

How to Win the Peace in Afghanistan

by Aiichiro Yamamoto

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To win a lasting peace in Afghanistan, a military victory will have to be combined with a functioning government offering programs that entice all but the most ideological fighters to lay down their arms.

At the London Conference on Afghanistan this January, Japan and Britain pledged to take the lead in a new program aimed at luring fighters off the battlefield and into the classroom. Japan will provide \$50 million for the first phase of this Peace and Reintegration Programme; part of the \$5 billion that the Hatoyama government pledged prior to London. Since the 911 attacks, Japan has spent or pledged \$7 billion in Afghanistan.

Can it work? Post-conflict integration is never easy. Nevertheless experiences in countries such as Angola show that it can work.

Undeniably, this is a difficult challenge in war-torn Afghanistan. But, based on JICA's experience in Afghanistan, I believe most Taliban fighters can be induced to lay down their arms permanently.

The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNMA) and JICA supported the Karzai government's "Afghan New Beginnings Program." Under this program, by 2006, we demobilized, disarmed, and repatriated 63,000 Afghan soldiers. These men had fought under the control of warlords, not under any centralized or disciplined army that would be recognized in the West.

This experience confirms our view that many of the Taliban fighters are still under arms because they see no other opportunities to support themselves and their families: whatever glamour that fighting might have offered has long since faded to the grim realities of deprivation and loss.

Not all the lessons from New Beginnings have been positive, and we need to always be vigilant on what works, and what does not. We need to be sensitive that cash paid to buy back weapons not be used to buy newer, cheaper ones.

Overall, the story is encouraging. But, building on what we've already learned in Afghanistan, here are some of the things that we have to get right:

- Commitment from the top. So far, the Karzai government's commitment to this program appears strong. It has to be. If President Karzai doesn't mean it, little we do will matter. The commitment to convene a Grand Peace Jirga is very important.

- Close coordination is critical. Another key to success is the close coordination of different actors. This is such a complicated and multi-faceted undertaking that no single actor can complete it wholly from the beginning to the end. The disarmament and demobilization processes are usually conducted by the military authorities of the country's government or by the UN peacekeeping mission, and the reintegration process is usually implemented by the country's development authorities and multilateral and bilateral donors in such forms as vocational training and provision of micro finance to help start up small businesses.

In the case of the New Beginnings program, demobilization and disarmament were mainly performed and supervised by the new Afghan Ministry of Defense, and the training was supported by the UNDP and JICA. JICA, in turn, trained Afghan vocational training instructors in metal work, welding and mechanical work, in addition to providing direct training to ex-soldiers in five vocational training schools in Kabul. By last count, about two-thirds of them were working in their new fields.

- Don't overpromise. Joblessness is a threat to stability throughout the developing world, even in countries at peace. We have to be clear about what we can offer, and what we can't guarantee. The offer to provide vocational training and to help find a job is not the same thing as the guarantee of the job itself. It is clear from the UN evaluation report that many of the former soldiers in the New Beginnings program said they heard officials promise during the demobilization process that they would be given a job. Certainly most of them think that is what they heard. These are men who believed they had fought for their nation and deserved recognition (and a permanent job) in exchange for their "effort and sacrifice."

We can't lure these fighters down with exaggerated promises of what will happen over the short term, nor do we need to. The risks are clear: they will become disenchanted later on and thus could undermine our efforts and lead to future instability.

- Literacy is the key predictor of success. There is clear evidence that educated former combatants have done better than those with no literacy or numeracy. Some have found government positions, for example. Shopkeepers and businessmen who can keep accounts tend to do better than those who have to remember everything in their heads. Also, those former fighters who returned to their communities with literacy have greater prestige than the uneducated and there is even some spiritual benefit: education is highly prized in Islam, for the pen is mightier than the sword.

There has been much concern recently that the US-Japan alliance may have lost its focus and may not be operating on the global basis which both partners desire. Frustrations have boiled over, as new governments on both sides of the Pacific

get to know one another, present their own views on domestic and international matters, and try to fit them into the existing framework.

JICA's bilateral cooperation on Afghanistan with USAID is quite close and productive. This doesn't grab the headlines, but this is a significant commitment of money and time, as dedicated professionals from both countries risk their lives to help build a more stable and prosperous Afghanistan. In response to the growing sense of urgency about the situation on the ground, the Japanese government has pledged even more, as have many other international donors. We think the US-Japan-UN cooperation in Afghanistan already shows that our alliance remains not just strong, but actively engaged where it counts. I am confident Japan will play a larger role in comprehensive global security in the future.