

The Afghan Challenge

A RUSI Qatar Policy Dialogue

Transcript of Presentation by:

**The Rt Hon Bill Rammell MP
UK Minister for the Armed Forces'**

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Introduction by Sir Paul Lever, Vice President, RUSI

“Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this RUSI Qatar Policy Dialogue.

RUSI hosts this talk at a pivotal time for the future of Afghanistan. Eight years after the overthrow of the Taliban Afghanistan remains a weak and fractious state. Though there are now 100,000 foreign troops in country, the Taliban remain undefeated. International casualties are almost twice as high as this time last year, and insecurity for the Afghan population remains the norm.

This has led publics in troop contributing nations to question the continued rationale for sacrificing the lives of their servicemen. And it has left many Afghans wondering whether NATO forces have the will to stay the course.

It is against this backdrop that the UK is undertaking a strategic review of its operations in Afghanistan, in parallel with the US. After a major review, General McCrystal, the top US commander in Afghanistan, has recommended substantially increased US troop levels, together with a strategy that places greater focus on protecting the population and building up the Afghan security forces. Other influential individuals though have argued that the ambitious goals of counter-insurgency and nation-building are unattainable and that the US should redefine its mission as one of limited Counter-Terrorism, focusing on Al-Qaeda alone.

Last week Gordon Brown, the British prime minister, in an indication of the decision likely to be made by President Obama, announced that Britain would send 500 more soldiers on conditions that also mirror General McCrystal’s emphasis on the Afghan Army and police playing a larger role. To expand on the British policy on Afghanistan, I am therefore delighted to welcome today the Rt Hon Bill Rammell MP, the UK Minister for the Armed Forces.”

Transcript - The Rt Hon Bill Rammell MP, UK Minister for the Armed Forces’

“Today I want to give you my thoughts if I may on how this changing world is throwing up new security challenges. And how these challenges have led Britain to engage in Afghanistan. Finally I want to share with you how our experience in Afghanistan is informing our strategic and military thinking about our defence posture. But first I would like to reflect on how Qatar’s evolving place in the world will inevitably mean that we will share many of these challenges and, no doubt, work more closely together to resolve them.

Qatar’s Evolving Place In The World

In our globe of nations, power is based on many factors – geography, economic size and growth, trading profile and military capability among them. Qatar is an oil- and gas-rich nation, with the third largest gas reserves and, I was amazed to learn, the largest GDP per capita in the world. And despite the recent

difficulties in the global economy Qatar is weathering the storm well with around 11,500 British people working here.

So Qatar's place on the world stage is growing. Your leaders - political, military, and from wider society - are facing decisions on how, where and when to engage to contribute to security and stability around the globe. Some decisions are driven by direct national security, others by financial or trade concerns, by alliance obligations and shared interests – some by humanitarian aims or altruism – and even how you see yourselves as a nation and how you wish to be viewed by others.

And we in the United Kingdom are proud to be counted among Qatar's friends and allies. Your continued support to UK operations in the region is greatly appreciated. We very much see you as long-term priority partners.

One thing is certain – with power comes responsibility. As Qatar's influence grows so more will be asked of her. And example of this is Qatar's growing role in resolving intricate international disputes.

In this respect, we strongly support Qatar's continuing efforts, in partnership with the African Union / United Nations mediator, Djibril Bassolé, to find a lasting settlement to the conflict in Darfur. Over the last year, we have worked closely with His Excellency, Minister of State Al Mahmoud and Mr. Bassolé, to support you in what is a difficult but crucial task.

Indeed, it is vital we continue to help build African capacity so that Africa, particularly through the African Union, can provide its own troops for peace keeping and support operations. We have learned over time that the best solutions in Africa are African solutions. It is right that other nations, such as Qatar and the UK, use historical and linguistic links in Africa, to help this process.

This is important work – and some of the difficult issues your Armed Forces face are issues that UK Armed Forces also face.

Shared Challenges

First, let's look at some of the challenges we share. The UK has been a permanent member of the UN Security Council since its inception. We too sit at the centre of a web of international organisations including, for us, the EU, NATO and the Commonwealth. In our experience, such a position of influence means that those who would oppose the nature of our growing global civilization consider with more ruthlessness how best to target our interests. As a nation, we have to be continually adept at meeting new challenges as they are thrust upon us.

In the last century, the threat to most nations was overwhelmingly from the Armed Forces of other nations. Vigilance remains necessary – and there are still difficult regions of the world such as the Middle East, parts of Africa, and the Korean Peninsula – where enduring threats remain. But most conflict is now less likely to be bi-polar, and more likely to cut across the interests of multiple parties (both state and non-state), military and economic. And most states now see the benefit of working through the United Nations and other international or regional organisations, those they are not perfect I know and need reform.

As the threats we face have diversified, a broader range of activities are required that deter aggression, and promote stability and security for all stakeholders in a region. Among them, the possible consequences of climate change and competition for resources, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the consequences of weak states and ungoverned space which can exacerbate ethnic and religious differences.

The UK, in common with many of our allies, also faces a new form of terrorism. The use of terror as a strategy is as old as warfare itself. But those who have used it, what they hope to achieve, and the way they apply it is continually evolving.

As civilisation is adjusting to the new realities of globalisation - with the increased worldwide use of the internet, the growing ease of global travel, and the interconnection of national economies - so civilisation's old enemy – terrorism – has shown a new and ugly face.

On 9/11, we saw the graphic results of this. No prior warning, mass casualties, symbolic targets, synchronised attacks, and orchestrated across continents. Terrorists groups like Al Qaeda use the features of our new world – global communications, international travel, devolved networks, outsourced operations, franchising, diverse finances. This is sophisticated and ingenious use of new technology, finance and communication for evil ends.

Their aims are not the narrow nationalist aims of 20th century terrorists like the Irish Republic Army. They are undertaking a global campaign exploiting a range of grievances to carry out acts of terror. Al Qaeda does not accept diversity. They want to impose by force their concept of a caliphate across Muslim majority countries and even across the world. They wish to impose across continents a system sharing many of the ways used by the hard-core ideological Taleban in Afghanistan when they were in charge. Brutality, oppression, intolerance and violence.

The UK's Engagement In Afghanistan

This new form of terrorism has forced the UK, and many of our allies, to take difficult but necessary decisions – particularly when it comes to the use of military force. As I speak, the UK Armed Forces are engaged in a tough fight in Afghanistan.

Our Armed Forces are in Afghanistan defending UK national security. To prevent Al Qaeda having a secure base from which to threaten us directly. They are fighting against an insurgency which, if successful, would provide free reign to the terrorist capacity that inspired, planned and provided support for attacks like those of 9/11 – the tube and bus bombings in London in July 2005, in Madrid, and many more besides.

We in the UK cannot ignore the threat that would be posed by Taleban rule. Look at Afghanistan before 2001. It was there that the horrors of 9/11 were planned. It was there that recruits were trained in the methods of terrorism. It was there that Al Qaeda leaders were planning and directing further major terrorist operations which would, no doubt, have been aimed at the UK and others.

Afghanistan is part of our strategic engagement in the region as a whole. The greatest international priority in tackling terrorism around the globe is the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al Qaeda is now located in the borderlands of Pakistan where they pose a direct threat to Pakistan and to wider international security. That is why our strategy doesn't focus on Afghanistan alone. But Al Qaeda is not in Afghanistan, because we and our Allies are providing support to the Afghan Government.

In the long-term, the key in Afghanistan will be Afghan-led governance and political reconciliation. Our strategy in Afghanistan is not about territory, it is about people. Securing the main population centres against the insurgents. Providing the space for governance and public services to take root. Splitting the insurgency. Allowing governance to be taken forward from a position of strength.

We are not trying to impose an idealised western democratic model or run Afghanistan ourselves. Ultimately it will be the politics of development, reconstruction and reintegration that will bring lasting stability to the region – no place for the terrorists to hide – and no reason for people to hide them.

This is not just about the UK's national security. 42 nations are taking part in Afghanistan - one of the widest ever international coalitions – under a UN mandate. It is about their national security too. So while our engagement in Afghanistan is primarily about the UK's national security, is also about our international responsibility too.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, as a leading member of NATO, we are required to stand ready to act with our allies – and to take responsibility for the security of others, as well as of our own nation.

The way forward will not be easy. This summer's operations preparing for the Afghan elections were bloody. In Helmand, where the British are operating, we took on the Taliban in their heartland. Now that the elections have taken place, we are looking for new momentum in Afghan governance.

We have also fully supported US General Stanley McChrystal, while he has conducted his Strategic Assessment.

His review will focus coalition efforts and, as part of that, the Prime Minister recently committed to increasing our force contribution by another 500. Because the price of failure will be paid not only by the Afghan people, but by the international community too.

Armed Forces in the 21st Century

In the kind of counter-insurgency operations that the UK are undertaking in Afghanistan, body count is not the measure of success – it is how safe people feel and whether they have faith in a new future. So our engagement in Afghanistan is not just a military operation but a joint civil-military plan to bring security and the possibility of stable governance to the country.

We in the UK are learning the early lessons of our engagement in Afghanistan, chief among those being the need to embed what is known as the 'Comprehensive Approach' into appropriate military operations.

The new security environment we all face is prompting the UK to begin the process of a Defence Review. Just as we need to win the battles we are fighting now, we need to make sure we are prepared for the battles of the future. This means examining some of the key issues for Defence including: the changing nature of conflict; the lesson we have learned from recent operations; conflict prevention; and technological changes.

The questions we need to ask ourselves will be difficult. How do we align our Armed Forces to conduct complex counter insurgency operations in the future? How do we maintain the capabilities to project power

in a tough fiscal environment? How can we, across government and around the world, become better at preventing problems from emerging in the first place?

We in the UK are prepared to consider deep and wide-ranging changes to our Armed Forces. We will need to re-balance our investment in technology, equipment, and people to meet the challenge of irregular warfare over the next decade while still retaining our ability to respond to emerging state-led threats and other military challenges.

It is my hope that we can share our experiences to help inform your own thinking and planning. And that you will share your experiences with us to inform our thinking.

So I'd like to note that, as I speak, a Qatari delegation is visiting the UK to fly our Typhoon aircraft. I'd also like to note that some of your forces are currently deployed in Mongolia on a training exercise with three UK Loan Service Officers training alongside. And I'd like to take the opportunity to say how much I welcome Colonel Saoud Al-Thani's nomination to the next Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) course which starts next January.

It's precisely this sort of engagement that will help us to forge even deeper relations at all levels.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been a pleasure speaking to you today. Qatar and the UK have a lot to gain from learning from each other's experience. I hope today I have contributed to your understanding of what is driving the UK's engagement in Afghanistan, and how we see it as part of our international responsibilities.

As Qatar's role and influence in the world grows, I have great confidence that the responsibility will sit comfortably on your shoulders."

Biography:

Bill Rammell MP was appointed UK Minister for the Armed Forces in June 2009. Prior to this he served as Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where his responsibilities included the Middle East (including Iraq and Iran), Counter-Terrorism, Counter-Proliferation, the Far East and South East Asia, North America, Drugs and International Crime, Migration Policy, and Leads on Afghanistan, South Asia and UN in Commons. He was appointed as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in October 2002. He was elected Member of Parliament for Harlow in 1997.