

Letter to the Editor,
Albany Times Union

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I agree with the commentary "US must help secure Afghan peace" printed in the March 6 edition of the TU. The commentary, by Daalder and Lindsay of the Brookings institution, argued that the US must not only defeat the Taliban and al-Qaida forces but must also work toward establishing an International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan to maintain peace and civility after the war is over. I wonder though, when are people going to start thinking beyond military action?

We cannot defeat terrorism by military might alone. We must defeat the causes of terrorism. More than half the population of most Arab countries is under the age of 25 and many have college degrees but are unemployed. In Egypt for example, unemployment is 25% and 90% of those searching for jobs have a college education. Many of the perpetrators of the September 11 disaster were college graduates. In addition, most of these Arab countries are controlled by repressive dictatorial regimes giving the people no political voice. On top of this, many of these countries rank among the poorest in the world. Morocco, for example is ranked developmentally by the United Nations as 112th out of 167 countries; Yeman, 133rd; Egypt, 105th; Algeria, 100th. The situation in the Arab countries is perfect for breeding desperation and discontent and out of this will come revolution and war. As long as poverty reigns and despots rule, terrorism will continue.

In addition to fighting terrorism on the military front, we must also fight it on the economic front too. During the cold war, America invested about 3% of the total federal budget on diplomacy and overseas development. In the 2003 budget, even after September 11, the international affairs budget is only about 1% of the total budget, about \$25 billion out of \$2.16 trillion. Furthermore, our international affairs budget is only about 0.1% of our GDP. This puts us dead last among the G-7 industrialized countries.

It is now time to increase investment in international assistance and we should not delay. We need to increase our international affairs budget, with a focus on programs to eliminate poverty, to strengthen democracy, to improve educational opportunities and provide additional health care and shelter. We need to provide better economic opportunities through development of sustainable market-based economy as we have helped to do in South Korea and Taiwan. In doing this, democracy will grow as it has in other places and we will build international trading partners in addition to peaceful world neighbors.

The Peace Corps forms a portion of the international affairs budget. As the nations oldest and most prestigious national volunteer program, the Peace Corps can and should play a major role in eliminating terrorism and fostering prosperity in poverty ridden countries. We need to encourage growth in the Peace Corps. First, we ought to include the Peace Corps in the Bayh-McCain bill, S. 1792, which aims to expand volunteer opportunities for national service to 200,000. Secondly we need to increase funding for the Peace Corps. The President has proposed doubling the Peace Corps in five years. This is much too slow! Currently, the number of volunteers is about 7000. Congress authorized 10,000 volunteers in 1997 but did not appropriate the budget (\$365 million) to support that number. We should do that in FY03 and in FY04 provide funding to increase the number of volunteers to 14,000.

Sincerely,

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