Afghanistan: Give Diplomacy a Chance

Since the invasion of Afghanistan and later Iraq, over four thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine soldiers have been killed in combat, fighting terrorism [iCasualties, 2009]. Over eight hundred seventy-two billion dollars have been spent on both wars combined and, yet, the U.S. has failed to achieve the ultimate goal of eliminating the terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, and their leader, Osama bin Laden [CACN, 2008]. The Taliban in Afghanistan is both a political party and a terrorist group whose purpose is different from Al-Qaeda, but the Taliban still continues to aid Al-Qaeda. The current policy for the war on terrorism has always been mainly to use our military strength to capture and kill the adversary. But, is this really an effective solution? Is it right to have soldiers dying and receiving empty results from their sacrifice? As the U.S. Secretary of State and head of the U.S. Department of State, I would negotiate with the Taliban in order to create a more stable position for the U.S. and the Afghan government, and weaken the support for Al-Qaeda.

The U.S. does not want the Taliban to have full control over Afghanistan because during their previous reign, 1996 to 2001, they enforced strict fundamentalist Islamic laws that restricted freedom of speech and woman's rights. This caused the people to be oppressed and suffer loss of freedom. The Taliban also provided a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, which allowed them to plot and prepare for their next attacks. After being driven out of power, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda moved into the rocky, mountainous border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Afghan government has no control over this area, making it a convenient hiding spot for the two groups [The New York Times, 02/17/2009].

The war on terrorism is important because it affects not only the US, but also the rest of the world. Although Al-Qaeda mainly threatens the US, Al-Qaeda often helps other terrorist

organizations to attack other areas such as in Europe. Al-Qaeda has terrorist training camps in Afghanistan that are preparing terrorists from all over the globe. This affects the countries around Afghanistan because these terrorists often infiltrate into neighboring countries, such as Iraq. The Taliban is known to provoke fear in the people of Afghanistan by using terror and executions. For instance, Suraya Pakzad educates women in Taliban-controlled-areas of Afghanistan. Pakzad is threatened every day by the Taliban and as a result, she cannot trust anyone. Other girls that attend the schools are being attacked and injured while attempting to be educated [CNN, 03/10/2009]. If we help stabilize Afghanistan, the country can begin to prosper and enter the global trade by beginning to produce goods and services. In this way, helping Afghanistan will not only fight terrorism, but it will furthermore help it become a productive nation.

Although the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are both terrorist groups, they have different reasons for why they were created. Because the Taliban is primarily a political organization, they want to rule Afghanistan, while Al-Qaeda simply wishes to terrorize the U.S. because of their great hatred towards the U.S. [The New York Times, 02/17/2009]. Their hatred comes from several reasons, but one main reason is because the U.S. supports Israel, a nation despised by Al-Qaeda. Recently, Pakistan agreed to allow the Taliban to have control over the Swat Valley, which shows how much the Taliban has rebounded from their defeat in 2001. Since the Taliban is shielding Al-Qaeda from harm, negotiating with the Taliban is the key to reaching Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda.

My plan would be to create a new policy, which would be to negotiate with the Taliban and allow them to participate in the governing of Afghanistan as long as they agree to no longer support terrorism. Other commentators and journalists have made similar suggestions [CNN,

03/09/2009]. Since the Taliban desire the right to govern their own people, if we allow the Taliban the opportunity to rule, then the Taliban may agree to cooperate with America and drive out Al-Qaeda. We would allow the Taliban to participate in the Afghan elections. In this way, we are both spreading democracy and letting the people of Afghanistan choose who governs them. If the people of Afghanistan choose to have the Taliban rule them, the U.S. cannot stop that. Looking back in history, people often rebel against governments if they dislike the way of rule. For example, America rebelled against the British, which led to the Revolutionary War, and ended with the formation of the U.S. If we force a government on the people of Afghanistan that the majority dislikes, the people will rebel to change it.

Once the Taliban is interconnected with the Afghan government, we can then focus on the reconstruction of Afghanistan's economy and government. Afghanistan is responsible for a large amount of the illegal opium and heroin drug trade around the world. If the government becomes more stabilized, it can then create and produce worthwhile goods to trade with other countries. As Afghanistan prospers, the Taliban will have to separate from Al-Qaeda even more because no country will want to trade with a government that supports terrorism. Therefore, the Taliban will be forced to drive Al-Qaeda out of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Through negotiation and reconstruction, I will rid Afghanistan of Al-Qaeda and help build the country into a flourishing nation. Because Al-Qaeda is very large and has a great influence over other terrorist organizations, weakening Al-Qaeda will have an important impact over many other terrorist groups, which will help the rest of the world. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars... Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Our current policy of using violence will not solve the issue, only empathy and diplomacy can.

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