



LIECHTENSTEIN INSTITUTE
ON SELF-DETERMINATION
AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Liechtenstein Colloquium on European and International Affairs

Creating Security and Stability in Afghanistan and the Region

Background

“Creating Stability and Prosperity in Afghanistan and the Region,” the inaugural meeting of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination (LISD) project “State Security, and Prosperity: Afghanistan, its Neighbors and the Region,” was held 26-29 October 2006 in Vienna, Austria. Participants outlined critical issues currently facing Afghanistan in terms of the state’s security, rule of law, mobilization of the economy, and border issues. Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, LISD director and the conference chair, and H.S.H. Prince Hans Adam II of Liechtenstein, opened the conference.

Approximately 50 leading experts participated from the U.S., E.U., and the region representing academia, the diplomatic community, governments, and the private sector active in the region, including Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, Commander, Combined Forces Command Afghanistan; Daan Everts, NATO Senior Civilian Representative to Afghanistan; Robert Finn, former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan and LISD senior research associate; Joschka Fischer, former Foreign Minister of



Germany and LISD senior fellow; Thomas Koenigs, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan; Francesc Vendrell, E.U. Special Representative to Afghanistan; and Hans Winkler, Austrian State Secretary. The colloquium was funded in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the government of Liechtenstein.

Consensus emerged from the conference that the government of Afghanistan, the Afghan people, and the international community are at a critical threshold. The security situation in the country deteriorated sharply during the summer of 2006, marked by increased fighting in Afghanistan between the Taliban and NATO, suicide bombings, and the use of improvised explosive devices. Afghanistan has become the world’s largest poppy producer with current levels of poppy production at the highest rate in the country’s history. A culture of impunity in Afghanistan remains the norm, with Afghans widely perceiving the police as corrupt and judicial systems as unresponsive. Within this context, the Taliban increasingly utilizes local perceptions of state failure and proffers their own swift remedies for local populations based on harsh forms of “social justice.” Moves by the Afghan government and the international community to implement meaningful assistance and reforms have been insufficient and uncoordinated. Local frustration and despair has combined with nascent international donor fatigue to create a sense of looming crisis. International media coverage has fed negative perceptions abroad.

Policy Recommendations

Given existing realities on the ground as well as the country’s strategic position in the region, participants identified four critical dimensions of a broad, unified strategy that can lead to Afghanistan’s stable and secure development, and identified recommendations to be adopted by international donors.

Security and the Taliban

The growing success of the Taliban in the east and south of Afghanistan is tied to public perceptions of the lack of Afghan government capacity to be responsive to the needs of the people and a guarantor of “human security.” This perception derives from daily experiences with corruption in the police, local administration, and the courts; activities of local officials

and organized criminal syndicates which control the narcotics trade; and an overall lack of delivery by the government of basic services including food, healthcare, water, power, and road access. International donors have been largely unable to provide any significant degree of assistance to people in unsafe areas, giving veracity to the statement “where the street ends, the Taliban begins.”

The production of poppy and the distribution of poppy-based narcotics is often abetted by local commanders, the Taliban, local police, and members of the Interior Ministry, and efforts to curb these activities have failed. A concerted effort to create human security through the delivery of basic services must take place experts asserted, in conjunction with reforms that will reduce corruption from local administrative levels upwards, including the removal of corrupt governors and police commanders. A new media strategy focused on providing timely, objective, and neutral news about such reforms to local, regional, and international audiences should support these efforts.

Rule of Law and Governance

The government of Afghanistan should pursue immediate and cost-effective changes to strengthen the rule of law and to rebuild public confidence in the government. These actions include reforming the Interior Ministry, increasing pay for police, as well as replacing corrupt mullahs and judges whose presence in government compromises public confidence. The central government must develop an official hiring policy and institute systematic reviews to fill local-level government positions, while creating stronger relationships between formal and informal justice systems. Meanwhile, the international community should focus on building trust in fragile government institutions by putting pressure on the Afghan government to prioritize immediate steps to strengthen the rule of law.

Economy, Infrastructure, and International Donor Policy

The government of Afghanistan and the international community should focus on basic infrastructure development, including power and water development and delivery, and the construction of national and regional road and rail corridors.

As this takes place, the Afghan government, in concert with the international community, must develop a market strategy

to attract new industry investments, provide alternative opportunities to poppy production, and to better develop and position Afghan products as a substitute for imports from China, India, and Russia wherever possible.

In addition, more incentives should be created to bring women into the workforce and build mechanisms for aid absorption targeting the labor market; for example, by working with donor countries to generate skilled-labor agreements and programs. International donor coordination is especially important among the U.S. and E.U. so that Afghanistan and its economic development is not overshadowed by needs in Iraq and the broader Middle East.

A Regional Compact

Afghanistan’s internal stability and economic development cannot be isolated from regional realities that threaten to change the geopolitical status quo, including intra-regional political conflicts, the newly strengthened U.S.-India relationship, issues relating to Iran’s nuclear capabilities, existing security problems along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and region-wide economic tensions. Therefore, the region requires a new compact that addresses Pakistan’s concerns, neutralizes regional and great power rivalries, and more explicitly links political, economic, and security developments in Afghanistan with those in Iraq, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

This new regional compact envisages a security mechanism with an institutional structure which will encourage state actors to work toward minimizing regional tensions and challenges while enhancing economic interaction. The U.S., E.U., and Russia should take a strong role in facilitating this compact.

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A copy of the policy brief can be found at:
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