

Leverage: Designing a Political Campaign for Afghanistan



This report notes that America's counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan has focused more on waging war at the operational and tactical levels at the expense of the strategic and political levels.

In the end, by having so vocally and materially committed to the Karzai regime, the United States and its allies are tied to its successes and failures. The goal, then, should be to maximize the former and minimize the latter through focused application of U.S. leverage, writes CNAS Fellow and author Andrew Exum.

Designing a political campaign minimizes the role luck plays in whether the United States and its allies are successful. By drawing on research conducted through hundreds of interviews with U.S. and NATO military officers and diplomats, policymakers and NGOs in Afghanistan, Exum offers recommendations to design an effective political campaign:

1. Convene another strategic review to assess the civilian strategy, not the U.S. and allied military strategy, in Afghanistan. President Obama should ask the tough questions to his secretaries and envoys that he asked his military commander General Stanley McChrystal to answer in his fall 2009 review.
2. Build a functioning relationship with Hamid Karzai and demonstrate to the Afghan president that he has an enduring partner in the United States and its allies.
3. Use U.S. and allied leverage to press the government of Afghanistan to either hold elections for district governors or appoint competent governors from Kabul. Effective local governance is a prerequisite for U.S. and allied forces to institute aid and development projects that are essential to addressing the factors driving conflict and violence at the local level.

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