

A Commentary on Ahmed Rashid's article "NATO's Dangerous Wager with Karzai"

The primary aim of the commentary is to argue the points that are raised by Ahmed Rashid in his article in relation to the political situation of post-2001 Afghanistan.

Ahmed Rashid in the article "NATO's Dangerous Wager with Karzai" focuses on Afghan President Hmaid Karzai not only as a changed man but also as an anti-Western political figure in the late post-Taliban period. While Rashid compares President Karzai with the Soviet-backed President Najibullah, he ignores historical facts in the last three decades as well as the post-9/11 realities of Afghanistan which distinguish between these two different historical periods and presidents.

First, Rashid compares President Karzai with President Najibullah in order to make an argument that Afghanistan will once again be moving towards instability and civil war. But doing so, he ignores the fact that these two presidents cannot be technically compared because President Najibullah was not a democratically elected leader of Afghanistan whereas President Karzai is a democratically elected president who has the legitimate right to govern. Also, President Karzai is neither a US-led coalition forces-appointed leader nor a specific political party-backed president of a one-part political system; however, President Najibullah was directly appointed by the Soviet Union leadership in order to provide the ground for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Second, Rashid evaluates the status of international troops in post-2001 Afghanistan to suggest that the NATO forces' status is the same as the Soviet troops in the 1980s. During the 1980s Afghanistan was not only recognized as an occupied country by the Soviet Union, but also the rest of the international community: Western and Islamic countries were supporting the Afghan Mujahiddin in the fight against the Soviet invasion. The situation of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 is different from that of the 1980s because the NATO forces are UN Security Council authorized troops for the obvious mandate of peace keeping/building efforts rather than occupying forces like the Soviet troops. The Taliban-led insurgency, with the exception of some parts of southern and eastern Afghanistan, lacks public support. Regardless of the undercover intelligence, technical, and financial assistance of Pakistan (and accursedly Iran) to further the support of Al-Qaida, the Taliban and other insurgent groups have no international legitimacy.

There is, however, an obvious similarity between these two periods of the 1980s and post-2001 that is the support of Pakistan from the Taliban and other insurgent groups which have been denied by Ahmed Rashid in his article. As a result, President Karzai is not going to be facing a civil war the same as President Najibullah confronted after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops because the international community has continuously acknowledged that the 2014 is not necessarily meant the last day of the NATO presence in Afghanistan; instead, international military and financial support will apparently continue in the post-2014 period but not in the capacity of military operations across the country.

Finally, Ahmed Rashid over-estimates the power of President Najibullah and fails to give a clear picture of the situation in post-Taliban Afghanistan as well as the power of President Karzai. Instead, he attempts to draw a complicated picture of Afghanistan situation in order to show disappointment in both Afghan officials and the international community from overcoming the ongoing security and political challenges. As a result, Rashid fails to provide the international community with policy-relevant recommendations for winning the war on terror and successfully deal with the challenge of the Taliban-led insurgency.

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The link below is Ahmed Rashid's article.

<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/nov/22/nato-karzai-afghanistan>

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