

PRICE OF SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN: WHAT ARE THE STAKES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?

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SORENSEN: What are the global stakes for success or for the outcome in Afghanistan?

KORB: I think the global stakes are very important in that part of the world. The Iranians want us to succeed in Afghanistan, because they don't want us to destabilize the region.

VENDRELL: The Russians and Chinese have every reason to be as worried if not more worried than we are about the geopolitical situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

WALT: Given that Al Qaeda has now spread and franchised, in lots of different places, it means controlling the original base of operations is less important and buys us less.

VENDRELL: We need to clarify to the Afghans and to ourselves why we are in Afghanistan, here, fighting.

WALT: Let's just be clear that as of right now we are headed for a multi-year, multi-billion dollar commitment which will inevitably require a major effort at social engineering in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

KORB: We did not go in initially there to transform Afghan society.

HAUSER: We will find ourselves very shortly, say sometime around now or next year, stuck in a very deep situation from which there will be no easy way out.

VENDRELL: Just as the Afghan public do not understand why on earth we are there, the Europeans also, in a way, want to know why we are there anyway.

KORB: I'm not worried about American staying power in Afghanistan, because of the fact that this is from where the attacks of Sept. 11 attacks came.

WALT: The question you want to ask is, is it worth it?

MEYER: I have yet to hear anyone say in Obama's wonderful phrase, "We screwed up," in the sense that we are dealing with monsters we helped create.

LEONE: I think Dick Cheney would have put it differently: that the lesson we wanted to teach people was that if you cross us, we will come in, change your government, and put in a government that is dependent on the United States.

FINN: I think Secretary Gates, if he's the author of the reference to Valhalla, is an indication of what's wrong with our whole thinking about Afghanistan, because the reference should have been to Shangri-La, which is in Afghanistan.

VENDRELL: The greater the number of civilian casualties, the greater the international military presence, the greater the insecurity.

KAMAL: Would it not be better to spend the same amount of money on sending engineers and teachers and doctors?

GERZEN: It can be done much cheaper by using NGOs, by going through the U.N., or spending money through U.N. trust funds and using more local organizations.

LAURENTI: If Karzai with all the resources of the international community can't take control of Afghanistan, what are the real prospects of the ragtag Taliban being able to take control of, consolidate power over Kabul, over Afghanistan without external support?

VENDRELL: I think the chances of the Taliban taking over in all of Afghanistan are pretty remote.

WALT: Most of what we call by the catch-all term Taliban are not global jihadis. Most of them are motivated by local concerns.

KAMAL: The assumption is that Al Qaeda and the Taliban are a sort of an Irish stew, in which you cannot separate the onions from the meat from the gravy from the potatoes. But they are a totally different kettle of fish.

KHAN: If we are looking at a way out, there has to be, obviously, a political solution.

SHERMAN: There's a very high likelihood that the outcome of this election will be illegitimate, both for Afghans and, quite possibly, will have ramifications for the troop-contributing countries, for international involvement.

VENDRELL: I would hope that they don't happen. It is clear because of security reasons that the conditions are not there for a legitimate election.

KORB: When you talk about Afghanistan, you cannot just talk about Afghanistan, you got to talk about Pakistan as well. If you don't solve Afghanistan, you're not going to be able to get Pakistan under control.

SCHWENNINGER: Our effort, in a sense, to stabilize Afghanistan drives division and helps to destabilize Pakistan.

PHILLIPS: The ISI, which is really the military, has always been very supportive of the Taliban.

HOGÉ: Our current approach in both place – Afghanistan and Pakistan – adds up to a very bad bet.

AYOOB: We have a lot of challenges.