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Will Anyone Debate the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement?

By Kathy Kelly

March 18, 2012

In Afghanistan, the tragic Kandahar killing spree has prompted renewed talk about the proposed U.S. Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement.

At stake in these discussions is the security of Afghanistan, the U.S., and the region.

Citizens in the U.S. and Afghanistan should be urgently exchanging their views or concerns about this partnership.

Many are not even aware of it.

Currently, citizens of Syria and the world can at least discuss Kofi Annan's warning that the situation in Syria should be handled "very, very carefully" to avoid an escalation that would destabilize the region, after an earlier warning against further militarization of the Syrian crisis. The crisis in Afghanistan is as severe as the one in Syria, and it is more chronic. Two million Afghans have been killed in the wars of the past four decades. But not a single diplomat is warning against the further militarization of the Afghan crisis.

The previous U.N. envoy to Afghanistan, Kai Eide, did try. "The most important reason for my bitterness was my ever-growing disagreement with Washington's strategy in Afghanistan," Kai Eide writes in his book *Power Struggle Over Afghanistan*. "It had become increasingly dominated by military strategies, forces, and offensives. Urgent civilian and political

requirements were treated as appendices to the military tasks. The U.N. had never been really involved or consulted by Washington on critical strategy-related questions, nor had even the closest NATO partners. More importantly, Afghan authorities had mostly been spectators to the formation of a strategy aimed at solving the conflict in their own country.”

It has taken the tragic killing of 16 civilians in Kandahar for the world to notice the anger that the war has inflamed in the hearts of both U.S. soldiers and Afghan mothers.

Military and foreign policy elites in Washington have encouraged a conventional presumption that the War on Terror requires a long-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Underlying that presumption is a deeper assumption that “terrorism” can be resolved through war, that is, a supposition that humanity can somehow counter “terrorism” by killing as many “terrorists” as possible, regardless of the deadly anger these killings, so similar themselves to terrorist acts, must necessarily fuel, not to mention the costly “collateral damage.”

Taxpayers from the 50 coalition countries involved in the Afghan war should be alarmed at how and where their money is spent. They should be considering how they would feel were they offered \$2,000 in compensation for the murder of a child, husband, father, or mother, the compensation NATO handed out *ex gratia* (with no admission of its own wrongdoing) to the families of the 16 children, women, and men slaughtered in their sleep on March 11, 2012.

Will the Afghan parliament, the U.S. public, or the U.N. debate the 10-year U.S. war strategy in Afghanistan?

Will the Afghan parliament, the U.S. public, or the U.N. debate the U.S. Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement?

The Afghan Parliament

A few Afghan parliament lawmakers have already raised a protest following the Kandahar killings.

Following the U.S. decision to move the soldier who allegedly committed the massacre to Kuwait, a Kandahar lawmaker, Abdul Khaliq Balakarzai, said that [President Hamid Karzai should respond to the U.S. by refusing to sign a strategic partnership agreement.](#)

On Nov. 14, 2011, [the national security adviser to President Karzai, Dr. Rangin Spanta, announced that the Strategic Partnership Agreement would be finalized by the Afghan parliament.](#) Will that be the case, or did Dr. Rangin Spanta lie to pacify public sentiment?

Note that last year, the parallel Iraqi Status of Forces Agreement was put to the Iraqi parliament for approval and was rejected, denying the U.S. a long-term, uniformed military presence in Iraq. Neither the Iraqi parliament nor the Iraqi public wanted the Iraqi Status of Forces Agreement to be signed. They deemed that it was not in their interests. This could be the case as well in Afghanistan, if the Obama/Karzai administrations allowed democratic parliamentary processes.

The American Public

Sixty percent of the U.S. public believes that the war is not worth its cost in life and expense, according to the latest *Washington Post*-ABC News Poll.

However, Hillary Clinton and Robert Gates have already insisted that [low public approval of the Afghan war won't change U.S. policy](#). "I think if you look at polling in almost all of our 49 coalition partners' countries, public opinion is in doubt," said Defense Secretary Robert Gates. "Public opinion would be majority, in terms of majority, against their participation. I would just say it's obviously the responsibility of leaders to pay attention to public opinion, but at the end of the day, their responsibility is to look out for the public interest and look to the long term."

So, whether led by the previous Republican, George Bush, or wanting-a-second term Democrat Barack Obama, there's not much likelihood the U.S. government will value a poll showing that 60% of the U.S. people want the war to end.

The U.N.

An interesting article dated July 11, 2011, had this to say about [possible U.N. silence over Afghan public sentiment on the U.S. Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement](#): "The Afghan public has outright rejected the U.S. plans as the results of a survey conducted by UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) suggest. UNAMA, with its 23 offices, in Afghanistan conducted the survey across the country some two months back and hasn't published it. Although the survey's findings are widely known, if published, the stark survey results will undermine the U.S.'s future strategic plans."

If this remains true, global citizens should request that the U.N. disclose the wishes of the Afghan public as reflected in the survey and demonstrate that it is still committed to diplomatic solutions and the interests of the people of Afghanistan.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a report on Thursday that the U.N. mission in Afghanistan should place a greater priority on protecting human rights, raising concern about widespread human rights violations by the Afghan Local Police, a U.S.-funded paramilitary program that has been also questioned by [Human Rights Watch](#). Ban made his statement in advance of a U.N. Security Council vote next week to renew the mandate of the political and development mission. Will the Security Council members hear him? Will the domestic constituencies of the Security Council nations?

Perhaps Kai Eide should be invited to play the same U.N. role that Kofi Annan is playing in Syria today. Perhaps, through Kai Eide, the views of Afghan and global civilians could finally be heard.

Just as the Global Commission on Drug Policy, comprising four ex-presidents and prominent diplomats, including Annan, [concluded that the war against drugs had failed and recommended to break the taboo for a global debate](#), a Global Commission on Terrorism Policy should be

established, and taboos on a healthy debate about the messy Afghan war and dire humanitarian situation should be broken.

In May 2011, Oxfam issued an urgent call to promote the accountability of the Afghan National Security Forces, titling their report “No Time to Lose.” There is indeed no time for U.S. and Afghan citizens to lose in questioning the last 10 years of U.S. military strategy. Failure to debate the U.S. Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement could perpetuate killing sprees. There is too much to lose: too many more soldiers to be debased into monsters, too many more innocent lives to be lost.