

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

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Editor

This monograph is the result of an integrated research project conducted by a group of eight officers at the U.S. Army War College during the 2017-2018 academic year. Three of the officers were international fellows, and five were U.S. military special operations officers with multiple tours of duty in Afghanistan. Together they had more than 20 years of experience working on various aspects of the complex problem set facing the United States in Afghanistan before arriving on campus. This group brought a unique set of experiences to the challenging problems now pressing on the nation-building effort in Afghanistan. The research project took on the four most difficult problems confronting the international community in the ongoing conflict for in-depth research and analysis. The problems themselves have long been identified and have been the focus of concerted efforts by the United States and our allies for 15 years:

1. The open border with Pakistan and cross-border sanctuary for Taliban forces.
2. The cultivation of opium poppies and its effects on the Afghan Government, civil society, and guerilla operations.
3. The challenge of creating and sustaining a capable state security architecture during an ongoing conflict.
4. Reducing the capabilities of a persistent and confident enemy and getting to a negotiated end to a conflict.

As these are already well known, the group was directed away from either elaborating on descriptions of these challenges or devoting much space in the core paper to their research of the history of these problems, as this would add little to the literature already available. Rather, the researchers were charged with bringing their practical experience and analysis to

bear on developing solutions with the highest probability of success. A pair of researchers addressed each of the four major problems, and each of the four teams was tasked with producing at least four detailed, actionable recommendations to solve the problems. In addition to a short chapter for each problem with its recommendations, the group also created appendices detailing its research, sources, and case studies.

The group was specifically directed to avoid the usual, vague recommendations that everyone working on the problems has seen and heard so often, such as "Pakistan must do more" or "the Afghan Government must eliminate corruption." While certainly true, such bromides do little to advance practical solutions to stubborn problems, which have resisted the best efforts of two generations of Americans. Within a year or two, the first American Soldier or Marine will deploy for duty in the Afghan conflict who was not born when it began in October 2001. There is little which has not been tried before.

The eight researchers studied what has been tried and sought to draw out what worked and why. They focused on realistic recommendations which were specific enough to be begun by this generation of soldiers and diplomats on the ground. Because this is the product of military officers, many of the solutions that emerged from their research are within the power of security forces in Afghanistan to test and implement. However, as thousands of dedicated men and women now focused on these persistent problems know only too well, there are few silver bullets which will solve these challenges overnight. The problems are unusually complex and often intertwined with each other, and even vary from one region of Afghanistan to another, such that what could work in one place might not be as effective in another.

The man-years invested in analyzing the problems focused on by this project, guided by faculty members with decades of experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan, have yielded a valuable product for discussion. This monograph provides some distilled wisdom derived from the 17 hard years of struggle that are already behind us to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, and specific, sometimes “outside-the-box” recommendations to improve the odds of success there in the coming years. The authors believe that these are valuable suggestions; if even one of these suggestions is tested locally, found to enhance the war effort, and could be implemented more broadly with success, the prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan will be improved.

More information about the programs of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC)

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