

CENTER FOR AFGHANISTAN STUDIES:

SUMMARY OF AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA FALL SEMINAR 2016

DATES: 17-18 NOVEMBER

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-OMAHA

This seminar is part of a series of academic and educational lectures, programs and activities the Center has had for the last many years regarding Afghanistan and the region.

The purpose of organizing this seminar is to provide a platform to discuss, learn and understand the relevant socio-political, cultural and historical factors currently affecting Afghanistan and the region. The goal is to increase participants' knowledge of the implications on the region's overall security, US policy objectives and interests, and the influence these factors have on mitigating negative impact on regional development.

The first of our Seminar Series was completed with excellent participation from various organizations and covered five major topic areas. Participants from CENTCOM, STRATCOM, the U.S. Army, Union College, UNL, UNO, The Brookings Institute, as well as Allies from Australia, Canada and New Zealand engaged in two days of presentations and discussions conducted by Subject Matter Experts in Military and Civilian fields. The following five topic areas included:

- I. **Afghanistan and its Neighbors: Current Political Situation and Five to Ten Year Projections:** This presentation will examine the influences of the current government, the fluidity of Geopolitics, and the reaction of states in Central and South Asia. Continued U.S. involvement in Afghanistan for the last 15 years plus political dynamics has changed greatly for each nation in the region. As each state realigns their goals and objectives based on developments in Afghanistan and the continuance of a U.S./Coalition presence, Afghanistan continues to recover from over four decades of conflict while maintaining an ambition to become a regional hub for economic activity and cooperation. Afghanistan holds a strong desire to regain status as a geopolitical power in the region. This last goal will impact future relationships with neighboring powers.

- II. **Messaging: Islamic State and Taliban Information Operations:** This presentation will look into how and why different dynamics have been in play and how they can be understood. What are the issues with current messaging? What are the local, tribal, economic, and sociopolitical factors that contribute to this effort? Despite millions of dollars spent on shoring up the current Afghan government, IS and Taliban cells have been successful in recruiting young people into their ranks. Their information operations have proved to be more attractive to younger Afghans and Pakistanis in rural villages and even increased among urban dwellers.

- III. **Cross-Border Conflicts:** The purpose of this presentation is to provide participants with a historical context of the Afghanistan/Pakistan conflict of interests and the dynamics that feed into Pakistan's support for proxies to achieve different goals and objectives. The Durand Line, the 1971 breakup of Pakistan and the desire of the Pakistan military for strategic depth with regards to Afghanistan are just some of the issues contributing to current policy choices by leadership on both sides of the border. These policy decisions have directly impacted U.S. presence in the region.
- IV. **Transboundary Water Issue/Natural Resources: A Discussion on Policy Craft, Maintenance/Security of Mineral, Water, and Energy:** One of the most urgent challenges of the 21st century is to ensure sustainable food and water security in the face of population and income increases, a changing climate, and growing demands for scarce water resources. Policy makers in Afghanistan and the region require a broad understanding of the hydrological interconnections of the region's shared water resources to use and manage them successfully to meet development goals. Presently, Afghanistan's water resources are underdeveloped, over time the country will inevitably need to make greater use of its water, with significant downstream impacts. This enormous challenge has significant political, environmental, social, and economic implications for generations.
- V. **Impact of Islamic State Ideology on Local Populations and Neighboring States:** This presentation will look into the influence of IS ideology, the degree of impact on local populations in the region particularly followers of more moderate schools of Islamic thought in Central Asia. Islamic State operates under certain religious and political ideology based on their interpretation of Islam that on many occasions is in complete conflict with local beliefs and the understanding of Islam in the region. Islamic State counts supporters in Central Asian states and a significant number of Uzbek fighters belong to Islamic movements in their respective countries, which has led to increased activity along Afghanistan's northern border after fleeing from sanctuaries in Pakistan. Tajikistan also has been a haven for fighters moving to Syria and Iraq.

The Center for Afghanistan Studies will continue to conduct future events partnering with individuals and institutions with interests in Afghanistan and the socio-cultural political dynamics of the region.