

Summary of Proceedings

Conference on

INTERVENTION IN INTERNAL CONFLICT: INSIGHTS FOR AFGHANISTAN

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December 7, 2001

The Greenbelt Marriot
Greenbelt, MD

The National Intelligence Council Project

Jointly managed by
The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland
and
The Center for International Development and Conflict Management

University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Introduction

This conference was the capstone event for an examination into the phenomenon of internal conflict, the reasons for third party intervention in internal conflict, and the role of the United States in such interventions. Three principal questions guided this process:

- What were the prospects regarding the nature and number of future internal conflicts?
- What were the challenges posed by internal conflicts and what could be learned by studying responses to internal conflict over the past decade?
- Under what circumstances was intervention in internal conflict managed more or less successfully?

This last inquiry raised another series of questions. How does one define success? Is “success” an ability to stop fighting and achieve temporary stability, or must it include the achievement of long-term stability through “nation-building?” In narrowly defined national security terms, why should the United States ever consider “humanitarian” intervention?

The original purpose of the conference was to provide a forum for the presentation of several case studies of internal conflict during the last decade. However, the events of last September 11th provided a real world case in which the answers to many of these questions were urgently needed to inform important US foreign policy decisions. As a result, the theme of the conference was changed. Now, instead of summarizing lessons learned about internal conflict and intervention, the conference sought to interpret how these lessons learned could help guide US policies toward Afghanistan following the collapse of the Taliban regime, which was perceived to be imminent. To assist in this effort, presentations by several Afghanistan area specialists were added to the event program. In addition to providing specific information concerning how Afghan culture, politics, and other factors might affect US conduct in post-Taliban Afghanistan, these scholars offered constructive criticism of the general lessons learned proposed by the case study authors.

The seven case studies on intervention in internal conflict are:

- Somalia – David Laitin, Stanford University
- Bosnia – Steven Burg, Brandeis University
- Rwanda – Gilbert Khadiagala, Johns Hopkins SAIS
- East Timor – Eric Schwartz, Wilson Center
- Sierra Leone – I William Zartman and Kwaku Nuamah, Johns Hopkins SAIS
- Cambodia – David Chandler
- Haiti – Chetan Kumar, United Nations

They are available on CISSM’s and the NIC’s websites. Only pertinent aspects are reproduced in these proceedings, which emphasize potential lessons learned from each study, similarities running through the different studies, and lessons considered applicable to Afghanistan.

Intervention and US National Interests

The conference highlighted one significant difference between the case studies under consideration and US actions against the Taliban and Al Qaeda network. This is a difference in what Americans perceive to be at stake in each case. The US government and Americans in general believe that events in Afghanistan directly threaten US security by holding American lives at risk in the US homeland. In short, defeating the Taliban and al Qaeda is widely perceived to be a US vital national interest. In contrast, the American public and policy makers generally considered intervention in the 1990s to lack such a direct connection to traditional US security concerns. In these cases, support for intervention stemmed from humanitarian motives, i.e., the American public's desire to avert mass starvation and gross abuses of human rights, including genocide. In fact, the absence of direct threats to US security was one of the principal points of contention when US policy makers contemplated intervention in internal conflict during the 1990s.

Certainly, the events of last September 11th have quelled debate over two issues of contention associated with decisions to intervene in internal conflicts during the 1990s by providing a painful and costly real world example.

- First, in a globalizing and increasingly interdependent world, failed, failing or totalitarian states can provide safe havens for radical movements capable of inflicting death and destruction on the US homeland.
- Second, abject poverty spawns the kind of hopelessness and desperation that lead individuals to join the ranks of radical movements.

However, it remains unclear whether Afghanistan will change US behavior toward future situations where intervention may be contemplated. On the one hand, US intervention might be swift if a particular state appears to be harboring terrorists or developing weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, US resolve may not be any greater than before 9/11 if a state is in the grips of a humanitarian emergency. One can even make the case that the United States will be even more reluctant to intervene in such cases than before 9/11 because of the demands and expense incurred by the war on terrorism. In other words, the decision to intervene in future cases of internal conflict might still rely on an assessment of the degree to which the crisis in question impacts traditional US interests. To the degree to which they don't affect traditional US interests and/or threaten to kindle terrorist activity, intervention might be susceptible to the type of half-hearted efforts seen in the 1990s.

Accordingly, it seems appropriate to break down any lessons learned from cases of intervention in internal conflict in the 1990s into two categories. The first group might be called strategic lessons learned. These primarily address the issue of when to intervene, which will probably remain influenced in large degree by assessments of how each conflict impacts US national interests. Strategic concerns will also include considerations of the advisability of obtaining United Nations resolutions authorizing intervention, the importance and nature of consultation with allies, the need for coalition building, and determination of the broad goals of the intervention (e.g., humanitarian assistance, nationbuilding). In contrast, the second group of lessons learned would fall under the heading of tactical considerations. These would provide advice for *how* to conduct an intervention once the decision to intervene has been made. For

example, should a strong military force be employed? Should this force attempt to remain impartial? What is a workable exit strategy? What kind of organization should perform the related missions? What about civil-military coordination within the intervening force? Who should be in charge, and what kind of chain of command should be employed? What about the role of humanitarian NGOs? How should local actors be engaged? Should the former combatants be disarmed? How?

Since US and allied forces have already intervened in Afghanistan and have agreed on the need for some form of nationbuilding, tactical lessons learned become more relevant for informing US policy and are emphasized in this summary. In this regard, the case studies offer many putative lessons learned worthy of consideration. These are enumerated in the next section.

Potential Lessons Learned from Case Studies

General Comments

- For both national security and humanitarian reasons, political conflict and state failure should be of serious concern to policy makers, and serious international efforts at nationbuilding may be critical to provide insurance against illegality, regional destabilization, and terrorism.
- Most interventions studied exhibited mission creep. This was largely due to the perception that the crises did not present serious threats to US national interests. In this context, the United Nations Security Council was given the lead in planning the intervention. However, it was persuasively argued that the strategic situation in the UN Security Council between the leading permanent missions and the Secretary General creates a bias toward ambitious goals combined with paltry resources. This combination tends to produce interventions that are incapable of carrying out their missions.
- Long-term planning (both within the US government and within international organizations) is critical – planning should extend beyond the next several weeks and should consider not only transitional governance, but also post-conflict peace-building and security arrangements, as well as worst-case scenarios.
- The perception of legality/legitimacy in an intervention eases the way for many states to participate.

Somalia

- The Somalia interventions indicate that one's allies in the military phase of a mission are not necessarily allies for the transitional administration. Fulfilling goals of the military phase, (e.g., local alliance partners help intervening powers defeat or weaken rival factions) might undermine the program of the transitional administration when local alliance partners emerge in strengthened military and political positions after rival factions have been defeated. These newly empowered local allies might then pursue independent agendas that make the transitional authority's task more difficult.
- However, Somalia also offers the idea that an intervening force should ally itself with a strong local faction (whose conduct meets minimal human rights standards) in order to

hasten the end of conflict. US and UN attempts to remain impartial didn't work in Somalia.

- Somalia strongly shows the danger in emphasizing manhunts, i.e., going after Aided. It is better to focus on shaping governing structures rather than eliminating individuals.
- Consider using the United Nations as the principal, not as the agent of intervention. As principal, UN monitoring of the intervention process provides legitimacy to the operation. Using others as agent – the US and its allies, which possess capable militaries and effective command and control structures – matches the unit to the task. For example, UN forces in Somalia had a divided command structure that seriously impaired its military effectiveness.

Bosnia

- In contrast to Somalia, Bosnia arguably offers a case where none of the local factions could have made acceptable alliance partners because of their uniform disregard for human rights. Allying oneself with such actors corrupts the legitimacy of the intervening force.
- Bosnia is another case where attempts by the intervening force to remain impartial failed. It was argued that this failure resulted when intervention forces began to disarm the population. In short order, each faction perceived that the disarmament program favored the other side.
- It was persuasively argued that, under the best of reconstruction programs, it would take about 30 years to produce a functioning, stable state out of Bosnia's current conditions. This observation should serve as a sobering reminder that the scars of systematic human rights violations run deep and that reconstruction is a complex, long-term, and probably expensive undertaking

Rwanda

- Rwanda highlighted the difficulty of intervening on the basis of a weak peace agreement, in this case the 1993 Arusha Accords. The initial intervention force was configured to monitor implementation of this agreement, and was accordingly a small, lightly armed mission only authorized to use force in self-defense. It was soon apparent that neither side intended to abide by the terms of the agreement, and, in such an environment, UNAMIR was impotent against the armed Rwandan factions.
- Rwanda seems to demonstrate that early intervention with a sizeable force (sufficiently large and heavily-armed to overcome any possible resistance) with robust rules of engagement can prevent the escalation of internal conflict and save large numbers of lives at relatively small cost.
- In the case of Rwanda, no outside country was willing to take responsibility for the implementation of the Arusha Accords. This contrasts with the East Timor intervention, in which the leadership role played by Australia was considered to be a decisive cause of that intervention's success.

East Timor

- In the context of intervention, the size of a military deployment is probably less important than the capability of the troops, the nature of the Rules of Engagement (ROE), and the clear willingness of the interveners to use force to protect the mandate.

- In agreement with the Rwanda case, East Timor demonstrated that, in an insecure environment that includes large numbers of combatants under arms, officials should be skeptical that a symbolic or monitoring military presence can play an effective role in limiting violence.
- East Timor seems to illustrate the major advantage of having a capable nation play a leadership role throughout the transition period. There are also advantages if the international military and civilian presence is reduced gradually as the transition proceeds.
- There may be significant benefits to having a capable yet relatively disinterested regional actor take the lead in international intervention.

Sierra Leone

- In a collapsed state, the conflict needs to be brought under control and the anarchic rebels defeated in order for state rebuilding to proceed.
- An internal conflict should be separated from its external sources of support, optimally by an agreement among these external sources. Then the internal conflict can be resolved.
- Military intervention is not sufficient to end a conflict whose source is state collapse, but intervention is a necessary ingredient in engaging the road to conflict's end.
- To isolate (quarantine) a conflict area, it is necessary to strengthen the states around it, not just by reinforcing the apparatus of the state but by enabling its services so that it can perform its functions.
- The existence of anarchic rebels indicates deeper problems. They need to be brought into the political system, but separated from their military leaders.
- The preferred agent for action in a regional conflict is a regional organization or coalition, if it exists, but it needs support and resources from the international community (outside powers and the United Nations).

Cambodia

- Cambodia is a case in which domestic political factions traditionally used foreign allies to strengthen their positions. As long as these foreign powers provided support, Cambodia continued to experience internal conflict. When these powers finally grew tired of providing support, the warring factions soon lost the wherewithal to continue fighting, and the peace process and state reconstruction began to make real progress. Now that the Taliban has been defeated, events in Cambodia indicate that every effort should be made to shut down external sources of support for factions in Afghanistan. Of course Afghanistan also has one internal source of support, opium production, which could continue to provide factions with the ability to keep fighting without external support.
- Other lessons learned from Cambodia are more specific in nature. The Cambodia case study provides a model for devising excellent voter education and registration programs, and establishing secure conditions for holding national elections. These might serve as a guide for similar efforts in Afghanistan.
- The Cambodian intervention included an excellent refugee repatriation program, which might also help such efforts in Afghanistan.
- The Cambodia case included a strong human rights component, again something that could prove useful with regard to Afghanistan.

Haiti

- • Political factions should not be the only focus of attempts to build lasting peace; such attempts should be embedded in broader processes of dialogue involving different social sectors, so that consensus on policy is not easily shaken by the short-term calculations of the factions.
- • Societies in transition cannot deliver immediately on the high expectations of their members. Crises of “social patience” may disrupt the fragile peace. Hence, local and international authorities should ensure maximum participation by civic representatives in the development and implementation of initiatives designed for their benefit. Such participation will help to reduce alienation.
- • The availability of security and justice for the common person is critical for the stabilization of peace. If factions continue to dominate political processes through fear and impunity, then politics will be deadlocked along the lines of their contradictory interests. The emergence of other voices, however, will open new spaces for compromise. Hence, the establishment of the rule of law, including through interim means such as community policing and alternate dispute resolution, should be a top priority.
- • An economic strategy that may support the emergence of a viable polity may not often coincide with conventional economic wisdom. Fiscal discipline in order to attract significant foreign investment may stress immature political systems to the point of collapse. On the other hand, non-capital intensive schemes centered on providing the simple means (title, credit, etc.) for entrepreneurial activity may generate greater longer-term wherewithal for political stability. Common persons engaged in sound productive activity may not succumb to blandishments towards violence.
- • International efforts should take into account the possibility of significant variation between local and international approaches to building peace. If local understandings emerge through open and participatory processes (as happened in 1987 in Haiti), or reflect agreement between key sectors, then they should be honored, even if they differ from preferred international courses of action. A genuine local process of interaction and learning will lead to lasting democratic participation.
- • The ideological polarization generated by extended periods of conflict can significantly erode the ability of key actors in a society to bargain concretely around specific policy issues. Great emphasis should be placed on reviving or strengthening this ability.

Comments by Area Specialists

Following the discussion of the case studies, four Afghanistan area specialists commented on how the United States should respond to the situation in Afghanistan.

Tom Johnson, IIT Research Institute, stressed that, while there were clear lessons to be learned from the case studies, focusing on the unique nature of the conflict in Afghanistan was more analytically useful. Specifically, Afghanistan’s multi-ethnolinguistic demographics combined with 20 years of war have made it a land mine for intervention. He enumerated what he described as the “basic tenets” of intervention in Afghanistan:

- The stakes are higher in Afghanistan than they have been in past cases of intervention.
- Afghanistan's history and factionalism will make finding a post-War political solution more difficult than fighting the war.
- It is important to remember that the *Mujahideen* government that ruled Afghanistan from 1992-95 brought on the social conditions that led to the Taliban's rise.
- Socially, Afghans are extremely war-weary, susceptible to bribery, corruption and "rental", are used to a weapons culture, and have the potential to be the world's leading supplier of heroin.
- War has destroyed traditional Afghan tolerance. Specifically, it has exacerbated tension along religious (i.e. Islamic) lines.
- Afghans are an extremely proud, independent people, and the plurality ethnic group, the Pashtuns, live by a set of rules described in the *Pashtunwali* code. Under *Pashtunwali*, a man's most important duty is to support and protect his family. Honor requires him to defend things collectively known as *namus* (essentially, women, gold, and land). If *namus* is violated, one has a duty to extract vengeance against the offender. However, in the absence of such transgressions, *Pashtunwali* requires the extension of hospitality to others. In particular, it is one's obligation to provide asylum – *nanawati* – to fugitives.
- There is a lasting memory that the US abandoned Afghanistan and its people after the Soviet withdrawal.

Next, Julie Sirrs, an independent consultant, addressed the internal political dynamics of the different Afghan warring factions. Specifically, she argued that the Iranians believed that the Taliban regime, which had openly discriminated against Afghans of Persian/Shiite heritage living in the western sections of Afghanistan, must have been secretly supported by the United States in an effort to destabilize the Iranian regime. In response, Iran instructed its fighters in Afghanistan to take orders from the Northern Alliance. Sirrs also discussed the fact that the United States had chosen to rely on Pakistan as its proxy in Afghanistan during the 1990s.

Sirrs stated that the United States was well acquainted with one particular warlord, Abdurrashid Dostrum, because of his role in fighting against the Soviet intervention. The US may have been the most comfortable in dealing with Dostrum because he is a secular communist rather than a radical Muslim. But Sirrs noted that Dostrum, like many warlords, is still not to be trusted. US support for Dostrum has exacerbated tensions with the Northern Alliance.

Sirrs listed several "hopeful signs for future stability" in Afghanistan, including:

- The Afghan people – even though from different ethnic backgrounds – perceive that Afghanistan is an independent nation state. This perception will contribute to achieving stability.
- The US has not yet become perceived as an invader. Sirrs stressed that it must avoid being labeled as such.
- Afghanistan has traditionally had a weak decentralized government, and it is probably in America's best interest to foster such a structure in post-Taliban Afghanistan.
- Even though Afghanistan has hosted terrorists, no Afghans have actually become terrorists (as distinct from Taliban followers).

Sirrs concluded by emphasizing that negotiating a solution in Afghanistan without legitimizing warlordism is a principal challenge for the United States. The US will have to determine who are the “enlightened warlords.”

Next, Peter Dombrowski from the Naval War College summarized what he called three “truisms” from the case studies on intervention that were commissioned for the conference. First, interventions are more successful when led by a single state actor (that possesses a large military). Second, interventions early in a crisis offer the possibility of more success. Third, each phase of an intervention offers a set of options.

With these characteristics in mind, Dombrowski placed the Afghanistan crisis into a case-study context. The first phase was initiated by the 1979 Soviet intervention, the second phase by the rise of al-Qaeda, and the third phase by the US-UK intervention on October 7, 2001. He argued that the fourth stage would be the reconstruction and rebuilding phase.

Dombrowski asserted that it would be critical for the US to lead this newest stage. He cited four principal reasons that the US needs to take the lead:

- the situation is complex,
- Afghanistan cannot be allowed to be a base for terrorists,
- the US has a moral imperative to lead, and
- the US cannot be seen as a superpower willing to hit-and-run.

One of the biggest decisions the US government must make will be what role US troops will play in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. To be militarily successful, it will be imperative for goals to be broadly defined. Keeping a presence there will be important to address such issues as kidnapping or crimes against foreigners. This will be a difficult mission because there is no military that is prepared for exactly this type of mission.

The next speaker, Ali Jalali from the Voice of America, said that the most important role of interim Prime Minister Kharzai is to pave the way for a second, permanent government to convene. Currently, the mood of the Afghan people is a mix of optimism and pessimism. Jalali said that, although many regard Afghanistan as “the graveyard of empires,” Afghanistan has in fact always welcomed foreign assistance.

Jalali noted that two of the main negative consequences of Afghanistan’s internal conflict are that it has shifted power from the traditional elite to military commanders, and that war has further heightened an ethnic emphasis in finding a final solution.

According to Jalali, several things need to be done immediately to increase the chances of successful reconstruction. First, it will be important to consolidate the power of the interim government. Second, the militias must be disarmed and a national army formed, which will be a difficult task. Specifically, Jalali asserted that there must be a break in the current ruling system to make a new military possible. Third, economic assistance is critical. Just giving money to various Afghans will only propagate corruption and warlordism.

Contrary to Sirrs, Jalali felt that a strong central government would be best for Afghanistan. He said that it is important not to think about Afghanistan in terms of the last century, as most people do. It will be important to have a strong central government based on nationality, not ethnicity, in order to increase stability. A strong central government will also improve prospects for disarming the population.

Discussion

In the discussion period that followed the presentations, participants attempted to fashion a consensus that accommodated both area specific and case study recommendations. In general, area specialists tended to discount the salience of lessons from other cases of internal conflict and emphasized the uniqueness of each conflict. Functional specialists maintained that area specific recommendations, while a necessary component in any attempt to fashion a successful plan of action for Afghanistan, were not sufficient.

For example, one participant noted that it was important to recognize Afghanistan's ethnolinguistic factionalism, but cautioned that factional analysis does not really act as a predictor of conflict. In addition, if ethnic factionalism is a driving issue, then reconstruction efforts should emphasize regional autonomy at the expense of a strong central government. But area specialists disagreed among themselves over whether a strong or weak central government should be the goal in Afghanistan. Accordingly, one functionalist contended that, when formulating plans for Afghanistan's new permanent government, planners might want to emphasize factors that minimize the chances that internal conflict would be rekindled, something about which the case studies offer advice.

In another example, area specialists emphasized the need to disarm the population, but also cautioned against intervening forces becoming perceived as occupiers by the Afghan people. However, several case studies indicated that, sooner or later, one or more domestic factions would perceive an intervening force as partisan regardless of how hard it tries to remain impartial. In addition, any attempts by intervening forces to disarm a population virtually guarantee that one or more of the previously warring parties will perceive that the intervening force favors an opposing faction. Accordingly, it seems essential that planners use both area specific expertise and functional analyses to fashion a disarmament plan that is both tactically effective (i.e., weapons are confiscated) and furthers strategic goals (i.e., reconstruction efforts are facilitated rather than impeded).

It was generally agreed that disarmament was a critical ingredient in any reconstruction plan for Afghanistan, making the development of an effective strategy all the more important. One participant said that, if Afghanistan were not disarmed, then another Taliban would soon arise. But another cautioned that efforts to disarm Afghanistan by force would not work. However, several case studies demonstrated that lightly armed intervention forces were not effective. Another participant stressed that the key to successful disarmament was convincing the Afghan people that it is in their interest to disarm, while another said that it was important to target the "middle management" of the various armed groups. He stressed that soldiers needed to be given a job; simple disarming would not work.

The issue of choosing to support “enlightened warlords,” which was recommended by both functionalists and area specialists in various contexts throughout the day’s discussions, was closely related to the disarmament issue. In this regard, positions did not reflect specializations, as members of each group disagreed among themselves. First, it was noted that supporting a particular group of warlords would decisively rule out any perception of impartiality on the part of the intervening force. Second, the issue of supporting a number of armed factions further complicated the perceived legitimacy of any disarmament program. Third, it was noted that, although the Taliban had become an extremely unpopular regime in the eyes of most Afghans, it was worth noting that the government in power from 1992 to 1996 was hated as well, and many of its leaders were now in the Northern Alliance. In other words, did a number of sufficiently enlightened warlords actually exist, and were these individuals in a position to wield power effectively in a new government? One participant offered a bimodal view of intervention. He noted that, in several cases (Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Haiti), the intervening force decided in advance to unseat the government. In several other cases of intervention (Rwanda, Somalia, and East Timor) the watchword was impartiality. Accordingly, if one decides that the government must fall, the chances of success will substantially depend on the factions with which one allies oneself.

It was argued that many people – in Afghanistan, its neighbors, and around the world – are hoping for a pre-1973 Afghanistan. Accordingly, it is critical to keep a close eye on the transition government. On the one hand, things are very factionalized and people are upset that they are not getting their share. But, on the other hand, one participant believed that Afghans are sick of war to the point that they are ready to agree with the government to disarm. In the current atmosphere, there are many self-styled leaders. It was argued that, once functioning institutions have been established, people would be better able to express their will and the power of factional leaders would diminish.

Discussion of institution-building led participants to talk about the importance of crafting policies for transitioning from the initial, military phase of intervention in Afghanistan to the reconstruction phase. They began by discussing the significance of the events of September 11th, both in terms of the magnitude of the US reaction and the perceived legitimacy of the response. One participant contended that legitimacy remained an open question because the Taliban did not possess it prior to its destruction. Another noted that the events of September 11th made the United States willing to suffer casualties in Afghanistan, which makes this conflict different from all the cases that were presented. It was further argued that this distinctive resolve is easier to maintain during the first phase, which is clear-cut. However, what about the second phase? What will happen to public opinion? Right now, US efforts are so focused on al-Qaeda that it is difficult to imagine that resolve could stay as high for the reconstruction phase. One participant contended that the resolve is likely to decline, there will be some pullout, and eventually Afghanistan will go back to what it was. This prompted another participant to remark that this view makes it all the more necessary to have a clear reconstruction strategy to pursue rather than an *ad hoc* one, and creating effective institutions should be a mainstay of such a strategy.

As the session approached its conclusion, two themes emerged. First it was recognized that the military phase of intervention was relatively straightforward. Second, the nation-building or

reconstruction aspects of intervention were not nearly as well understood as the military aspects. Although participants agreed about the crucial importance of properly transitioning from the warfighting stage to the reconstruction stage of intervention, the group had not been able to develop consensus on how to handle this transition. Specifically, what organizational structures would enable this outcome?

In his closing remarks, John Steinbruner noted that one clear lesson that seemed to emerge from the day's discussions was that one should not expect "success" in an intervention unless a project of reconstruction accompanies military action. During reconstruction, the need to establish and maintain legitimacy is extremely important. He stated that institutional deficiencies currently make reconstruction – and therefore success intervention in the broad sense of the term – difficult at best. For example, there currently is no international organization to handle police, judicial and civil administrative functions, all of which are recognized to be essential elements of any reconstruction process.