

AJISS-Commentary

The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies

IIPS

Institute for International
Policy Studies

JIIA

The Japan Institute of
International Affairs

RIPS

Research Institute for
Peace and Security

Editor:

Akio Watanabe

Editorial Board:

Masashi Nishihara
Naoko Saiki
Taizo Yakushiji

Online Publisher:

Yoshiji Nogami
President, JIIA

No.81. 28 January 2010

Japan's Peacebuilding Policy toward Afghanistan: The Need for a Civilian Surge to Improve Security

Yuji Uesugi

On 1st December 2009, US President Barack Obama announced his new strategy toward Afghanistan. Overall, it was a reasonable strategy that reflected the US position in the struggle, with its situation analysis and objectives based on an earlier version announced in February 2009. Obama needed to make the fight against Al Qaeda his utmost priority in order to justify US involvement in Afghanistan in the eyes of Americans. This was important given that the Taliban had no intention of attacking the US homeland, being just an insurgent

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.

group vowing to overthrow the government of Hamid Karzai and driving out foreign forces.

While the overarching goal of the new strategy was to eliminate the terrorist activities of Al Qaeda, most of the tactics identified in the strategy, in substance, were aimed at the Taliban insurgency. The planned surge of some 30,000 troops was designed to break the supremacy of the Taliban, which has rapidly been expanding its territorial control in recent years. It was assumed that the key to success in the new strategy would be the provision of civilian assistance linking the improved security created by these additional troops to peacebuilding. The civilian assistance required here included not just the building of schools and hospitals, but also efforts to enhance political stability. Swift deliveries of massive assistance would be crucial, and all the efforts must contribute to political stability.

This is where Japan can play an important role. Japan should complement the US strategy in two ways in particular. Firstly, Japan should place peacebuilding at the core of its Afghan policy in a way that would fill the vacuum left by the US focus, which is principally oriented towards the fight against Al Qaeda. Secondly, Japan should also play a central role in assistance to improve the livelihood of the Afghan people. Priority should be given to assistance that would create jobs and allow the local people to earn their bread as soon as possible. Particularly important is assistance to Afghanistan's key industry, agriculture. Japan will be able to make valuable contributions in building irrigation systems and improving agricultural technologies. In short, Japan should place at the core of its Afghan policy livelihood assistance designed to promote peacebuilding in the country.

It is true that these suggestions are no different at a glance from Japan's approach to Afghan peacebuilding thus far. Japan has been assisting Afghanistan by dispatching experts, providing machinery, and offering training and financial assistance. However, with the worsening of security, the conditions allowing effective livelihood assistance have been lost, forcing Japan to provide only limited assistance to Afghanistan as effective livelihood assistance requires a certain level of security. The challenge faced by Japan is how to conduct

effective livelihood assistance in a non-permissive environment. Alternatively, Japan must consider what it can do to create the conditions that would allow effective livelihood assistance.

To continue providing livelihood assistance in a country without political stability would be tantamount to building a house on sand. A considerable amount of international assistance to Afghanistan has flowed to warlords and insurgent groups, strengthening their influence. We should not let livelihood assistance be exploited as a tool for political maneuvering. To prevent this from happening, the utmost priority should be placed on putting an end to the armed struggle between the Karzai government and the insurgency. Because no society is immune from political struggle, it would be wise to assist Afghanistan in creating a political arena that does not rely on military force and confine the political struggle there. This is not to suggest excluding insurgent groups; rather, they should be invited to participate as legitimate players in the political struggle so that they can balance their interests within the framework of government and parliament.

Japan should assist Afghanistan, first and foremost, in creating a political arena in which a negotiated settlement between the Karzai government and the insurgency can be sought. This will allow Japan to expand its livelihood assistance to Afghanistan. Once they have reached an agreement, Japan will be able to find a way to revamp Afghan peacebuilding by aiming for effective assistance by, for instance, dispatching teams of experts, ranging from agricultural to security experts, instead of sending individual experts separately to different projects, and allowing them ample funds to be used at their discretion so that their efforts can contribute to consolidating the peace agreement and political stability in Afghanistan. 

Dr. Yuji Uesugi is Associate Professor at Graduate School of International Development Cooperation, Hiroshima University. His latest work on Afghanistan: "Toward Bringing Stability in Afghanistan: A Review of the Peacebuilding Strategy" can be found at <<http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/heiwa/Pub/E24/yujiuesugied.pdf>>.