

US POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN
SENLIS COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

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Senlis Recommendations for US Policy in Afghanistan

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About The Senlis Council

The Senlis Council is an international policy think tank with country offices in Kabul, London, Ottawa, Rio de Janeiro, Paris and Brussels. The Council's work encompasses foreign policy, security, development, and counter-narcotics policies, and aims to provide innovative analysis and proposals within these areas.

The Senlis Council's extensive programme, currently underway in Afghanistan, focuses on global policy development and, in conjunction with field research, investigates the relationships between counter-narcotics, military and development policies, and their consequences on reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Senlis Afghanistan has permanent field offices in the cities of Lashkar Gah and Kandahar.

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I. Security recommendations

Recommendation I: The US should actively participate in and help form a “NATO-Plus” force: more ground troops, caveat-free and an active involvement of the military in humanitarian aid and development delivery

The present number of NATO-ISAF forces deployed in Afghanistan, and the restrictive operational caveats imposed upon them by several European governments, is easing the Taliban’s position of dominance in many parts of the country. Therefore the force size should be doubled to 80,000 as soon as is logistically possible. To reach this number, each country contributing to ISAF should make a troop commitment that is proportionate to their overall economic capacity.

As part of “NATO Plus” the United States should play a leading role within the Atlantic Alliance to create a new balance between military and humanitarian efforts within the stabilisation strategy for Afghanistan. Economic-focused humanitarian interventions should be placed at the core of military planning as a way to pursue an effective hearts and minds strategy. The core challenge is to show the people that the international community is addressing their most basic needs. So far, the failure to do so has given the Taliban a strategic advantage over international troops. A focus on economic humanitarian aid will defuse tensions and create support for the international presence and the central government within rural communities. It will also reduce the growing control that the Taliban exert over those communities, making the US troops’ missions safer.

Recommendation II: Increase support for Pakistan’s security forces through training and limited US special forces’ operations.

Part of the new “NATO Plus” concept should be an increased focus on Pakistan and the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The United States should increase its support for Pakistan’s security forces, increase the number of limited operations of US Special Forces and train specialized Pakistani forces in the crucial border areas and tribal zones within Pakistan. This is the only way to cut off the life support, flow of Taliban recruits and supplies entering Afghanistan. Moreover, specialized US forces should be deployed at the major border crossings.

Recommendation III: Help the Afghan Government establish Neighborhood Security Groups

Similar to its policy in Iraq, the United States should actively support setting up Neighborhood Security Groups, which are committees that offer local populations an outlet to discuss their concerns regarding security issues. Composed of village elders, indigenous and international security forces, and representatives from regional and central government, Neighborhood Security Groups will host ‘security jirgas’, building confidence among local communities that their voice is being heard by key local, regional and international players. If utilized correctly, they will establish a grassroots information channel that will capture additional intelligence about Taliban operations at the village level – information that US troops on the ground are in need of.

II. Counter-narcotics recommendations

Recommendation I: Stop aggressive poppy crop eradication in Afghanistan and avoid at all cost chemical spraying

The United States should stop pushing for aggressive, short term poppy crop eradication as long as sustainable alternatives are not yet readily available and farmers still do not have a real choice between the legal and illegal economy.

The United States should especially abandon pursuing chemical eradication of poppy crops in Afghanistan, whether from the air or through ground spraying. Chemical spraying of poppy growing areas would be disastrous for the United States’ hearts and minds mission, sacrificing the early results obtained so far in terms of local trust gained and local support won for the NATO-led ISAF mission. Instead, counter-narcotics policy should be regarded by the US as strategic security and counter-insurgency policy focusing on alternative livelihoods and general rural development to drive a wedge between impoverished farming communities and the Taliban insurgency.

Recommendation II: Implement a *Poppy for Medicine* Pilot Project

Similar to medicinal poppy production projects supported by the US in India and Turkey since the 1960s and 1970s, the United States should support in Afghanistan the implementation of a scientific *Poppy for Medicine* pilot project in one of the provinces where US troops and/or USAID-development projects are based. Since current alternative livelihood programmes have a limited scope and take too long to offer poppy farmers a sustainable and profitable alternative source of income, the United States should investigate on the ground whether the local production of an Afghan-made brand of morphine could on the short term could provide impoverished rural communities with a legitimate income within the legal economy. Through three years of extensive field research, The Senlis Council has developed a *Poppy for Medicine* model for Afghanistan as a means of bringing illegal poppy cultivation under control, and building support for the international community’s counter-insurgency mission in an immediate yet sustainable manner.

Polling conducted in the US in August 2007 (see Box 1 below) shows that the US public opinion overwhelmingly supports *Poppy for Medicine* and is opposed to chemical spraying.

Recommendation III: Invest more in alternative livelihood projects and stimulate tax credit systems to boost financial resources available for Afghanistan's reconstruction and development process

While investigating innovative, more short-term development projects such as *Poppy for Medicine*, the United States should invest further in alternative livelihoods and diversification of the rural economy. Parts of the funds spent on military and security projects should be diverted incrementally towards the development of the rural economy, decreasing dependence on opium poppy cultivation and eventually taking away both the local support for the insurgency and their recruitment base. Next to the *Poppy for Medicine* pilot project, the United States should investigate other plant-based medicinal projects such as *Artemisinin*, the anti-malaria drug, which could provide enough added-value to farming communities to eventually diversify away from its current dependence on opium poppy cultivation.

Moreover, both the Afghan Government and the international community must recognize the key impact of tax policies on promoting Foreign Direct Investment and development in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's donor governments such as the United States should enact law on tax breaks for those companies (and individuals) willing to invest in Afghanistan. The tax revenue lost as a result of the tax credit schemes would be offset by reducing direct foreign aid to Afghanistan by the same amount. Tax credits could prove a solution to the current mismanagement of aid funds, circumventing institutional weakness, ineffectiveness and inability to deliver.

Results of August 2007 polling of US public conducted by Ipsos-Reid

- **66 per cent** of Americans support a "poppy for medicine" scheme which would allow farmers to switch their crop away from the production of illegal narcotics, and towards the production of legal medicines;
- **69 per cent** agree that in order for this medicinal scheme to work, there needs to be a trial run in the form of a scientific pilot project;
- **69 per cent** of the US public opposes chemical spraying of poppy crops.

III. Development recommendations

Recommendation I: Make emergency poverty relief a top priority

Poverty is the primary enemy of Afghanistan's reconstruction, and must be defeated. As a beneficiary of international aid, Afghanistan receives the lowest amount of reconstruction financing compared to all other post-conflict nations, signifying a failure to recognize that Afghanistan is among the poorest of the poor nations. The response to emergency crises like starvation is not only a humanitarian necessity – it represents an essential part of any stabilization effort.

Building on experiences in other countries such as Brazil, and Afghan *Family/Community Fund* whereby positive action for the Afghan public (such as sending their children to school) would be rewarded with mutual investment on the part of the Afghan Government support by the United States. Certainly, an Afghan *Family/Community Fund* could be a crucial instrument to increase investment in the supply-side of public services to cope with increased service utilization, such as hospitals and schools; training of teachers and doctors; and stimulating local food and produce markets.

Recommendation II: US Military delivers Aid & Security Action Plan (ASAP)

The United States should develop an Aid & Security Action Plan (ASAP) for Afghanistan, focusing on targeted humanitarian aid and enhanced medical treatment capacity through mobile field hospitals. Food aid and medical aid will directly improve the relationships with the Afghan people in those areas where US troops are based, having an indirect impact on the success of the stabilization mission. Where there are no local or international aid organisations present, US soldiers should be involved in the actual delivery of humanitarian aid.

Recommendation III: Rebuilt existing hospitals and build new hospitals, and implement outreach and training programmes to foster sustainable improvements in health

The United States should rebuild and re-furbish existing hospitals in the areas where it is based. Moreover, the US should immediately fund and provide the engineering and construction expertise to build new hospitals in Afghanistan. To positively impact on Afghans' perceptions, these hospitals must be built to American standards, the same standards as the hospitals provided for NATO military troops. Building new hospitals will also provide Afghans with much-needed employment.

Next to increasing the capacity of Afghanistan in terms of medical treatment, medical doctors should be provided with continuing medical education by their military counterparts to manage the trauma of war, and outreach programs for the malnourished, children under five, pregnant women and the elderly must be developed and implemented. Meanwhile, comprehensive surveillance of health indicators such as disease incidence and prevalence must begin immediately. This surveillance must include those living in refugee camps and remote villages. The information gained should be used to guide the response of the international community.