



# Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

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## The Kabul Conference

by Amin Tarzi

On 20 July the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) will host the Kabul Conference which is envisioned by GIRoA to be a contract with the Afghan people. The main agenda of the conference is to end the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan mainly through an Afghan-led reconciliation and reintegration program which Afghan President Hamid Karzai formally announced at the London Conference in January 2010. The GIRoA plan has endorsed reconciliation talks with almost all segments of the insurgents in Afghanistan who are of Afghan origin.

KABUL CONFERENCE... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

## MES Notes

### MES AfPak Lecture Series

MES at MCU is hosting an AfPak Lecture Series throughout 2010 entitled "A Multidisciplinary Approach to the AfPak Region and Its People." Upcoming lectures include:

16 August

Professor Robert Crews,  
Stanford University  
"The Politics of National  
Reconciliation in Afghanistan"

Lectures are held at the GRC from 1400-1530. POC for the lecture series is Adam Seitz at (703) 432-5260 or [seitzac@grc.usmcu.edu](mailto:seitzac@grc.usmcu.edu).

For further information and resources pertaining to the MES AfPak Lecture Series is available at : <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Pages/Middle%20East%20Studies.aspx>.

### MES at MCU Disclaimer

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the Marine Corps University or any other governmental agency. Any references to this newsletter should include the foregoing statement

## The Role of History in Afghanistan's Future

by Adam C Seitz

Since January the Middle East Studies (MES) program at Marine Corps University has been hosting a lecture series pertaining to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region entitled, "A Multidimensional approach to the AfPak Region and its People." The series has intended to fill a critical gap in the U.S. Marine Corps' understanding of this volatile region and its people. This project has also incorporated the ISAF Commander's Summer 2009 counterinsurgency and stability operations guidance for Afghanistan into the Marine Corps PME by giving Marines the tools needed to "embrace the people", "partner" with the Afghan National Security Forces, "build governance and accountability", and "get better every day" through a better understanding of the Pashtun population in both Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

AFGHAN HISTORY... (CONTINUED ON PG 3)

The criteria by which the insurgents can be reintegrated and reconciled are that they must renounce violence and join “in a constructive process of reintegration in order to benefit from a chance at peace, improved governance, and economic development.” As announced by Karzai in London, the GIRoA organized the National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ) which met in Kabul in June. Regardless of the true sentiments of the majority of the Afghan people, at the conclusion of the NCPJ, the GIRoA secured a national mandate, at least on paper, to achieve a peaceful end to the country’s three decades of almost perpetual conflict through national reconciliation. As expected, tactical details of the reconciliation process were not enumerated by the NCPJ, but rather called for the formation of a High Peace Council to handle the modalities of the peace process. The period between the end of the NCPJ and the Kabul Conference should provide the GIRoA and its foreign backers the time to concentrate on the minutiae of the reconciliation program and hammer out the details to discern between desired and achievable end states. Time, unfortunately, is not on the side of GIRoA, as the neo-Taliban’s strategy increasingly is to wait out the presence of NATO-led ISAF combat forces. The current narrative of the Afghan conflict in Afghanistan and the region is that the West, led by the United States, is tired of its engagement in Afghanistan and is looking for an honorable exit and to leave behind a system bolstered by financial and political support that could maintain power for a reasonable period of time in Kabul and major population centers.

While the GIRoA concept on peace and reintegration notes that the Afghan people “desire not only short-term security, but a consolidated, sustainable peace,” actions by the GIRoA to carry out peace and reintegration efforts, most recently the NCPJ, increasingly appear to be short-term tactical moves lacking clear long-term objectives for achieving a long-term consolidated, sustainable peace. The mere fact that the Hazarah and Uzbek political leadership, who supported Karzai’s reelection efforts, chose to stay out of the NCPJ, is an indicator that if the peace and reconciliation program remains ill-defined, Afghanistan may be heading towards the divisive environment that followed the fall of the last communist regime in Kabul in 1992.

Most of the Afghan, ISAF and European Union officials consulted by this author during a trip to Kabul in May agreed that there is a growing sense of uncertainty among the Afghan population. For the Kabul Conference to be successful the following recommendations regarding clarity of objective to guide GIRoA were offered by those consulted:

- The goal of reconciliation should be defined and contextualized.
- Clear, precise information campaigns explaining the reconciliation program’s goal of sustainable peace and countering the perceptions that the program is providing ISAF a graceful exit will help to alleviate Afghans’ concerns over the aims of the program.
- Shaping public debate about ISAF troop withdrawal is a shared responsibility of all troop-contributing states.
- The GIRoA needs to define and clarify the incentives that it can offer to the neo-Taliban leadership.
- The GIRoA needs to clearly articulate the targets of the reconciliation efforts – defining who’s in and who’s out. Some expressed fear that some among the neo-Taliban leadership may still seek revenge for their defeat in 2001 and see reconciliation as a means to avenge their losses once the threat from international forces is diminished.

To date MES has hosted eight presentations by regional experts from both the operational and academic worlds. Each of the speaker's unique expertise and experience has been critical to enhancing the Marine Corps' understanding of the complexity of the issues that define or plague the region and its people.

The speakers that have participated in the MES AfPak Lecture Series have discussed a wide range of topics from the tribal structure to Afghan national identity, and from the different historical narratives of the Afghan people to lessons for ways forward. The participants have also discussed the regional dimensions that have played an important role in Afghanistan's past, present and will continue to play a pivotal role in its future.

Dr. James Caron, Professor Robert McChesney, Professor Shah Mahmoud Hanifi and Mr. Qamaruddin Jabarkheil provided very different historical and cultural narratives of how Afghans, with a focus on the Pashtuns, view themselves and their history. The narratives provided in-depth insights into Afghan historiography, Afghan society, governance, and nationalism; but at the same time the lectures, when viewed collectively, illustrates the complexity of the subjects. Nevertheless, their insight based on examination and analysis of the written and oral history of the Afghan people provided a fresh look at the history of the Afghan people and provided a foundation to build upon in understanding Afghanistan in the here and now, and devising a strategy for a successful way ahead.

Ambassador Ronald Neumann beginning with the past, with the lessons of Afghanistan's history, focused more on his personal recent diplomatic experience in Kabul as the U.S. ambassador, and went on to provide strategic options for the future. Neumann discussed how statements and catch phrases, such as "government in a box," are undercutting U.S. credibility and pointed out the effects that similarities between actions and statements of U.S. officials now and those of Soviet officials leading up to their withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, will have on the perceptions in Afghanistan and the region. He referred specifically to a 1988 statement by former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, who called the occupation of Afghanistan a "bleeding wound" for Soviet Union a year before the start of the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Neumann compared Gorbachev's statement to one made by General Stanley McChrystal referring to Marjah as a "bleeding ulcer" in June of this year. Statements such as this reverberate through the Afghan, and regional, communities as they wait, and prepare, for history to repeat itself, Neumann warned.

Through the lens of his diplomatic post in Afghanistan as the deputy of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ambassador Peter Galbraith, concentrating on the controversial presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2009, offered a look at the hurdles that Afghanistan has yet to overcome in terms of governance and rule of law.

## MES Past Events

15-21 May 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi traveled to New Delhi and Agra, India with Marine Corps War College students and faculty.

21-29 May 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan to meet with senior Afghan, ISAF and EU officials on various issues, in particular reintegration and reconciliation.

18 June 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Insurgency, Reconciliation and COIN: A Regional Round-Up" to visiting students from the Danish Defense College in Washington, DC.

1 July 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "A Strategic Overview of the Afghanistan Theatre" to 3rd Bn/25th Marines at Camp Pendleton, CA.

Mr. Abubakar Siddique and Mr. Haider Mullick provided two Pakistani perspectives of the region and the war in Afghanistan. Siddique's presentation was directed at the history of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and the uniqueness of governance and the judicial system that have taken shape in this transition zone due to that history; while Mullick focused on the Pakistani military's evolving counterinsurgency strategy over the past 10 years. Coming from different perspectives, Siddique and Mullick had an agreement on the fact that the Pakistani government is very selective which insurgents they target as well as the purges of army and the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) officials that are associated with these groups. Mullick stated that the ISI views the Haqqani network as its "government in a box" for RC East, for the time when ISAF withdraws from the region, and is therefore untouchable in their eyes.

A major theme that has come out of this series has been how history and culture, and more importantly how Afghans and Pakistanis have viewed their history and culture, has had a major impact where Afghanistan and Pakistan are now and will heavily influence the actions of Afghans and Pakistanis, as well as the regional players, as the AfPak forges ahead. At present, many in the region see eerie similarities between their past and the current situation that they are in, and this perception is weighing heavily on the actions of regional decision makers as well as the common Afghan and Pakistani citizens.

*The resources and information pertaining to the presentations discussed in this article, as well as more information about the lecture series and other MES programs, are available online at <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Pages/Middle%20East%20Studies.aspx>. For further information on the series or how to obtain copies of the lectures and other MES products, please contact MES of MCU at [MCU\\_MES@grc.usmcu.edu](mailto:MCU_MES@grc.usmcu.edu).*



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