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Bishops offer Obama advice on Afghanistan

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

The think piece on Afghanistan posted to the front page of our web site this morning, Alternatives to war in Afghanistan by David Cortright of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, says:

Demilitarizing U.S. strategy would not mean abandoning the people of Afghanistan. The reduction of military operations should be linked to a greatly increased commitment to development assistance and democracy-building programs for local groups willing to uphold human rights principles.

It's very similar to the advice Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., offered to retired Marine Gen. James L. Jones, the national security adviser. With the Obama administration reviewing U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Hubbard -- the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace -- wrote to Jones about the church's experience in Afghanistan, through the work of Catholic Relief Services on agriculture, water, income generation, education and health.

"CRS' ability to develop local partnerships, involving people in examining their needs and determining priorities, has meant that those communities have a greater commitment to their own development, as well as protecting CRS programs and staff," he wrote.

The approach of CRS, the U.S. bishops' overseas relief and development agency, "exemplifies how long-term efforts can lead to sustainable development and contribute to improved security," he said.

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