

House Debate on Afghanistan Missing Bigger Picture

Written by Mike Honda

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 18:07

As Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus's Afghanistan Taskforce, I want to offer my thoughts on the war in Afghanistan in light of Rep. Kucinich's resolution, H.Con.Res. 248, considered today on the House floor. I firmly believe our current strategy falls far short of bringing stability to Afghanistan or security to America. My serious concerns about U.S. strategy have led me to oppose the war funding supplemental bill in 2009, oppose increased funding for the 30,000 troop surge, support a war tax, and call for an about-face in funding priorities. My concerns have led me to host innumerable congressional briefings on Afghanistan, pursue the commissioning of GAO reports to audit aspects of U.S. engagement, and author multiple op-eds on the subject. In short, I take my chairmanship very seriously.

As long as we continue to pursue military solutions to this conflict, paying little to no heed to economic, political and social solutions, security will remain elusive. As long as we continue to forego the building of Afghan capacity and instead prop up a privatized defense industrial complex, as well as an increasingly privatized development industrial complex, Afghans will never be able to answer our call to "stand up". As long as we remain unwilling to bring to justice our allied warlords and corrupt officials in Afghanistan, our calls for an end to corruption in Kabul ring hollow.

Washington must face up to the alarming reality that the hundreds of billions of dollars being pumped into Afghanistan are simply not benefiting the Afghan people whatsoever and are not being used effectively in the long-term U.S. strategic interest. Washington also must realize that hard power is utterly limited in its capacity to eliminate an ideological enemy, who is not finite in number. What must be pursued, instead, is the build-up of Afghan state capacity to provide policing and legal enforcement, systems of justice, and good intelligence (in addition, of course, to the socio-economic policies capable of educating and employing a vulnerable population).

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Ending this war (and with it, the loss of additional American lives), a policy prescription which I certainly support, will not end the pursuit of a failed security strategy. It is this failed strategy, inaugurated by the previous administration in Iraq and Afghanistan nearly a decade ago, which I want Washington to rethink immediately, before we continue similar strategies elsewhere. This is the conversation I wish my colleagues in Congress would host, before we are soon engaged in the very same debate about failed strategies in Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia.