

Dr. Roger Kangas on Afghanistan and Central Asia

I had the pleasure of attending a short one hour session to hear Dr. Kangas talk about the current political environmental of Central Asia and specifically Afghanistan. Afghanistan currently faces an especially tumultuous time as the United States winds down its military operations there and looks to pull out. The widespread political, social, and cultural upheaval Afghanistan has experienced this past decade and a half will undoubtedly shape the Afghanistan we will see in the future. To gauge just how much Afghanistan has been razed and changed Dr. Kangas mentioned how it is not just being rebuilt, it's being built.



Dr. Roger Kangas during his presentation at UVU

Dozens of countries have been involved in Afghanistan, from providing security forces to humanitarian forces. The sheer number of interested parties indicates the importance of Afghanistan to the Central Asian region. Currently, the mission of the United States is maintenance, not expansion or conquest. The US is seeking stability and consistency in the civic side of Afghanistan, a sharp refocusing of attention and manpower from militaristic actions even a year ago. From 2001 to 2014, the mission and goals of a US occupation and military presence shifted and changed, evolved and fluxed. It was, as Dr. Kangas stated, "an era of changing missions."



UVU faculty and students at Dr. Kangas presentation about Afghanistan

Furthermore, as Afghanistan enters a heated stage with multiple countries such as Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and China, the US has increasing concern for how those states will act in relationship to one another. China is especially concerned with cyber security threats from terrorist groups located in Afghanistan.

Prior to this lecture, I had little knowledge or concern for the happenings of the Middle East, particularly Afghanistan. I am in the military so I have had a little exposure to the events transpiring in Afghanistan via military news. However, I did not know about the political or social situation that Afghanistan now wrestles with. Moreover, I did not know just how many times the mission has changed for the military in Afghanistan. I remembered that the US invaded Iraq and Afghanistan under the pretense of weapons of mass destruction and terror cells, but I had not kept up with the evolving mission of the US military occupation.

What interests me the most is the political situation of Afghanistan in conjunction with other countries. To me, Central Asia looks much like a chessboard in the sense that many pieces are moving, attempting to gain power, and maneuvering towards a secure future. Each country has very real priorities of securing borders, widening purview, and ensuring a flow of resources to further economic development. Furthermore, each nearby country has a legitimate fear of terrorist cells moving from Afghanistan to within their borders. Should neighboring countries prioritize securing Afghanistan's borders or their own borders? Pakistan was especially embarrassed because it housed Osama Bin Laden without governmental knowledge.

Power plays intrigue me as well. While I think a lot about individual maneuvers to attain power and the ascendancy of some individuals, that kind of maneuvering on the state level astonishes me. Leaders of powerful states have to look at their own position in relation to the position of neighboring states and make strategic decisions about which plans to execute, what words to say, what policies to enact, and what course of action will best benefit their country.

William Ng, student of UVU

