Afghanistan: The Way(s) Out of America’s Longest War

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The American public’s frustration with the stalemate in Afghanistan grows each month that passes with no clear forward progress. Most wonder if this is a war that we can win. And if we can, what would “winning” even look like? Strengthening Afghan governance and civil society appears to be key, but how can this state-building be accomplished? What moral obligation do we owe to the Afghan people, and how can we fulfill it?

Afghan Endgames is a new book that seeks to provide a balanced, comprehensive, and realistic assessment of the alternatives for restoring peace and stability to Afghanistan. Bringing together some of the finest minds in the fields of military strategy, foreign policy, history, anthropology, ethics, and mass communications, the volume presents a range of options—from immediate withdrawal of all coalition forces to the maintenance of an open-ended, but greatly reduced military presence. The contributors weigh the many costs, risks, and benefits of each alternative to present the reader with a survey that is neither right nor left leaning, merely one that separates bad policy from the good.

While respecting the range of the contributors’ opinions, the volume editors distill the competing views and conclude by making recommendations for US policy going forward. Among the editors’ suggestions:

• Stop pushing specific withdrawal dates, and accept that we will need to stay as long as is necessary
• Create a customized military strategy that relies on Special Forces, station only five thousand troops in the country, and close most bases and downsize those that remain
• Encourage local political power rather than centralized control by the government in Kabul
• End expensive development projects, encourage local investment on necessary projects, and halt infrastructure efforts in areas where violence is tolerated and exported
• Reduce funding to Pakistan and strongly encourage India to lessen its presence in Afghanistan

Leon Fuerth, former national security advisor to vice president Al Gore and now a professor at The George Washington University, applauds Afghan Endgames for the advice it offers saying it “could not be more timely. [This book] offers a chance to think afresh. It also offers a new perspective on strategic goal setting for issues still in the future.”

Hy Rothstein served in the US Army as a Special Forces officer for more than 26 years, spending much of his time training and advising governments threatened by active insurgencies. He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Defense Analysis at the US Naval Postgraduate School. He is the author of Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare. John Arquilla is a professor of defense analysis at the US Naval Postgraduate School and is the author of Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World.

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