

Beyond the Military Campaign

November 5, 2001

The Taliban government of Afghanistan refused to cooperate with most of the world's governments to track down and bring to justice the globally dispersed Al Qaeda network. Not only that, the Taliban declared its complicity with Osama bin Laden who is headquartered in Afghanistan. For these reasons, a properly conducted war by aggrieved and terrorist-threatened countries against the Afghan government—in order to put an end to Al Qaeda—is justified.

However, a retributive military offensive against the Taliban is not sufficient to meet the demands of justice. The governments prosecuting the war must aim for, and have realistic expectations of achieving, an outcome that is more just than the one that existed previously. Thus the goal must be a legitimate, post-war government in Afghanistan that is strong enough to protect its citizens, to withstand any future terrorist bands, and to uphold a stable society. Consequently, the nations cooperating to end terrorism also bear an obligation to support Afghan reconstruction, which may take decades. There will be no cheap justice.

Yet even that is not sufficient. The terrorist networks that concern us are secreted throughout the world and are fueled by a diverse range of motives and funded by substantial parties. To get at these networks requires, on the one hand, the cooperative international police and intelligence work of dozens of governments: policing, not war. On the other hand, significant, even radical, changes in diplomacy are also required.

Look first to the international police front. Bin Laden's Al Qaeda, which is not a government with a territory of its own, is like a Mafia organization or a gang in the sense that the obligation to expose and put an end to it belongs to the police and judicial authorities of the countries in which the network functions parasitically. Consequently, the only long-term, just answer to bin Laden's type of terrorist gang is strong governments in every country, cooperating internationally in the conduct of their policing and judicial responsibilities. Altogether, the most successful military achievements can neither establish sound governments nor assure the success of those governments' police and judicial responsibilities.

Second, United States diplomacy, along with that of many other countries, requires comprehensive reevaluation. Even if the U.S. government fundamentally rejects, as mistaken, the worldview held by militant Islamists, that view is substantially reshaping Middle Eastern and South Asian politics. Reality cannot be ignored. Most important in the immediate context is our approach to Israel and the Palestinians. The U.S. and its allies must take strong steps, perhaps within a new framework, to help resolve the conflict, for it continues to fuel enthusiasm for anti-American, anti-Western jihad (holy war), which also destabilizes or threatens to destabilize the entire region.

This is not to say that U.S. support of Israel is the first cause that legitimates bin Laden's terrorist efforts. Bin Laden's self-appointment as God's final judge to cleanse the earth of American evil has no political justification. However, as with the ideology of revolutionary Communism, if militant versions of Islam are rallying millions, then the U.S. must take that reality more fully into account both in its plans for self-defense and in its diplomacy.

Thankfully, there are positive signs that the U.S., the U.N., and many allied governments are already working toward a post-Taliban reconstruction in Afghanistan, cooperating in new ways to strengthen international policing, and reorienting international diplomacy. The worry is that those who would prefer a quick and cheap fix, will not give their governments adequate backing to carry through with the longer term reordering and rebuilding that is necessary.

—James W. Skillen, *President*

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