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RECONSTRUCTION OF AFGHANISTAN

Kinichi Komano

Afghanistan seems still to be far from being reconstructed. While I served there as Japanese ambassador supporting the Afghans' efforts towards reconstruction, I used to say that it would take a few decades for a devastated state to be reconstructed. Therefore, the problem now is not that Afghanistan's reconstruction has not been completed but rather that the country has not yet been put on a sustainable path to development. What are the problems and solutions?

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There are complex reasons that time has been wasted in the reconstruction of Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. However, two things can be argued without dispute. The government has failed to grasp the hearts and minds of the people and the international community has failed to concentrate its limited resources on focused areas based upon clearly delineated strategy. These two are mutually cause and effect. Instead of elaborating on these, however, I would like to focus on ways to set the strategic direction correct in the future.

In this intellectual exercise, Ethiopia, where I am serving now as the Ambassador of Japan, offers something to go by. It is more or less on par with Afghanistan in per capita GDP (around \$200 per year). Japan's post-WWII experiences in its own reconstruction efforts will also give us valuable hints.

In post-9/11 Afghanistan, the political process has gone well, while security (in terms of both maintaining security itself and implementing security sector reform) and development have been left behind, in spite of the tremendous efforts and ideas wrought by the Afghanistan government and the international community. Nothing demonstrates this better than the resurgence of the Taliban and the rampant cultivation of poppies throughout the country.

It is not too late to correct the approach by both sides of the Afghanistan government and the international community. I suggest two concrete solutions.

Firstly, the responsibility for security should be shouldered mainly by the international community (as has more or less been the case so far, but both responsibility and the size of forces to be deployed should be clearly decided and enlarged). Troops should be substantially strengthened and resources should be focused on maintaining security (and not so much on security sector reform for the sake of sharpening focus until such time that basic security is established throughout the country and the government enjoys enough financial clout of its own to pay at least the salaries of its own security forces). I argue this, because by pursuing diversity of objectives, none will be achieved.


Secondly, the Afghanistan government should focus its attention and limited resources on development, while being relieved of responsibility for security (this is the situation in post-WWII Japan). The government should take a

strong lead in both delineating and implementing the development strategy. Although having scarce natural resources, Ethiopia has been enjoying double-digit economic growth for the past five years, owing mainly to the good policy system and the strong leadership of the government in its implementation, especially in terms of directing scarce resources to strategic areas like education and road construction (similar to Japan in its post-WWII reconstruction) and mobilizing policy instruments and harnessing public and private partnerships towards realizing agricultural development-led industrialization (this is called “ADLI” in short) boosted by exports.

In the case of Afghanistan, its geographical location and abundance of water resources give it comparative advantages (in the case of Ethiopia, water resources are given strategic importance not only as the means of irrigation but also as a source of generating power for sale to neighboring countries). Afghanistan used to be the crossroads of east-west and north-south traffic and a grain basket for the sub-continent. (1) Why not revive Afghanistan these roles in the region? Ethiopia exports roses to Europe and even to Japan by air. Roses will be followed by other floriculture and horticulture products and meats and dairy manufactures. (2) Why not have Afghanistan export its products to nearby emerging economies such as those of the sub-continent, Russia and the Middle East?

Development, if and when it is placed on a sustainable path and becomes tangible to the people, will give them incentives to work hard and make them ready to invest in the future, including the education of their children. Development not only gives the people hope for the future (this is the real meaning of grasping hearts and minds), but also creates resources for the government to use for security. People’s confidence in the country’s future and the increase of resources available to the government in turn will give the government the capability to resume responsibility for security. It is only through creating this virtuous circle that Afghanistan can be saved from the present quagmire.

The Afghanistan government should be given full support by the international community in achieving the above strategy. Though doubling aid

from the international community might be required, this will be fully rewarded with a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. It goes without saying that success will not be achieved without strong will and leadership on the part of the Afghans. 

Kinichi Komano is Japanese Ambassador to Ethiopia. He served as Japanese Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2004.