

# The Future of Afghanistan



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editor



United States  
Institute of Peace

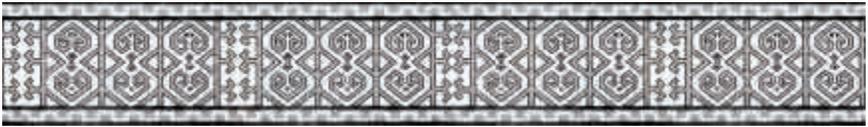


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WASHINGTON, D.C.

The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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# Introduction: Building Bridges

*J Alexander Thier*

As we embark on a discussion of Afghanistan's future, it is important to remember its past, for this history leaves us with enduring lessons. Afghanistan's geography, people, and culture are not fated to war and failure. For more than four thousand years, Afghanistan served as a bridge between continents and cultures. In 2000 BCE, centers of art and commerce flourished on this territory—a hub of the Silk Route, which ran from China to Rome. Between the conquests of the armies of Alexander and Genghis Khan, great Greco-Bactrian, Buddhist, and Islamic civilizations rose and fell there. The fame of Balkh, "the Mother of Cities," stretched from the time of Alexander to Marco Polo and it reigned as a cultural capital for centuries. The notion of Afghanistan as an insular, intolerant, and hide-bound society represents a fundamental misreading of its history and misunderstanding of its culture. Afghanistan is at its best when it serves as a conduit of cooperation between countries on its borders and those further away. As visitors to the country know, even in their darkest hours, Afghans are preternaturally hospitable. But to successfully engage with Afghan culture is to first and foremost respect it. So long as the core aim of the international partnership with Afghanistan is to change the country, rather than enable its positive growth, we will fail.

Since 2001, pundits and policymakers have labeled each year as "the critical year for Afghanistan." Yet, it is dangerous and shortsighted to think of Afghanistan in twelve- to eighteen-month horizons. Indeed, seven years of short-term thinking have gotten us to a place where, out of desperation, we can only think of the short term. The goal for this collection of essays is to look a bit further into the future—a modest ten years—to think about where Afghanistan can and should be going. There are several clear lessons and themes that our essays turn to again and again. The foremost priority is, in fact, to prioritize. It is essential that we begin to do a few things well rather than do many things poorly. Therefore, we must focus on a few critical priorities—security, rule of law, economic empowerment, and the regional context—with reasonable expectations about what can be achieved over a ten-year span. Second, insecurity, whether due to insurgency, terrorism, regional meddling, or warlordism undermines the potential for progress on all other fronts.

Security alone is not sufficient to ensure progress, but without competent Afghan security institutions success is impossible. Third, and equally important, is the legitimacy of the Afghan government itself and, especially, its will and capacity to implement the rule of law. Ultimately, the future of Afghanistan depends upon the ability of its leaders to organize for a common, positive purpose. Fourth, an engaged, empowered, and informed population is the key to sustainable progress. We must engage the capacity of the broader Afghan society, making them the engine of progress rather than unwilling subjects of rapid change. Finally, we must work with Afghanistan's neighbors to create a regional environment conducive to Afghanistan's success.

## Great Expectations?

Afghanistan has experienced a relentless welter of swift and jarring changes in its recent history. Since the 1970s, following a fifty-year period of relatively peaceful and gradual development, Afghanistan was whipsawed through Cold War great-power competition, accompanied by a Soviet invasion, Communism, and jihadism; fratricidal civil war perpetrated by ethnic militias acting as regional proxies; the rise of Talibanism and bin Laden's global jihadism; and pacification and democratization under U.S.-led military intervention.

Over the past thirty years, perhaps half of the population has been displaced, with one-third leaving the country altogether. More than a million Afghans were killed, and millions more were wounded, traumatized, or died prematurely due to the lack of sufficient food, clean water, or basic medical care. The educated and skilled left the country, arms flooded in, and the scourge of crime, corruption, drugs, and a culture of impunity has overwhelmed the economy and traditional structures of governance and peacemaking.

When these histories are combined—centuries-old traditional culture buffeted by decades of turmoil—we are forced to ask what are reasonable expectations for sustainable change in Afghanistan over the next ten years? Is the long-term vision of a liberal democratic political system with an emphasis on individual rights and a free-market economy, feasible in the near term? If we must prioritize, are priorities likely to be shared by the Afghans and the international community? In a world of limited resources, are the primary goals of Afghans to enjoy a secure environment with sufficient food and basic elements of justice compatible with the primary international goal of preventing Afghanistan from being a safe haven for international terrorist networks that inspired the intervention in 2001? Although this is a

forward-looking book, it is important to have a clear understanding of the critical failures in the last seven years, so that we may prioritize our efforts in the coming years. To paraphrase Rienhold Niebur's Serenity Prayer, the United States and Afghanistan in their nation-building ambitions need the serenity to accept the things they cannot change; the courage to change the things they can; and the wisdom to know the difference.

These questions pose a central conundrum of Afghanistan's current development path: far from a gradual process of development led by domestic forces, Afghanistan's dramatic changes are occurring due to enormous external pressure. Since September 11, 2001, U.S. national security concerns have largely dictated this direction. Following that day's cataclysm, ungoverned territories exploited by terrorists and traffickers, with Afghanistan at the forefront, were perceived to represent significant threats to international peace and security. The U.S. National Security Strategy issued in September 2002 reflected this transformation. It identified the main security threats to the United States as stemming from the confluence of terrorism, criminal networks, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, warning that "shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank." It went on to describe rogue regimes and failed states as the weak link in the international system, as safe harbors for the enemy. "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones." In response, the United States would use its combined power "to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world."<sup>1</sup>

Based on this logic, "nation building," or transforming failed states into stable, quasi-democratic countries, became essential to U.S. national security strategy and has taken on an importance of purpose not seen since World War II. After September 11, the Bush administration was ill-equipped to formulate and implement a long-term nation-building strategy, a policy it had openly eschewed prior to the attacks. The refusal by the administration to properly anticipate and plan for the political ramifications of the Afghan and Iraq interventions has made the job that much harder still. Despite the somewhat hyperbolic "Marshall Plan" rhetoric, President George W. Bush did not commit the soldiers, funds, or political attention necessary to succeed in Afghanistan. Instead, the United States relied heavily on the proxy armies of warlords with long records of drug smuggling, human rights abuses, and complete disregard for the rule of law. This "original sin" of the Afghan invasion could

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1. U.S. National Security Strategy (Washington, DC: White House, September 2002).

have been overcome with a steadfast commitment to security and state building, but the Afghan effort quickly became overshadowed by Iraq, which drew critical military resources, funds, and political attention from Afghanistan. Iraq also had a deleterious impact on cooperation between the United States and its allies and on the United States' standing in the Islamic world—both of which made success in Afghanistan more challenging still.

As many of the authors indicate in their essays, change has indeed been rapid since 2001. Media and access to information have expanded, as have educational opportunities and the number of Afghans who have lived outside the country, including several million returned refugees. The first-ever elected head of state in Afghanistan is subject (hypothetically) to a new constitutional framework that is liberal by regional standards. But rapid change can also be destabilizing at the individual and corporate levels. For many Afghans, this new regime looks like a Western ideological expansion not so different from the stillborn Communist revolution in the 1980s, estranging ordinary Afghans from ruling elites in Kabul and their international backers. In a country where 50 percent of the population lives in rural villages of three hundred persons or fewer, codes of honor, privacy, and respect still define social relations for most.

That is not to suggest that Afghans have a consensus vision of their future development that is being undermined by international interference. On the contrary, like any nation undergoing upheaval and identity shifts, Afghans express inconsistent goals that are complicated by the bundle of paradoxes inherent in the process of transitions comprising nation building. For example, many Afghans say they want a strong central government to bring the divisive elements of the country together, to fight extremists, and to shape and control the agenda of the unwieldy international community. At the same time, trust in central government is very low after thirty years of despotism and many Afghans prefer to avoid contact with officialdom. Similarly, Afghans want international forces—particularly U.S. and European forces from far away—to secure the country and thwart the designs of regional powers meddling in Afghan affairs. However, Afghans remain extremely wary of Christian armies from distant countries that they fear have designs to control the region and unveil Muslim women.

Ultimately, most Afghans and international policymakers want the same thing: a stable, self-sustaining Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors. However, the road to that point is long and has grown longer in the last few years. What is needed now is a coherent strategy to bridge the gap between conflict and democracy, between burkas and women's

equality, between tribal councils and a Supreme Court—the next decade must be about building those bridges. The first step is to realign joint priorities and expectations. The intersections among our objectives, capacity, and determination must be found. The international community will be much better with a right-sized, Afghan-appropriate vision that can actually be implemented than a grand international confection that continues to wilt under the glaring realities of the day.

## **Balancing Center and Periphery**

Afghanistan's 2004 Constitution lays out a vision of a highly centralized state, with all political and economic power flowing from Kabul. To realize this vision, large well-functioning institutions supported by a vast, competent, noncorrupt civil service needs to be put in place. New courthouses need to be built around the country, filled with skilled, impartial judges who would provide access and an inviting environment to rural, frequently illiterate Afghans.

Yet this vision of Afghanistan is at odds with reality. The vast majority of Afghans live in face-to-face communities where most issues of "governance," from property disputes and water and natural-resource management to marriage and inheritance are resolved through traditional means at the local level. This local capacity is a tremendous resource and should be harnessed. Indeed, through years of war, the resilience of community-based structures has allowed Afghans to survive even while national government failed them.

This is not say that these local institutions are without their problems. They frequently rely on traditional practices that generally exclude women, provide disproportionate voice to the powerful, and fail to deal with larger intercommunal issues such as terrorism, opium trafficking, and warlordism. When working well, however, they are relatively egalitarian forums meant to achieve fair, consensus outcomes in order to maintain or reestablish community harmony. Perhaps most importantly, community-based governance practices, imperfect as they are, have a legitimacy that formal, centralized government institutions do not yet enjoy. The social contract that provides the citizen with protection and other benefits in exchange for obedience to the rule of law has simply not been reestablished.

As indicated by several of the essays in this volume, the solution going forward is a melding of top-down and bottom-up approaches, creating a condominium of central government institutions addressing larger challenges beyond the capacities of communities while enabling local capacity

to deal with other issues. Under such a framework, central government would be responsible for those issues requiring collective action, such as fighting insurgents, building primary roads, regulating media, and protecting basic rights. Community-based structures would be heavily engaged in local governance issues such as water management, agricultural development, and dispute resolution. Civil society and private enterprise would expand media, protection of basic rights, and revitalization of culture. Such an approach would increase citizen participation, develop civil society, improve the delivery of basic services at the local level, and enhance the legitimacy of both national and local institutions.

The old formula of governance in Afghanistan was, as Barnett Rubin writes in his essay, that “the amir established a centralized administration to assure security and sharia courts for justice, while leaving local governance and dispute settlement to tribes and communities.” The new formula, then, might be a variation of this theme, where the central government continues to ensure security and justice on the national level but also uses its position vis-à-vis international donors to channel assistance to the local level in exchange for an increased role in ensuring that the rule of law is adhered to within the communities. This formula would also open space for the development of civil society to bind the two, neither controlled by central government nor subordinate to local power or social dynamics.

Indeed, the greatest development successes in the last seven years have utilized this model. The National Solidarity Program (NSP), run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, has succeeded in delivering public goods as well as improved governance to the community level. The NSP’s model uses a variation of a traditional mechanism—a community council—and transforms it into a decision-making body elected by the community and responsible for planning and overseeing a development project with a community block grant. This program brings together capacity from four places—local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Afghan government, and international donors—where none alone would be sufficient. Local communities are aided in implementation by Afghan and international NGOs, which have been responsible for most service delivery in the past twenty years. The central government manages the NSP and channels money earmarked for the program from international donors. A similar approach was taken in the public-health strategy for the country, which relied heavily on local planning and needs assessments, central government organization, NGO implementing capacity, and foreign funding. This strategy succeeded in extending access to basic health services from 7 to more than 70 per-

cent of the Afghan population and cutting mortality in small children by 26 percent, saving an estimated eighty thousand young lives.

## **Security, Governance, and the Rule of Law**

Security is the *sine qua non* of the stabilization and reconstruction process—the thing without which nothing else can happen. But security cannot simply be imposed on an unwilling or desperate population. The social and political fabric of the country must be simultaneously and painstakingly rewoven, creating rule of law and legitimate institutions to transform or eliminate both the roots and perpetrators of conflict. Societies transitioning from war to peace therefore struggle with a very difficult balance among establishing security, stability, and democratic governance. In his essay, Ali Jalali, Afghanistan’s former interior minister, emphasizes the rebuilding of national security forces as a lynchpin of creating a legitimate state, but he cautions against subordinating “good governance, justice, and the rule of law to pure security concerns,” arguing that the development of security institutions must be done in close alignment with the broad goals of state building.

The failure of vision and investment in Afghanistan since 2001 has created a dangerous vacuum. For the international coalition, the goal of establishing internal Afghan-focused security was subordinate to the goal of destroying the international terrorist networks there that were orchestrating a campaign of spectacular attacks. It may have taken international military forces to upend the status quo that allowed the Taliban to dominate Afghanistan, but it requires Afghan governance and security forces to create a viable long-term alternative to the Taliban. Yet, efforts to create a capable and legitimate government, including the development of Afghan security forces, were underfunded and poorly orchestrated. Consequently, the foundations for the stable, reasonably democratic state at peace with itself and its neighbors articulated in the Bonn Agreement, the 2004 Afghan Constitution, and the 2006 Afghanistan Compact have not proven sufficiently robust to counter Afghanistan’s punishing poverty, the rampant narcotics trade, or a rising insurgency.

With a ten-year outlook, the message of this volume is clear: we need to get back to the basics. Establish security, create a conducive regional environment, build basic governmental legitimacy, engage the citizenry, create economic opportunity—these are the building blocks of a virtuous cycle that will broaden opportunity for ordinary Afghans while narrowing the space for insurgents. On the state-building front, Barnett Rubin argues for a minimalist conception for the Afghan state buffeted by international

geopolitics (the war on terror, U.S.-Iran conflict, the future of NATO), regional competition, insurgency, an out-of-control opium economy, and dependence on the international community for 90 percent of its budget, including 100 percent of the cost of building national security forces that it can likely never afford. The best we can hope for, according to Rubin, is a regional accommodation that transforms Afghanistan from a playing field of divisive competition to a status as neutral connector, allowing a long, gradual, and cosseted period of development.

What then of democracy and the citizen mobilization sparked by elections, access to information through media, and a small but growing human rights movement? Here we are faced with one of the thorniest conundrums of nation-building missions: how to maintain a semblance of democratic development before the minimum necessary institutional safeguards are in place. Elections may exacerbate conflict by introducing high-stakes political competition and pressures toward ethnic and sectarian division into an unstable environment lacking in rule of law and the other safeguards that make electoral democracy feasible. Even the most ardent democratizers struggle with this dilemma. As Tom Carothers, a leading authority on democracy promotion, has recently written,

In certain situations, democratization does need to wait for state-building. Where a state has completely collapsed or failed under the lash of civil conflict or other accumulated or acute calamities, moving rapidly toward open political competition and elections makes no sense. The state will need to have at least minimal functional capacity as well as something resembling a monopoly of force before such a country can pull itself onto the path of sustainable, pluralistic political development.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the failure to hold elections may be seen as both an attempt by one group (and its international partners) to hold on to power and a violation of fundamental political freedoms.

In his essay, Grant Kippen asserts that our expectations for Afghan democracy were dangerously overblown, wrongly believing that “democracy would be the panacea to resolving the myriad challenges facing Afghanistan following such a protracted period of conflict.” It may well be that, in the long run, democratic governance is a key to stability, but that the scale and strength of institutions required to maintain constitutional democracy cannot be established with sufficient speed during the transitional phase.

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2. Tom Carothers, “How Democracies Emerge: The ‘Sequencing’ Fallacy,” *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (January 2007): 19.

## **Building a Culture of Accountability**

We must place far greater emphasis on building the rule of law and a culture of accountability that pervades government, security forces, and the general population. This requires investing in those institutions that will uphold these rules—police, judiciary, anticorruption, and human rights entities; it requires making the powerful subject to the law and ending impunity; and it requires creating a culture of accountability throughout the country by empowering citizens with access to information and institutions. At the same time, this must all be accomplished while remaining sensitive to the conflict between tradition and modernity that has historically derailed such progress in Afghanistan.

The explosion of mass media throughout the country, one of the success stories of the post-Taliban period, raises the tension of this conflict. As Amin Tarzi discusses in his essay on media, the quality of Afghan democracy is contingent upon the quality of Afghan media and Afghan access to it. This powerful tool is rapidly exposing millions of Afghans to perspectives, information, and images that, until recently, were unknown or taboo. How do Afghan Star, a televised music program similar to American Idol, and Bollywood extravaganzas survive alongside recitations of the Koran? As freedom of expression and private ownership of media expand, the government's desire for control of discourse grows as well. The same theme of contest between government and civil society, modernity, and tradition surfaces strongly in Jolyon Leslie's essay on culture. The creation of an imagined community—a basic narrative element of the nation-building process—is predicated on the complex notion of culture. Arts, language, and the preservation of antiquity all define the cultural space, and thus politicians, bureaucrats, and power brokers all vie to control these elements.

Democratic participation, access to information and other cultures, and the growth of civil society have mobilized thousands of Afghans who take seriously the notion that their basic rights are enshrined in a higher, universal plane and cannot (or at least should not) be denied by the state, warlords, insurgents, or intolerant community members. Even if most Afghans cannot cite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Nader Nadery argues that "human rights" is not a foreign concept to Afghans imported from the West and that the fundamental principles within the declaration resonate through Afghan culture. But the contrast between a legal system that protects rights on paper and the actual environment of impunity in Afghanistan today is grave and undermines the very foundation of the system. It is not simply that the rights of individuals are being violated, but that the rule of law—wherein the law is applied fairly and equally to

all—is absent. The essays on democracy, media, human rights, and culture all assert that public education and public engagement are essential to deepening the roots of a rights-respecting culture in Afghan society.

The issue of women's rights is a lightning rod of controversy that highlights the tension between modernity and tradition, center and periphery, Islam and equality. Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam argues that while the removal of the Taliban from power in Kabul may have rolled back some of the most egregious antiwomen policies of that regime, the prospects for the vast majority of Afghan women remain narrow. Access to education, health care, courts, or other public offices remains low, while forced marriage and domestic violence remain high. Economic mobilization, exposure to other cultures through media and migration, expanded access to education, and the growth of women in public roles as parliamentarians, police, and professionals all provide some dim light on the horizon, even if these changes will be slow to affect the lives of most.

## The Regional Context

Like all countries, but perhaps more than most, Afghanistan functions (or fails to function) in relationship to the world around it. Indeed, if Afghanistan continues to serve as the open field in a great game, then much of the rest of this book can be ignored as fanciful planning.

Afghanistan is enmeshed in an extremely complex and interrelated web of regional relationships and tensions. Competition between Pakistan and India, and Iran and the United States, and the roles of China, Central Asia, Russia, and Saudi Arabia all cut across Afghanistan in some (usually unhelpful) way. At the same time, the incentives for regional interdependence in a globalized world may be greater than ever. As William Maley writes in his essay, if Afghanistan is going to succeed in this broader context, a comprehensive regional approach is the only way forward: "Interconnectedness is the name of the new Great Game."

The most important and pressing of those regional challenges, by all accounts, is the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the status of the border region between them. As Marvin Weinbaum and Haseeb Humayoon argue, there is enormous potential for positive cooperation between these neighbors on trade and energy and on jointly combating extremism and improving governance and development among the tribes spanning the border. However, tensions over that unresolved border, Pakistan's fears about Indian hegemony, and a history of antagonism between the two nations increase the likelihood that overt and covert confrontation will continue to drag both nations down. Most dangerously,

the militant groups once supported by Pakistan to operate in Kashmir and Afghanistan have, Frankenstein-like, grown out of control and threaten the stability of Pakistan itself.

Ultimately, these meditations on the future of Afghanistan are a tale of broken roads and the need to (re)build bridges: between citizens and the state, between national and local institutions, between men and women, and between nations. To accomplish this, there is a need for planning, resources, and a stable foundation on both sides. There is no particular challenge in Afghanistan so difficult that it has not been met before, but the sheer number and complexity of these challenges make Afghanistan uniquely demanding.

This project was conceived to promote a deeper and longer-term exploration of these key issues and challenges. Only once we understand—and agree upon—a long-term vision can we create a comprehensive strategy to get there. There are numerous key issues pertaining to the future of Afghanistan that are not addressed fully in this volume—including economic development, public health, rule of law, and education. Limitations of time and space have not allowed for a comprehensive treatment, but some of these issues will be addressed in essays available on the Future of Afghanistan Project's Web site (<http://www.usip.org/peaceops/afghanistan/future.html>).

If there is one clear message throughout this volume, it is that the alternatives to a reinvigorated international engagement in Afghanistan are far bleaker still. An apocryphal quote, often attributed to the Taliban, says that, "The Americans have all the watches, but we have all the time." If a ten-year horizon is too far for Afghan and international policymakers and military commanders to contemplate, then the insurgents may indeed possess an unassailable advantage. But if the international commitment to Afghanistan and the region can be sustained and local leadership empowered, the prospects for Afghanistan and its people carry with them the hopes of us all for a better, safer future.



## 2

# The Transformation of the Afghan State

*Barnett R. Rubin*

**H**ad I written an essay on the next ten years of the Afghan state in 1998, I would have proposed several different scenarios. Notably lacking would have been the one that actually occurred. The events since then have made accurate prediction even more difficult. The history of Afghanistan over the last thirty-five years has been that of the end of the country's status as an isolated buffer state. Rather than separating conflicts, Afghanistan now links them. Ten years ago Afghanistan, besides having a low-intensity conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, was also the scene of India-Pakistan and Sunni-Shia conflicts and, to a certain extent, U.S.-Iranian-Russian competition over pipeline routes. All of those conflicts have only become more intense. In addition, today Afghanistan is the theater for the War on Terror, the ill-defined confrontation between the United States and global Islamist movements; the conflict between NATO and Russia; the confrontation between the United States and Iran; the struggle within Pakistan over that country's future; and a transnational insurgency spanning Afghanistan and Pakistan and linked to al Qaeda. Finally, there is a higher level of mobilization around the ethnic, tribal, regional, and sectarian cleavages that have always marked Afghan politics.

If it seems unlikely that Afghanistan can return to its days of isolation, it is because all of the elements that enabled Afghanistan to survive in relative stability for nearly a century have disappeared: a population largely isolated in remote valleys with few links to the outside world, some small arms, and no political organization on a scale that could challenge the state; a government subsidized by great powers and accepted as legitimate by all neighbors; and an economy largely based on subsistence farming, pastoralism, limited pockets of commercial agriculture, and trade.

The territory of today's Afghanistan has never sustained a state without international aid to the security forces, and it has repeatedly collapsed in the face of invasion or contestation. The stability of such a state would require, at a minimum, a level of income and legitimacy sufficient to recruit and maintain security forces adequate to defend from the level of threat faced by the state. In the current environment, that is a tall order indeed.

## Evolution of the State

The territory of today's Afghanistan more or less corresponds to the Eastern Iranian world (Khurasan), which remained Sunni despite the conquest of Persia by the Shia Safavids in the sixteenth century. This area (Kabul and its dependencies) became a kingdom of the Afghans (Pashtuns) only from the eighteenth century, when both the Ghilzai and Durrani Pashtun tribal confederations sought to establish empires as the Safavids collapsed. The empire founded in 1747 by Ahmad Shah Durrani survived by raiding Punjab, Kashmir, and Iran, and dividing the taxes (booty) among the tribes.

The arrival of Russian and British imperialism on the Asian land mass confined Afghan rule to a demarcated territory, which came to be known as the state of "Afghanistan." In the nineteenth century that state underwent a series of upheavals and invasions until finally becoming stable as a buffer state after the Treaty of Gandamak (1879). The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 recognized Afghanistan's new borders and its status as a buffer state under British suzerainty enjoying full domestic autonomy. From 1879 to 1919, British India controlled Afghanistan's foreign relations and provided a yearly subsidy in cash and weapons to enable the emir to control the territory. The emir established a centralized administration to assure security and sharia courts for justice, while leaving local governance and dispute settlement to tribes and communities.

The key elements of stability were

- agreement among the great powers (which were also regional powers) to not interfere inside Afghanistan or use Afghanistan's weakness against one another, leading to a low degree of international contestation of the Afghan state and the separation of rival powers by a neutralized Afghanistan;
- a disarmed, demobilized, and isolated population without large-scale political organization and largely engaged in subsistence activities, resulting in a low degree of domestic demand on and contestation of the state;
- an international subsidy exclusively to the state to enable it to finance security forces adequate to the low threat environment.

The Anglo-Russian Convention expired in the wake of the Russian Revolution and the Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919), in which Afghanistan won full independence. Nonetheless, an informal agreement of nonintervention continued until 1978. The British continued to support the army through the end of the British Empire in India; when the United States, allied with Pakistan, refused to take up where the British left, Kabul turned to Moscow. As the educational system and road network expanded, and

as capital flowed into the Persian Gulf after the 1973 oil embargo, more Afghans left their villages, entered the cash economy, and became politicized. The state financed its development programs through foreign aid and hence did not need to confront the rural society over the legitimacy of revenue extraction. The rural areas remained untaxed and largely self-regulating, so long as they posed no threat.

The coups in 1973 and 1978 and then the Soviet invasion in 1979 destroyed what remained of international agreement over Afghanistan, and the country became a theater of the Cold War, which overshadowed the regional and sectarian conflicts. When the Soviet Union dissolved and the United States disengaged, they left behind an Afghanistan that had become a cockpit for regional competition, a shattered state with no functioning security forces or civilian political process, a highly mobilized and armed population increasingly dependent on international organizations and cash for livelihood (including through the drug trade), and a multiplicity of armed groups linked transnationally to both state and nonstate patrons.

In addition to these general conditions, Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan had also led to the blurring of the lines between the two states. Since Pakistan's independence, the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) had been a buffer between Afghanistan and the core of Pakistan. Now FATA was settled with millions of Afghan refugees, and FATA tribes had been mobilized to fight in Afghanistan's "civil war." The Pakistani directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), at first with U.S. and Saudi support, had turned the border region into a militarized platform for asymmetrical power projection using jihadi groups in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and beyond. FATA and Karachi also constituted markets and transit points for goods smuggled into and out of Afghanistan. In many respects the countries came to intermingle and overlap rather than border on each other like two states.

The events of 9/11 illustrated that the Afghan state was both weak and no longer integrated into the global community and that its territory now included the center for a highly organized global network of political violence. The U.S. response was to destroy the weak government of the Taliban and call on the United Nations to try to resurrect the Afghan state. But resurrecting the previous Afghan state under current conditions may be doomed to failure.

## **Transformation by War**

The relationship of Afghanistan to the international system has changed decisively since 1978 and cannot be restored to its former status. After 9/11, it appeared that a grand coalition had formed to support the new

government and that, just as in the early twentieth century, great powers might reach an agreement to support the government and to not compete in Afghanistan. But this time, virtually every major international and regional actor decided to become involved in Afghanistan with no restraining rules of the game. The result has been the importation into Afghanistan of innumerable other conflicts, making the original one harder to solve.

The following international issues and actors are now linked to the conflict in Afghanistan:

- **The War on Terror**, which, as defined by the Bush administration, includes as a goal not only the destruction of al Qaeda but also the destruction of organizations and states that harbor or support “terrorists,” including both the Taliban and Iran (not Pakistan, for some reason). Although the War on Terror is not the sole policy framework for U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, it constrains others.
- **The India-Pakistan conflict:** Pakistan seeks to exclude Indian influence from Afghanistan, which it considers part of its security perimeter; India considers a presence in Afghanistan important to gain a back window into Pakistan. Both countries’ intelligence agencies are active there.
- **Sunni-Shia conflict:** Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing for leadership of the Islamic world; both have proxies in Afghanistan.
- **U.S. relations with its NATO allies:** NATO allies who opposed the war in Iraq agreed to send troops to Afghanistan to reduce strain on their relations with Washington. Now that same commitment is further straining relations.
- **Russia’s relations with the United States and NATO:** Russia supports the war and sanctions against the Taliban and al Qaeda, but one of its principal security preoccupations is the expansion of NATO to the former Soviet space and its borders. Russia does not want to see a permanent NATO deployment in Afghanistan or U.S. bases in Central Asia.
- **U.S.-Iran conflict:** The United States and Iran worked together to overthrow the Taliban and bring the current Afghan government to power, but the Bush administration rebuffed Iran’s overtures and has placed limits on the relations Afghanistan has with Iran. Iran has also begun providing limited support to insurgents to warn of the consequences of attacking Iran.

This is only a list of the most evident problems and stakeholders, the sheer number of which is prohibitively high to reach an agreement.

The Afghan population is no longer isolated and quiescent. Every group in the population has been mobilized militarily and politically and enjoys some patronage from foreign powers or movements. Each village has been penetrated by armed militants competing to mobilize young men. Afghans have been heavily politicized and listen incessantly to international news. One of the results of this has been the increased recruitment of Afghans into national ethnic or ideological politics.

At least half of Afghans have suffered war displacement and perhaps a third traveled abroad (largely as refugees), exposing them to life outside the extended family. The subsistence economy has been largely destroyed, and Afghanistan relies on imports of food and exports of agro-based commodities—opium and heroin. Afghans are participating in global labor, commodity, and capital markets and in global politics and warfare, all at the same time. The expansion of cash transactions has empowered ideological groups, including the ulema and Islamists, who rely on cash contributions for power rather than solely on ownership of productive assets. Without a cash economy that can be taxed by an armed organization, the Taliban regime, composed of clerics who do not directly control productive assets, would not have been possible.

As community coping mechanisms have become less reliable and cash more necessary, families and communities are increasingly looking to the state for livelihood and public services, including education, the demand for which has mushroomed. Afghanistan has become the most rapidly urbanizing society in Asia, with resultant escalating demands for public services and political participation. The demands placed on the state are far greater and the task of legitimation far more demanding than at any time in the past. Hence, the type of weak state that encapsulated a quiescent Afghan society is no longer feasible or effective; yet the state is still structured and resourced to maintain control, not provide services.

Under these conditions of increasing external and transnational threat, plus mounting domestic demand, stability would require a state and security forces with substantially more resources and capabilities than at any time in the past. Currently the Afghan government extracts about 7 percent of licit GDP in revenues (or \$960 million), which is not sufficient even to cover its recurrent nondefense costs. The entire defense and development budget is paid for by foreign assistance; an even greater amount is spent directly by aid donors outside of the government budget for projects of every description. As the estimated size of the security forces Afghanistan needs continues to rise, there is no realistic scenario

under which the country would be able to finance even the recurrent costs of security.

## **Does the Afghan State Have a Future?**

The Afghan state is now well advanced along an unsustainable trajectory. Its army and, increasingly, its police depend for their salaries and equipment on supplemental appropriations of the U.S. Congress, which cannot be projected from year to year. There was no supplemental appropriation in 2006. A massive devaluation of the U.S. dollar or a prolongation of the economic crisis in the United States could eventually prevent the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) from being paid. Furthermore, the increase in expenditures by aid organizations outside the Afghan government budget and the disbursement of huge amounts of cash through the dozens of uncoordinated financial systems used by various aid agencies generates a tsunami of corruption, which both undermines the legitimacy of the system and prevents the assistance from achieving its objectives.

Of the three trends—the rise in conflict among powers involved in Afghanistan, the increasing mobilization of the population, and the proliferation of funding channels outside the government—the one that is most clearly irreversible is the increase in mobilization, politicization, and urbanization of the Afghan population. One may add to that the rapid increase in education without any comparable increase in the amount of licit employment, and all the ingredients are present for a chronic social crisis, expressed in ethnic and Islamic politics, violence, criminalized economic activity, and increased efforts to emigrate in search of work.

It is difficult but not impossible to imagine the mounting external tensions becoming less threatening. If, for instance, the coalition apprehended or killed the top leadership of al Qaeda in Pakistan, leading to an end of the pressure of the War on Terror doctrine on operations, a political settlement with elements of the insurgency in Pakistan and Afghanistan might become more feasible. U.S.-Iran relations might warm slightly above their current frozen state. It is more difficult to imagine a deescalation of the India-Pakistan conflict, but if elected government does start to take hold in Pakistan, and civilians with a primarily economic program remain in power, we might see a shift in emphasis in India-Pakistan relations from confrontation to competition and even economic cooperation.

Such trends might make it possible to reduce the size and sophistication of security forces and thus move in a direction toward sustainability. The reduction of the level of threat would also favor investment and economic

activity, which is strongly dependent on security in a land-locked country. Such growth might make it possible to increase the tax base as well as the government's share of GDP to pay for public services.

These do not, however, seem to be the most likely trends. While the next administration may seek less confrontational and militaristic ways of coping with the threat from global terrorism and competition with Iran, the persistence of al Qaeda in the Pakistan border region and, covertly, in cities could continue and create pressure for broader intervention in Pakistan, destabilizing that country and its neighbor further. The loss of legitimacy to rule by the Pakistan Army combined with the continued incapacity and corruption of civilian political parties could lead to a prolonged crisis or collapse of governance, with more space being occupied by armed extremist groups also active in Afghanistan. Any number of unpredictable events—another large attack by al Qaeda in the United States, a riot in Kabul or another Afghan city, the collapse of a regional center (most likely Kandahar) under Taliban assault—could precipitate a rapid crisis, although all the capabilities put in place in the past several years might prove themselves able to surmount even such a crisis.

The most important lines of policy to cope with these threats include

- increasing regional diplomacy and economic cooperation to lower regional tensions;
- expanding higher education and employment opportunities to absorb more of the educated youth;
- developing a plan for stable financing of Afghan security forces by putting them on a recurrent budget (Afghan or U.S.) or creating a trust fund;
- phasing out the most intrusive and kinetic parts of the counterterrorism part of the international mission;
- strengthening the foundational legitimacy of the government through elections and measures against corruption.

If Afghanistan is to meet even a fraction of the new demands placed on it, the state will have to be restructured to provide for more accountability to citizens and communities, but this cannot happen in isolation. As long as the existence of the state is under threat from a combination of domestic and international challenges, rulers will resist decentralization of authority. The state is simply too weak to manage decentralized service provision, which would require some kind of budgetary process in each province and perhaps district, even if it were based solely on grants from the central government. There is little organizational capacity to carry out the required monitoring and implementation. A few provinces (Herat, for

instance) could probably do a better job of managing their own finances and service provision than the central government, but such an arrangement would appear to threaten the control of the central government and its ability to redistribute resources among provinces and regions. This redistributionary function is highly political: non-Pashtuns charge that the state has historically allocated resources from north Afghanistan to Pashtuns and southern Afghanistan. There is some, though inadequate, evidence for this claim, but certainly all members of ethnic groups have not been affected equally, and the beneficiaries of government patronage have been much smaller groups than entire ethnicities. Nonetheless, the seemingly technical issue of decentralization of service provision is closely related to the most potentially divisive issue, namely the relation of the state to different ethnic groups and in particular to Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns.

Over the past few years, the government has experimented with methods to reach communities through national programs that bypass the dysfunctional administrative structure. The best known example is the National Solidarity Program, which provides communities with block grants of up to \$20,000 for development projects chosen and implemented by elected Community Development Councils (CDCs). Financial management and transparency is assured by implementing the funding through international agencies and NGOs, while leaving actual implementation in the hands of the communities.

The program appears to work well in delivering projects to the village level, but it has not sparked any major institutional change. The CDCs exist in parallel to the historically rooted local institutions (for example, village shura, or local councils, meeting in the mosque) and have not displaced them. Afghans understand that the NSP depends on yearly aid appropriations of foreign donors and is not sustainable. Therefore, they treat it as a windfall rather than as an institution. Attempts by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) to have the CDCs recognized as representatives of communities within the administrative structure have met stiff resistance. Other national programs implemented in the same way will meet the same response as long as they are dependent on foreign aid and are not integrated into the communities' permanent institutional structure. Nor will any central government be willing to delegate genuine authority over mobilization and use of resources to localities as long as the state remains vulnerable to subversion by much larger foreign countries.

There is no foreseeable trajectory under which the Afghan state will become a self-sustaining member of the international community at peace with its neighbors in the coming ten years. It might be possible, however, to

approach rather than recede from that goal. The highest priority should be to reduce the level of threat through both regional diplomacy and domestic reconciliation with insurgents who renounce al Qaeda. By reducing threats, the level of security forces needed will be more manageable, and it will be more practical to call on Afghanistan's neighbors to provide the economic cooperation and integration needed to turn an isolated former buffer state into a connector state in a rapidly growing Asia. When Afghanistan no longer fears for its own disintegration, it will become more feasible for the state to experiment with forms of local governance and decentralization of the administration in order to provide the public services that the Afghan people are now demanding.



### 3

## The Future of Security Institutions

*Ali A. Jalali*

The Afghan government and its international partners have been unable—after seven years of disjointed efforts and in the face of a recently resurgent Taliban—to set conditions for sustainable economic growth and development, to strengthen state institutions and civil society, to remove terrorist threats, to fight the narcotics trade, to rebuild capacity and infrastructure, to reduce poverty, and to meet basic human needs in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Their lack of success stems in part from the fact that the country is short of competent security forces that can provide the space political leaders and development professionals need to initiate comprehensive state-building processes. It is imperative, therefore, that the Afghan government and its international partners redouble their efforts to develop capable security forces.

Although Afghan and international leaders face innumerable obstacles to success—including a weak national economic base, uncoordinated international aid, crumbling infrastructure, a culture of corruption, the primacy of factional loyalties, and a largely illiterate population—leaders will be particularly challenged by the need to balance the rebuilding of the security forces with the demands of fighting an ongoing insurgency. This essay will identify the steps that Afghan and international leaders have taken in attempting to rebuild Afghanistan’s national security forces in such unfavorable conditions and analyze the results that they have achieved and the setbacks that they have endured. It will then outline changes that must be made if the forces are to grow into robust institutions capable of effectively serving and protecting the people of Afghanistan.

### The Afghan National Security Forces

Few reconstruction tasks have proven more difficult than building indigenous security forces in war-devastated Afghanistan. State security institutions were destroyed and numerous factional militias and nonstate armed groups emerged during a long period of foreign invasion (1979–89) and

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1. These goals were laid out in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, [www.unama-afg.org/news/\\_londonConf/\\_docs/06jan30-AfghanistanCompact-Final.pdf](http://www.unama-afg.org/news/_londonConf/_docs/06jan30-AfghanistanCompact-Final.pdf) (accessed October 22, 2008).

civil war (1992–2001) that involved internal factions with extensive foreign links. Although the Taliban defeated many warring factions, it failed—like its predecessors—to establish a viable state and security structure.

In 2001, the international community enlisted many of the armed factions that rose to prominence during Afghanistan's recent wars to help overthrow the Taliban. The move allowed the factions to consolidate broad post-war powers and establish themselves as the backbone of the country's new security structure. Their positions were legitimized in the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, which asked Afghanistan's international partners "to assist in the reintegration of the mujahidin into the new Afghan security and armed forces."<sup>2</sup> The factions, however, began to pursue their own interests and disrupt the maturation of formal, effective security institutions. Because no international peacekeepers were deployed to Afghanistan in the post-Taliban period, and because American forces concentrated on fighting terrorism and the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) deployed only to Kabul with a limited mandate, Afghanistan began to be plagued by a rapidly expanding security vacuum.

The Afghan government, in an attempt to fill the vacuum, launched its Security Sector Reform (SSR) agenda at a security donors' conference in Geneva in April 2002. The agenda was composed of five pillars, each of which was supported by a different donor nation. Of the core security pillars, the United States assumed responsibility for building the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Germany for the Afghan National Police (ANP). The pillars were designed to be built at the same pace and reinforce one another, but progress proceeded unevenly under the countries' stewardships. The United States' building of the ANA moved rapidly, for instance, while Germany's construction of the ANP moved more slowly. Such discrepancies illustrate the inherent weakness of the SSR agenda, which since its inception has been hindered by insufficient donor investment, an inefficient use of the funds that have been made available, and the absence of a cohesive and integrated framework.

## Afghan National Army

Afghan leaders are determined to forge a wholly independent and self-sustaining national army but are finding it difficult to do so in a country that has historically been imbued with military pluralism. Today, for instance, regional militia commanders maintain private armies despite

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2. The Afghan Bonn Agreement, [www.afhangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm](http://www.afhangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm) (accessed October 23, 2008).

public declarations of support for the Karzai government. Many of the 1,800 to 2,000 illegally armed groups operating in the country have refashioned themselves as private security companies and offer protective services to public and private organizations working inside Afghanistan. Such work has allowed the groups to reclaim a semblance of legitimacy, but it has also perpetuated a continuation of militia culture that has on the whole been detrimental to the Afghan government. In particular, the ANA has found it difficult to monopolize the use of force in the country.

Today's ANA—an all volunteer force—is very different from the drafted armies of Afghanistan's past. It is composed of a career officer corps and contract enlisted men who have the option to reenlist and is slated to grow to a total strength of 134,000 troops by 2013.<sup>3</sup> Although Afghan leaders have achieved a number of notable successes in building the ANA's organizational capacity since 2002 and it is a more effective force than Afghanistan's previous armies have been, the ANA cannot be sustained by the country's meager \$2.6 billion budget. The United States has supplied the ANA with vehicles and arms, and the force is endowed with a small fleet of transport aircraft, it nevertheless continues to lack sufficient firepower, combat air support, and a self-sustaining operational budget. Further, a June 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noted that the ANA has had difficulty recruiting qualified leadership candidates and retaining its personnel, that the United States has not provided the ANA with a sufficient number of military trainers and mentors, and that ANA combat units are woefully underequipped.<sup>4</sup>

Although the ANA continues to depend upon military support from coalition forces and cost underwriting from the United States, the dangers of an overreliance on the use of military force to tackle challenges without carefully considering the consequences are very real and can be seen in recent events in Afghanistan. On August 22, 2008, U.S. and Afghan forces engaged insurgents in Azizabad village in Herat province, ordering airstrikes that caused significant civilian casualties.<sup>5</sup> U.S. officials at first denied the existence—and then the scale—of the civilian casualties and insisted that the attack was justified, enraging Afghan citizens and turning them away from their government and international forces. Afghan and international forces have too often used overwhelming force in pursuing

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3. Robert Burns, "Gates: NATO Must Share Cost of Raising Afghan Army," Associated Press, September 19, 2008.

4. General Accounting Office (GAO), *Afghanistan Security* (GAO-08-661) (Washington, DC: GAO, June 2008).

5. Carlotta Gall, "US Airstrike Did Kill 90 Civilians, UN Finds," *International Herald Tribune*, August 27, 2008.

militants, prioritized the protection of soldiers over civilians in their operations, conducted indiscriminate and unwarranted searches of peaceful villages without consideration for local customs, detained Afghans with no known connection to militant groups, and picked discredited allies with whom to fight terrorism. These actions have provoked indignant protests and popular resentment across the country and have hindered critical stabilization and state-building efforts.

## Afghan National Police

Afghan leaders and their international partners have found the essential mission of building an indigenous Afghan police force quite challenging, because the core of the former national police force was destroyed by years of grinding civil war. The mission's degree of difficulty has been increased by the need for Afghan leaders and their international partners to focus on combating insurgency and militia-led violence. Security exigencies have forced the ANP, despite its inexperience, to operate at the forefront of the fights against terrorism, illegal border incursions, the illicit drug trade, warlords and militia commanders, and organized criminals. Furthermore, critical reconstruction projects needing to be protected have strained the ANP's capabilities.

A German-led program for the ANP's development was adopted in Geneva in 2002, but its most immediate results were underwhelming. The United States, through the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) bureau, stepped in to reinforce the German-led program in 2003. The two countries initially determined to build a force of 62,000 police, but because the Taliban-led insurgency flared in the south and east beginning in 2005–06, the target number was increased to 82,000. Of those, 40,000 are uniformed police, 18,000 are border police, and 5,000 are civil-order police (based on a carabinieri or gendarmerie model). The rest are counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and criminal-investigation police.<sup>6</sup>

The INL helped to establish eight central and regional police-training centers to support the task of training the ANP. The training, which was run by contractors for the American DynCorp corporation and lasted for only two to four weeks, was largely inadequate, insubstantial, and ineffectively followed up with mentoring programs and on-the-job training.

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6. Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), "Afghan National Police Fact Sheet," [www.cstc-a.com/mission/Fact%20Sheet%20Afghan%20National%20Police.pdf](http://www.cstc-a.com/mission/Fact%20Sheet%20Afghan%20National%20Police.pdf) (accessed October 23, 2008).

Beginning in late 2004, the U.S. military began to provide financial, material, and personnel support for the ANP's development, and in mid-2005, the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) took the lead of the United States' contribution to the reconstruction of the ANP.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the United States initiated a program in July 2004 to support reform in the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI), in which senior advisers helped the ministry to develop standard operating procedures, community-policing initiatives, and plans for pay and rank reform. The MOI in turn initiated Focused District Development (FDD), an effort intended to improve police reform, local governance, public works, and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup> The FDD is a partial adaptation of the Afghanistan Stabilization Program (ASP), which was launched in 2004 with the goal of building physical infrastructure, governance, and police capacity at the district level. The program had a very good start, but later it weakened due to lack of funds and interministerial turf battles that eventually reduced the ASP from a national program into a poorly managed "project." Given the favorable conditions at that time, and its combined approach to governance and police capacity, the ASP had a decent chance of succeeding. Today, however, there are doubts about how effective the FDD program can be in Afghanistan's unstable environment.

In June 2007, the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) assumed control of the Afghan police-training mission formerly led by Germany. Building on German efforts, EUPOL Afghanistan aimed to contribute to the development of a nationwide civilian policing program. However, EUPOL Afghanistan has failed to provide sufficient numbers of police trainers and mentors to meet the increasing requirements of building district, provincial, and regional police forces. By the summer of 2008, EUPOL Afghanistan had provided less than two hundred police trainers, even though the ANP requires the deployment of 2,300 trainers/mentors.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, most police training is conducted by U.S. military personnel under CSTC-A programs.

A U.S. interagency assessment of the ANP that was released in November 2006 indicated that the force's readiness to perform conventional police functions and carry out its internal security mission was "far

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7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Maj. Gen. Robert W. Cone, commander of CSTC-A, in a statement at a NATO press briefing, September 3, 2007, [www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080903b.html](http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080903b.html) (accessed October 24, 2008).

from adequate.”<sup>10</sup> The report pointed out that the obstacles to establishing a professional ANP are formidable and include the lack of an officer-training program, illiterate recruits, low pay, pervasive corruption, and an insecure environment.<sup>11</sup> It suggested that long-term U.S. assistance and funding—at least beyond 2010—will be required to institutionalize the police force and establish a self-sustaining program. To this end, in January 2007 Washington pledged to provide \$10.6 billion over two years to help Kabul strengthen its security forces. Most of the money (\$8.6 billion) is to be spent on training and equipping the Afghan police and military forces, while the rest is to be put toward reconstruction.<sup>12</sup>

The United States, Germany, and the Afghan government have worked to restructure the ANP and improve its performance, but they have so far been unsuccessful in unburdening the organization of its unwieldy mandate. The ANP has evolved into Afghanistan’s first line of defense in the fights against insurgency and terrorism. As a result, its units have been widely deployed, even though they are often unprepared, operating in small groups and patrolling remote areas with insufficient backup, poor equipment, and little training and leadership. The extent and range of the units’ deployments have spread the ANP too thinly across the country and have increased its members’ vulnerabilities to attack. In fact, the ANP has lost more men fighting insurgency and terrorism than have the ANA and coalition armed forces combined—more than 900 in 2007 alone.<sup>13</sup>

## Cross-Cutting Challenges

Afghanistan is beset with regional challenges, the most acute of which emanate from Pakistan. Insurgents and terrorists have recently established sanctuaries for themselves in Pakistan’s lawless tribal areas and begun to attack the ANSF and coalition forces with impunity. Their attacks have forced the ANSF to focus on building counterinsurgency capability at the expense of law-and-order capabilities. If the sanctuaries are allowed to remain intact, the short-term tactical options used to combat them will

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10. Offices of Inspectors General, U.S. Departments of State and Defense, Interagency Assessment of Afghanistan Police Training and Readiness (Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of State and Defense, November 2006), <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/76103.pdf> (accessed October 24, 2008).

11. *Ibid.*

12. Helene Cooper and David Cloud, “Bush to Seek More Aid for Afghanistan as Taliban Regroups,” *New York Times*, January 26, 2007.

13. Colin Freeze, “For Afghan Police, Staying Alive Is the First Priority,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, January 14, 2008.

stunt the long-term growth of a diversified ANSF that is able to support Afghanistan's development.

While militants operating from Pakistani sanctuaries have attacked the ANSF from the outside, a different set of forces has weakened the ANSF from the inside. Many militia leaders and warlords have infiltrated the forces and pursued their own interests within them. They have had a deleterious impact upon many ANSF units' cohesion and their members' loyalties. Many ANSF rank-and-file members have resultantly proven themselves less than loyal to their units and commanders. As much as 17 percent of ANA combat personnel are AWOL at any given time, and only half of all soldiers decide to reenlist after their first contract expires.<sup>14</sup> These factors have slowed the ANSF's ability to build institutional trust and other intangibles that an effective security force needs.

Finally, the ANSF is burdened with expectations that it will be able to grow, operate independently, and sustain itself in a short period of time. In fact, it will take the ANSF decades to develop capabilities similar to those of Western militaries and police forces—or even to the best forces in the region. The primary reason for this is that Afghanistan lacks quality candidates to fill all of the authorized positions in the forces. The June 2008 GAO report noted, for instance, that “although basic recruiting is strong, the ANA is experiencing difficulties finding qualified candidates for leadership and specialist positions.” The ANP, meanwhile, has had “personnel providing weapons or defecting to the Taliban and . . . engaging in bribery or misconduct.”<sup>15</sup>

## Long-Term Vision

The long-term vision for the ANSF needs to be widened and brought in line with the Afghanistan Compact, which recognizes that good governance, justice, and the rule of law bolstered by reconstruction and development—in addition to military strength—are prerequisites for security. The heretofore narrow vision of the Afghan government and its international partners for the ANSF has been shaped by counterinsurgency and counterterrorism exigencies and tends to ignore the ways in which Afghan army and police forces can be employed to enforce the rule of law and improve human security nationwide. By overemphasizing certain ANSF responsibilities at the expense of others, the present vision undermines the effort to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, which is the key

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14. GAO, Afghanistan Security.

15. Ibid.

to defeating the insurgency and achieving stability in a post-conflict setting. Afghan and world leaders must change the ways in which they conceive of the ANSF's reconstruction and mandates if they are to effectively widen the strategic vision for the forces.

## **Reconstructing the ANSF**

The key to building viable national-security institutions is the emergence of effective governance that is underpinned by the legitimacy of the state. Institutional loyalty and faith in serving the government are closely linked to the legitimacy, viability, and effectiveness of the government. Most of the security forces that Afghan governments attempted to create in the recent past were composed of odd assortments of armed groups with varying levels of loyalties, political commitment, professional skills, and organizational integrity. Many of them felt free to switch sides, shift loyalties, and join or leave the group spontaneously.

Afghan and international political leaders will not be able to bring peace to Afghanistan by focusing all of their energy on fighting and killing insurgents. Nor will they be able to use development projects to win over the population as long as militia commanders, drug traffickers, and corrupt provincial and district administrators continue to pose violent threats to the Afghan government and people. The reconstruction and development of the ANSF, therefore, must occur inside the overall state-building framework. Success in present-day Afghanistan will require the ANSF to reinforce the state-building process and the state-building process to reinforce the ANSF.

It is clear that Afghan army and police forces must act forcefully to combat the threats that the Taliban and other groups present, while placing a high premium on the protection of civilians. They must not subordinate good governance, justice, and the rule of law to pure security concerns but rather act to establish and support these goals. They should be employed to protect and support Afghanistan's nascent political institutions and economic infrastructure, as this will allow the state to develop the tools necessary to serve the Afghan people. If the ANSF is employed to foster the development of government ministries and protect roads, farms, and towns, millions of Afghans will see tangible improvements in their daily lives and will accept a government that they view as legitimate. Their acceptance will in turn allow the ANSF to grow into a robust and effective force that will be able to respond to the country's myriad security challenges.

The separate elements of the ANSF must also be integrated into a cohesive security-providing apparatus, which will include a coordinated

operation of the ANA, ANP, and different intelligence agencies (the National Directorate of Security and the intelligence elements of Ministry of Defense and MOI). It is also imperative that structured measures be established to provide for job security, merit-based promotion, monetary incentives, family benefits, and the depoliticization of appointments so that the morale and professional loyalties of the ANSF can be reinforced. If the Afghan government and its international partners pursue these objectives, they will be able to create competent security forces that will reinforce Afghan state building.

## Rooting Out Corruption

The Afghan government must initiate a comprehensive program to root out corruption, one that will encompass the surveillance of corrupt officers and officials, their prosecution for criminal acts, and their sentencing to a strict jail term. The ANP, which is in direct contact with the public and represents the face of the government, must be cleaned up to gain the public trust. Measures should include the establishment and strengthening of parliamentary and civil-society bodies to help depoliticize the service and provide civilian review. It is imperative that the Parliament take a more active role in overseeing the ANP's operations and activities. An ombudsman position should be created and tasked with independently evaluating and assessing the ANP's efficacy. A police commissioner should be appointed with clear lines of authority down to the district level so that the police service maintains professional and law-enforcement independence.<sup>16</sup> A police selection board headed by the police commissioner should be formed and given authority to make professional decisions based on national strategic decisions. The commissioner should in turn inaugurate community oversight panels on the national, regional, and provincial levels that will allow all Afghans to provide input on the ANP's performance.

## Refining the ANP's Mandate

Afghan leaders and their international partners must work to refine the ANP's mandate so that the organization can both support the fight against insurgents and terrorists and enforce the rule of law. They must

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16. International Crisis Group (ICG), *Reforming Afghanistan's Police*, Asia Report no. 138 (Kabul/Brussels: ICG, August 30, 2007), [www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5052](http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5052) (accessed October 24, 2008).

do this by establishing distinct counterinsurgency and civilian policing units within the ANP. The counterinsurgency units should be deployed at the country's border posts, along its highways, and in its rural and more isolated regions—the areas where violence and terror are more prevalent. Mandated to confront insurgents and militants, these policemen should be more specially trained and equipped and better integrated with the ANA and international armed forces—and thus more effective in their tasks. The civilian policing units should be deployed in the country's cities, towns, and villages with the sole purpose of enforcing the rule of law. Their work will allow the Afghan government to develop legitimacy and the space with which to build capacity to help the country's population.

## Granting the ANSF Time and Resources

A greater number of ANSF than are currently in uniform will be needed to combat the many threats in Afghanistan's security environment. To that end, the plan to increase the size of the ANA by more than 50 percent is a step in the right direction, but it will take years for the force to actually reach such numbers and perhaps even longer for it to be able to operate effectively and independently. Until that time, international forces must commit themselves to assisting the Afghans in their counterinsurgency operations and to helping them build their own security forces. These forces must, however, take great care to avoid civilian casualties.

It is also becoming increasingly evident that the Afghan government and the international community will face a herculean task in sustaining a robust and effective ANSF. Gates's plan is projected to cost \$5 billion per year for the first three years and \$3 billion for each of the final two years of the expansion.<sup>17</sup> Because the Afghan government's budget will be unable to meet such costs for the foreseeable future, the United States and the international community must make long-term financial commitments to Afghanistan. The Afghan government and its international partners should also seek ways in which to restructure and streamline the ANA, which would eventually reduce its costs. One way to accomplish this would be to recruit new members via a combined volunteer-draft system. Volunteers could be recruited to fill the ANA's more specialized roles while draftees could be integrated into localized units.

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17. Thom Shanker, "Gates Pushing Plan to Double Afghan Army," *New York Times*, August 8, 2008.

## Conclusion

A U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) from October 2008 noted that Afghanistan was in a “downward spiral” and that the country’s government was struggling to limit the Taliban’s growing influence. Unfortunately, such trends will continue as long as Afghanistan’s security forces continue to be riven by corruption, poor leadership, and a lack of human and physical resources. Working in concert, Afghan and international leaders have the ability to reform the forces and reverse Afghanistan’s descent, but only if they firmly commit to doing so. International leaders must provide money, troops, and mentors for Afghanistan’s reconstruction, and Afghan leaders must rise above personal and factional interests and shape forces that work for the good of the country. In the end, they will have succeeded if all Afghans perceive the country’s army and police as legitimate. Legitimacy will breed sustainable security, and sustainable security will open the door to a new Afghanistan.



## 4

# The Long Democratic Transition

*Grant Kippen*

In the long, rich, and vibrant history of Afghanistan, the past several decades have stood out for their rapid and often violent political oscillations as the country experimented with different governance structures—democratic, communist, fundamentalist. Sadly, the only common denominator these various political regimes appeared to share was that they all failed to provide even the most basic protection of personal rights and freedoms as guaranteed in various Afghan constitutions and in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Following the defeat of the Taliban and the signing of the Bonn Agreement in late 2001, Afghanistan began a new chapter in its history. This agreement laid out an aggressive implementation timetable of key milestones intended to build the foundation of a modern representative democracy, including the establishment of a transitional government at the Emergency Loya Jirga in 2002 and the ratification of a new constitution at a Constitutional Loya Jirga eighteen months later. The election of a president in October 2004 and the holding of parliamentary and provincial council elections in September 2005 followed.

But today, more than forty years after Afghanistan's first "decade of democracy" and nearly seven years since the signing of the Bonn Agreement, Afghans find themselves struggling to both understand and institutionalize this latest form of governance. The initial progress toward a modern democratic state now seems to be in jeopardy. Should there be any surprise at this development? Frankly, no. But perhaps we should have been surprised about the degree to which democracy was expected to be the panacea to resolving the myriad challenges facing Afghanistan. Suffering from insecurity, poverty, corruption, and an expanding drug trade, the country is still deeply rooted in a post-conflict environment, where building nascent political institutions and processes is an enormous undertaking fraught with challenges.

Simply accomplishing the milestone activities as set out under Bonn was never going to be sufficient enough to guarantee that the democratization process was firmly entrenched into the fabric of the nation and the psyche of every individual Afghan. In this post-Bonn period, a much deeper and broader effort needs to be made to further strengthen the work that has begun. In fact, it would be completely unrealistic to expect

Afghanistan to become a flourishing democracy within the span of only a few years when the evolution of democracy in the West occurred over the past several centuries.

If the international community is committed to the democratization process in Afghanistan, then it needs to not only recalibrate its expectations about how long this process will take but also take a hard look at the breadth and depth of the programmatic activities that are needed to inculcate a democratization process and culture among the diverse stakeholder communities in the country.

## Moving Forward

One oft-cited reason for the lack of progress on the democratization front in Afghanistan is that the country and government lack the necessary vision needed to move this process forward. This criticism seems to overlook several significant Afghan-led efforts since 2001, including the 2004 Afghan Constitution, which offers up a very progressive model of democracy.

The Afghan Constitution commits to many of the fundamental principles of a progressive democratic country, including a governance structure that is balanced among the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary; supremacy of the rule of law; a government that is committed to being responsive to the needs of its population at the national, provincial, and local levels; and a nation that is proud of its multiethnicity and that sees it as a strength rather than as an impediment to the functioning of the country. Furthermore, women enjoy a guaranteed level of representation in the Parliament, giving Afghanistan a proportionately higher number of female legislators than most Western democracies.

This vision is also articulated and reinforced in other government documents, most recently in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) that was presented and adopted in Paris in June 2008. As envisioned by the ANDS, by the solar year 1400 (2020), Afghanistan will be

- a stable Islamic constitutional democracy at peace with itself and its neighbors, standing with full dignity in the international family;
- a tolerant, united, and pluralistic nation that honors its Islamic heritage and deep-seated aspirations toward participation, justice, and equal rights for all;
- a society of hope and prosperity based on a strong, private-sector-led market economy, social equity, and environmental sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Afghanistan National Development Strategy 1387–1391* (2008–2013) (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008), 5.

However, there appears to be a significant gap between the goals and words as expressed in official documents and the ability of the state to implement the programs that are required to turn these words into actions. To this end, the main challenge to the future of democracy in Afghanistan is not the lack of vision as enunciated in the constitution and laws. Rather, the challenge appears to be more connected to a lack of vision by the government on the more central issue of implementation and how democratic goals and ideals should be fostered and strengthened among the various stakeholder groups throughout society. It is also important to recognize that democratization is not a process that takes place in isolation; its progress is also closely tied to the economic and social development of the country and to the overall security environment. Indeed, the security situation and its impact on the democratization process represent a particularly significant challenge within the Afghanistan context.

It is widely acknowledged that the country's programs of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG) have failed to deliver on their intended goals; there remain large and small militias operating within the country as well as outside the parameters of the government of Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Until there is a complete disarmament by all protagonists, the likelihood of a successful democratic transition will be greatly diminished, because armed militias will continue to rely on force rather than on the political and legal systems to resolve problems, exercise influence, and maintain control over their resource and revenue bases.

Notwithstanding the economic, social, and security challenges facing the democratization process, a much greater effort is needed to turn the current vision of Afghanistan's future into reality. The current Afghan leadership—with the support of the international community—must commit to building the requisite knowledge and understanding of the democratic process throughout the country. In order for ordinary Afghans to support the process and take an active role in it, they need to understand what democracy is and have an understanding of their rights, roles, and responsibilities as citizens. It would be unimaginable to think, let alone expect, that such knowledge and understanding of democracy would already be inculcated within

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2. Thomas E. Flores and Irfan Nooruddin, "Democracy under the Gun: Understanding Post-Conflict Economic Recovery" (working paper, University of Michigan, Ohio State University, 2006), 8.

the population when the formal process began only a scant few years ago. What is required now is a broad-based effort to create the needed environment in which initial democratization efforts can be further strengthened.

## **Strengthening the Foundation**

Ensuring that the democracy agenda continues to move forward in Afghanistan will not be an easy or straightforward undertaking, but it will require the long-term commitment of both Afghans and the international community. An important determinant in strengthening democracy in Afghanistan going forward lies in the need to fully engage the population in this important process. If the goal is to strengthen the participative democratic processes and institutions within Afghanistan, then the Afghan public will need to not only understand what democracy means but also be able to participate in a meaningful way within the process and accept their roles and responsibilities within it. Whether it is their role as a citizen, a voter, a government employee, a journalist, a police officer, or a member of a political party or civil society organization—all individuals have responsibilities to the country that need to be learned, understood, and practiced. It is this aspect of democracy that perhaps needs the most attention over the near term.

To date, very little work has been directed toward this particular task. During the 2004 and 2005 elections, there was a limited civic education effort undertaken that focused on how the election-process worked—for example, how to cast your vote. But little effort was made then or in subsequent years to improving the knowledge and awareness of the population about the nature of the democratic process and to building a sense of citizenship among the population. Furthermore, continued impunity by some powerful political elites has allowed them to retain legitimacy while acting illegitimately and undermining the rule of law. Although civic-education activities are an important part of the elections process, they are no substitute for a long-term, broad-based educational effort about democracy.

While there are many potential approaches that can be taken to further strengthen the democratization process in Afghanistan, the government of Afghanistan and the international community should focus their greatest efforts and attention going forward on the following three core elements: people, public institutions, and political parties. Attention should also be given to other important elements of a developing democracy, including civil society and the media.

## People

With a population estimated at more than 32 million,<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan's people are comprised of a diverse number of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. The impact of war and civil conflict in recent decades has exacted a huge toll on society, not just in terms of loss of life but also on the social and economic fabric of the nation. Minimal access to education has resulted in one of the lowest literacy rates (28.1 percent of the general population) in the world,<sup>4</sup> which has an enormous impact on the future development of democracy within the country. At present, there appears to be a very notional understanding of democracy by the population as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

Such a limited understanding of democracy has implications. For example, voters appear to have highly unrealistic expectations about what candidates will be able to do for them if elected. These expectations might be tempered if there is a better understanding of the system and process as well as the duties and responsibilities of elected officials before elections take place.<sup>6</sup> With the majority of the Afghan population being twenty-five years old or younger and approximately 80 percent of the population living in rural areas, the government of Afghanistan and the international community need to make democracy education an essential priority over at least the next five years. After all, Afghanistan's fundamental building block for a democratic society—its people—has been severely weakened over the past several decades. Overlooking this need could well inhibit, not expedite, the democratic transition. To build an informed and engaged population, the following three courses of action should be pursued.

First, educating the younger generation of Afghans about democracy and citizenship should be one of the key learning outcomes for the educational system throughout the country. By focusing on students, the government will not only be targeting a large part of the population but will also be working with the next generation of voters and leaders, thereby developing the base of a more informed and engaged population. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, consideration should be given to developing a civics curriculum that would be delivered within all primary and secondary schools. International partners could fund the development

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3. *CIA World Factbook 2008*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (accessed October 30, 2008).

4. *Ibid.*

5. For a sense of how democracy is perceived by Afghans, see chapter 7 on democratic values in *Asia Foundation, Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2007).

6. Andrew Wilder, *A House Divided* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005), 41.

of the curriculum and associated teaching materials as well as the requisite training for teachers. This activity could be undertaken in conjunction with syllabi development that is currently underway for lower- and upper-secondary education.<sup>7</sup> The target would be to have the curriculum, materials, and teaching training in place prior to the presidential and provincial council elections slated for summer 2009.

Second, the government of Afghanistan and the international community should consider the development of a multiyear civic-education program on democracy for men and women across the country. Such a program could support the voter education activities that will be developed for the upcoming voter registration process and the 2009 and 2010 elections. This program would also act as a bridge to engage the population between the election cycles. Such a program should be implemented by civil-society partners at the local level, and these partners should be encouraged to hire young Afghans as trainers and facilitators for the program.

Third, the government of Afghanistan, with the support of the international community, should dialogue with the domestic media to determine the feasibility of establishing a multiyear citizenship-focused program that could be delivered via print, radio, or television. The goal of the program would be to develop a sense of citizenship among the population. Inculcating a sense of civic responsibility within the Afghan population through such programs will be important to ensuring the future sustainability of the democratic process, particularly because most of the population has no formal education.

## Public Institutions

The government of Afghanistan faces enormous challenges in terms of its credibility, legitimacy, and capacity to govern effectively throughout the country. With nonstate actors reemerging, this situation is resulting in direct confrontation among the nascent political institutions at the local, provincial, and national levels. Efforts to build and strengthen government agencies that provide the foundations of democracy and deliver the most basic services to citizens have largely fallen far short of expectations. Many institutions are corrupt, and the slow process of creating an independent judiciary and other institutions that will establish and enforce the rule of law has yet to deliver serious dividends. In order to address issues of legitimacy and credibility of government of Afghanistan institutions, far greater

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7. See *National Education Strategic Plan for Afghanistan (1385–1389)* (Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007), 68,

attention needs to be paid to educating public officials about their duties, roles, and responsibilities within a modern democracy, and to giving them the tools, resources, and know-how to properly fulfill those duties.

First, public officials must be provided with the requisite management, technical knowledge, and skill sets needed to perform their duties and responsibilities. Targeted professional-development programs also need to be created and implemented for government officials at all levels so that they have a basic understanding of their roles and responsibilities within a representative democracy. Such professional and postsecondary-education programs have been developed with positive effects in other countries to educate public officials on such issues as democracy and human rights.<sup>8</sup>

Second, in advance of the upcoming elections, the government of Afghanistan should develop a training module specifically designed for public officials that clearly specifies their duties and responsibilities during elections. In addition to providing a general overview of the electoral process and the relevant laws, the module would specifically address the issue of nonpartisanship of public officials and the illegality of using state resources to assist candidates in their campaigns. A code of conduct should be developed as part of this module, which all public officials would be required to sign. A separate module should be developed specifically for law-enforcement personnel, such as the Afghanistan National Police and Afghanistan National Army, which would describe their role in the process and provide a background on the laws and regulations governing the process. Both modules need to be delivered at the national, provincial, and local levels of government ministries and agencies.

Third, in conjunction with a multiyear, broad-based civic-education program for the people of Afghanistan, the government of Afghanistan should consider developing a module that elected representatives could use to engage their constituencies on various democratization issues, such as the duties and responsibilities of elected representatives. Such a module—and there could be others developed on other themes—would provide elected representatives with the ability to not only engage their constituencies but also to educate them about key principles of the democratic process.

Fourth, the government of Afghanistan should consider initiating a community-focused public-awareness campaign that would reinforce the vision of the country as defined in the Afghan Constitution, the Afghanistan Compact, and the ANDS. This would be a broad-based campaign aimed at

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8. For an example of a comprehensive program of professional and postsecondary education about democracy and human rights, see *Building Democracy in Ukraine*, [www.queensu.ca/sps/bdu/](http://www.queensu.ca/sps/bdu/).

the general population but would be built around elected officials; provincial and district officials; and tribal, ethnic, and religious leaders, so that people understand the future direction of the country and understand that all these individuals are supporting the same democratic vision.<sup>9</sup> This type of communication activity is key to building public awareness and ongoing support.

## Political Parties

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the future of democracy in Afghanistan is the absence of mature political parties. Political parties in any democracy play a critical role in bridging the divides that exist between various stakeholder groups in society, and within Afghanistan they have not yet matured to the point where they represent constituencies beyond a very narrow ethnic base. Their maturity has been hindered by a deep public mistrust of political parties in recent Afghan history, their association with armed militias, and the current antiparty electoral system of single nontransferable voting (SNTV).<sup>10</sup>

Despite their essential role in the democratic process, after the 2005 elections, funding by the international community for political-party development virtually dried up because donor attention shifted to working with the legislators in the Wolesi and Meshrano Jirgas and provincial councils. It makes no sense for the international community to sit back and let the future development of political parties happen in an ad hoc, haphazard fashion, because much greater attention needs to be paid to political parties in order to assist their evolution.

Assisting the transformation of political parties in Afghanistan will require perseverance and a long-term commitment on the part of donors, the government of Afghanistan, implementing organizations, and the Afghan people. First, the international community needs to commit to multiyear funding for political-party development programs. Second, the international community needs to coordinate their funding and programmatic activities in this area in order to ensure consistency of programs and coverage and to avoid duplication of effort. Third, financial and technical support should be provided only to those parties that are either engaged

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9. For a similar recommendation, see Sarah Lister, *Moving Forward? Assessing Public Administration Reform in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, September 2006), 16.

10. For a comprehensive analysis of the history of political parties in Afghanistan, see Thomas Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftists—and a Void in the Center: Afghanistan's Political Parties and Where They Come From (1902–2006)* (Kabul: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2006).

in or committed to the following activities: expanding their membership base on a national basis; undertaking a countrywide policy-development process; developing the in-house technical capacity for efficient and effective functioning (finance and administration, policy development, organizations, training, information technology, media); developing an open and transparent candidate nomination process and preparing for election-related party activities, such as poll-agent training; and developing democracy modules that party officials could deliver to their members across the country and to the general public.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the international community and the government of Afghanistan should support the development of formal linkages between Afghan political parties and political parties within donor countries. Such opportunities would provide Afghan political leaders with the opportunity to observe and learn firsthand about the functioning of modern political parties within a representative democracy. These linkages would also provide Afghan political leaders with the chance to see the relationship that exists between elected members of legislatures and their duties and responsibilities as members of a political party.

## Coordinating the Effort

Given the critical importance of the democratization process to the long-term stability of Afghanistan, the international community and Afghan stakeholders need to ensure that future funding and technical assistance in this area is properly coordinated. Too many reports on development aid in Afghanistan have pointed to deficiencies in coordination and delivery among the international and Afghan stakeholders, so this will be a key issue moving forward.

To this end, the international community should develop an appropriate monitoring and coordination mechanism that meets on a regular basis to share information and measure progress. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is probably the most logical entity to lead this coordination effort, but all the donors involved in democracy-promotion activities will need to accept UNAMA's leadership role for it to be effective. The leading Afghan institutions participating in this monitoring and coordination mechanism would include the Independent Election Commission (IEC), the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and the Parliament. Another important part of the

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11. See also *Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work*, Asia Report no. 116 (Kabul/Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 15, 2006), 21.

coordinating group's work will be developing appropriate benchmarks in order to gauge the effectiveness of the democratization efforts.

## **Conclusion**

History tells us that democracy is not an end state but rather a long and often arduous self-improvement process. Although there has been some frustration about the rate of progress to date, this frustration should not be allowed to turn into bitterness and disappointment or lead to questions about the importance of democracy to the people of Afghanistan. With the magnitude of the challenges facing Afghanistan—politically, economically, and socially—perhaps this is a perfect time, as the next set of elections draws closer, to recommit our collective efforts to the democratic transition that is now underway there. This may also be the right time to recalibrate both domestic and international expectations about the time and investment that will be required for this transition. Because the Afghan people will be the drivers of this democratization process, building the human capital needed to sustain it will be critical.

It is also important to recognize that there will be bumps and detours along the way. To put some perspective on the task ahead, perhaps it would be fitting to reflect upon the words of Sir Winston Churchill, who, when faced with a particularly dark time during the Second World War, remarked, "Now, this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

# The Politics of Mass Media

*Amin Tarzi*<sup>1</sup>

**M**ass media in Afghanistan has awakened into a new era of freedom of expression. Unlike any other time in Afghan history, diversity of opinion and media outlets allows the population to raise the varied voices of Afghanistan and debate the country's political future. Historically, Afghanistan's relationship with the media has been complicated. From the experiments with independent press in the mid-twentieth century to the brutal repression under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has searched for balance between freedom of expression and control of the central authority. The latest experiment, which began with the fall of the Taliban regime, has resulted in Afghanistan gaining freedoms and the means to disseminate information not remotely paralleled in its past.

This has not come without challenges. The low quality of available media and opposition to this newfound freedom threaten to overtake the advances Afghanistan is making toward establishing an independent, freethinking mass media. To address these challenges, Afghanistan needs to draw from its past and critically evaluate the political dynamics surrounding media freedoms to ensure that an independent, professional mass media roots itself in Afghanistan as the vanguard of the country's progress toward becoming a more inclusive, democratic society. Ultimately, the fourth estate should stand alongside the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to safeguard freedom of expression as a fundamental pillar of the country's democracy and to help nurture national cohesion through debate and dialogue.

## Not a Long Tradition of Free Press

Media freedom in Afghanistan does not have a long history. The first experiment began in 1949, after Prime Minister Shah Mahmud allowed relatively open parliamentary elections that seated what has come to be known as the "Liberal Parliament." Among other reforms, this new

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1. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the Marine Corps University or any other government agency. References to this paper should include the foregoing statement. The author wishes to thank Abubakar Siddique and Erika Tarzi for their suggestions and recommendations.

parliament passed a press-freedom law, the effect of which was almost instantaneous. Newspapers appeared immediately, with most if not all of them criticizing the monarchical system.<sup>2</sup> In 1953, when Mohammad Da'ud became prime minister, he ordered the closure of independent newspapers, ending the initial experiment.

The second experiment began with the promulgation of the 1964 Afghan Constitution by King Mohammad Zaher, which ushered in what is commonly referred to as the "decade of democracy." Article 31 of the 1964 Constitution states that "every Afghan has the right to express his thoughts in speech, in writing, in pictures and by other means, in accordance with the provisions of the law." The article continues, "Every Afghan has the right to print and publish ideas in accordance with the provisions of the law, without submission in advance to the authorities of the State." To codify the rights of Article 31, the Afghan government promulgated the 1965 Press Law. Article 1 of this law stipulates that "freedom of thought and expression is immune from any encroachment in accordance with Article 31 of the Constitution of Afghanistan."

Deeper within the document, however, contradictions to this broad sweeping freedom appear. Article 31 of the Press Law forbade publication of "matter implying defamation of the principles of Islam."<sup>3</sup> Article 32 further restricted press freedom by disallowing the publication of "obscene articles or photos which tend to debase public morals."<sup>4</sup> The law also included an extensive list of unspecified prohibited topics that, if raised, would break state laws or reveal state secrets. All of these limitations were left to the subjective interpretation of authorities. Furthermore, under this law, the government maintained exclusive rights over radio and television broadcasting and assigned punitive measures to private individuals attempting to operate radio or television stations.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the restrictions, the relative freedom of press allowed under this new law led to the mushrooming of print media in Afghanistan's major urban centers, in particular in the capital. In the words of an observer at the time, the 1965 Press Law followed a "course halfway between complete freedom of the press and close government supervision."<sup>6</sup> The government

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2. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 1980 ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 495–97.
  3. Press Law of 17 Sombula 1344, Article 31.
  4. Press Law of 17 Sombula 1344, Article 32, section b (3).
  5. Press Law of 17 Sombula 1344, Article 36. According to the provisions of the law, any individual who attempts to establish radio or television stations would face fines or "imprisonment for seven years." If the individual actually broadcasted over radio or television waves, then the incarceration period was to be ten years.
  6. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 600.

did maintain a watchful eye. Many publications were allowed to continue; however, those that were politically left-leaning were deemed anticonstitutional or anti-Islamic and thus were shut down.<sup>7</sup>

## Impact of War on Media in Afghanistan

The 1973 coup d'état of Mohammad Da'ud not only ended the two-century-old monarchy in Afghanistan but also ended the second experiment of press freedom. It was not until December 2001 that a governing authority allowed Afghans to once again exercise freedom of expression. That said, during the Communist period and Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1978–92) and the ensuing civil-war and Taliban periods (1992–2001), hundreds of publications and several radio and a few television stations flourished both among Afghan diasporas—mainly in Iran and Pakistan but also in Western countries—and in different parts of the country that at one time or another enjoyed de facto independence from the central authorities. The influx of ideas through these largely external sources exposed Afghans to the power of media and led many of the factionalized leaders to use this power to promote their individual agendas.

Paradoxically, at the same time, the nearly quarter century of war and displacement left an indelible mark on Afghan society, plunging it into greater illiteracy as the educational system deteriorated. Already struggling with one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the world before 1978, the decades of war exacerbated the problem. According to official 2004 UN data, Afghanistan's population ended up with male literacy rates of less than 30 percent and female literacy rates of less than 15 percent.<sup>8</sup> These numbers translated into few Afghans being capable of producing or consuming quality mass media despite the growing and diverse means of dissemination. This has had a negative and profound impact on Afghanistan's quest to become a functioning state with a civil society capable of national dialogue. After more than two decades of conflict, Afghanistan no longer stood as a cohesive nation but rather became a fragmented one, alienated from itself.

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7. Article 29 of the *Press Law* stipulates that the “fundamental policy of every periodical publication should be to support the values and aims mentioned in the Constitution of Afghanistan,” thus disallowing those publications that at the time espoused political systems other than the existing monarchical system or that were deemed to be un-Islamic.

8. *National Human Development Report for Afghanistan: Security with a Human Face, Challenges and Responsibilities* (Islamabad: United Nations Development Programme, 2004), 4.

Notwithstanding the obvious limitation which radio as a medium of broadcasting has, it remains for the foreseeable future as the sole medium that has been able to reach all Afghans, rural and urban alike. The three decades of war kept Afghanistan as a major global story, prompting many international media organizations, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Deutsche Welle, to establish radio programming in the Dari and Pashto languages and to broadcast into Afghanistan. While not sanctioned by the central authorities, these international media organizations exposed Afghans to quality reporting from abroad and helped elevate journalism standards in Afghanistan.

## **The Media in Post-Taliban Afghanistan**

The rapid expansion of media outlets showcases one of the major achievements of the post-Taliban period. Today hundreds of newspapers, news agencies, magazines, and radio and television stations across Afghanistan project a picture of successful rebirth of the media sector. Non-governmental organizations such as Internews and the Institute of War and Peace Reporting have focused efforts on media development and report having trained hundreds of journalists. Despite the challenging political environment, the country has more press freedom than most of its neighbors where authoritarian regimes and draconian laws suppress freedom of expression. Despite the initial success, much remains to be done.

## **A New Legal Framework**

With the arrival of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan (IAA) in December 2001, Afghanistan witnessed a dramatic change in the relationship between the central authority and the media. The IAA was established on the basis of the Bonn Agreement. This agreement stipulated that until Afghanistan adopted a new constitution, the 1964 Constitution would serve as the country's governing law as long as its provisions did not contradict the Bonn Agreement and those provisions that dealt with the monarchical system were excluded.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the freedom-of-expression provisions of the second experiment resurfaced, and a new era for media was born. Both domestic and foreign media flooded Afghanistan, prompting the new

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9. For the full official text of the Bonn Agreement, see "Letter Dated 5 December 2001 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council," UN Security Council document S/2001/1154, December 5, 2001.

administration to attempt to regulate this new freedom over the next couple of years.

With the passage of the 2004 Afghan Constitution, the overarching principles governing freedom of expression were promulgated. According to Article 34, "freedom of expression is inviolable ... [and] every Afghan has the right to express his thought through speech, writing, or illustration or other means, by observing the provisions" of the constitution.<sup>10</sup> The article further gives every Afghan the "right to print or publish topics without prior submission to the state authorities in accordance with the law." Furthermore, the constitution stipulates that "directives related to printing house, radio, television, press and other mass media will be regulated by the law." Freedom of expression is further strengthened by Article 7, which obligates the state to "abide" by the international conventions it has signed, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 19 of the declaration reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." For the first time, Afghan citizens have been granted clear and broad freedom of expression.

While the constitution provided these freedoms, the presence of Article 3, which states that "in Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam,"<sup>11</sup> severely challenged the promulgation of new media laws, as called for under the constitution. Once again, Article 3 introduced subjectivity into the law and diminished the likelihood that courts or the government would protect freedom of expression. Efforts to establish a Mass Media Law have been underway since March 2004, and the presence of reactionary warlords in this discussion is creating a major hurdle to ensuring that media freedoms are protected.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Da Afghanistan asasi qanun/Qanun-e asasi-ye Afghanistan (Kabul: Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan Constitutional Commission Secretariat, 2004).

11. For more on Article 3, see Amin Tarzi, "Afghanistan's New Constitution Is Flawed," in *Afghanistan*, ed. Jann Einfeld (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 42–45; Amin Tarzi, "Limits to Afghan Democracy," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 26, 2006; Amin Tarzi, "Après l'adoption de la Constitution," *Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan* (Paris) no. 104 (March 2004): 3–6.

12. The most recent draft has passed the Parliament but President Karzai has not indicated whether he will sign the current draft or introduce further revisions. The Wolesi Jirga maintains a copy of the revised Mass Media Law on its official Web site, [www.parliament.af/media/files/Rule\\_press\\_law\\_dari.pdf](http://www.parliament.af/media/files/Rule_press_law_dari.pdf) (accessed on May 29, 2008). The author is grateful to Toby Mendel, Law/Asia program director at Article 19, for providing the Meshrano Jirga amendments to the Mass Media Law. See also a letter by Joel Simon, executive director of Committee to Protect Journalists, to Hamid Karzai, "CPJ Urges Karzai to Protect Afghan Media," January 17, 2008, [www.cpj.org/protests/08ltrs/asia/afghan17jan08pl.html](http://www.cpj.org/protests/08ltrs/asia/afghan17jan08pl.html) (accessed May 27, 2008).

## The Profession

Afghanistan has experienced a recent boom in media sources, both state-run and privately owned. Many outside observers would applaud this as evidence that Afghanistan is allowing the free flow of information and a forum for debate. However, this “success” is masking significant shortcomings in the media itself. First and foremost, Afghanistan suffers from a lack of professionalism in journalism. The overall quality of Afghanistan’s media directly depends on the professionalism of its practitioners.<sup>13</sup> There are many who engage in reporting, editing, analyzing, and disseminating information to the public, but very few who have a sound professional background to do so. Journalism in Afghanistan has become a profession akin to politics; anyone can practice it without the need for proper credentials, thereby creating a media of mediocrity. Lack of access to proper education at all levels of society, which hampers the growth of a professional cadre of media producers, challenges the effectiveness of the media’s role in shaping national dialogue and raising the critical capacity of the Afghan public.

## Freedoms under Attack

Currently, media freedoms are under attack in Afghanistan. Despite efforts to put in place laws guaranteeing inviolable rights to freedom of expression and opinion, some exercising these rights via the media have been killed or have been charged with violating those very laws. Because Afghanistan is a nascent democracy, many of the institutions established to protect democratic principles are not fully developed. The security forces have not been able to fully protect those reporters who have challenged warlords, narco-traffickers, and neo-Taliban forces.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, ambiguity in the law, especially the inclusion of Article 3 in the Constitution, has brought subjectivity to the application of law, and media practitioners are forced to navigate blindly the murky waters of defining Islamic beliefs. Presently, the executive branch is working to protect the media from abuse by conservative religious forces, warlords, elements within the legislative and

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13. For journalism education, the author has drawn from N. Ram, “The Rationale and Relevance of Journalism Education Today” (presentation, Ad Hoc Independent High Commission of Communication and Information for Afghanistan, UNESCO, Paris, March 14, 2006).

14. For more on the neo-Taliban, see Amin Tarzi, “The Neo-Taliban,” in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi, 274–310 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

judicial branches, and some elements within its own ranks, and is striving to establish an effective media law.

A challenge for Afghanistan and the international community will be recognizing Afghanistan's absorption capacity for change. Afghanistan has made significant progress in adapting its laws to support democratic principles. There are still areas of ambiguity in the laws, as discussed earlier. Both the constitution and the Mass Media Law guarantee freedom of expression, as enshrined in the UDHR, and at the same time allow for the curtailment of that freedom when it contradicts the beliefs and provisions of Islam. Customarily when a state becomes a party to an international law, domestic law is drafted or altered to make it compatible with the provisions of the international law in question. In the case of Afghanistan, this has not happened yet, as it is obvious that Article 3 and the Mass Media Law contradict parts of the UDHR.<sup>15</sup> This challenges the sensibilities of those who want and expect immediate change.

## The Way Forward

Maintaining an environment in which mass media can freely operate is pivotal to transforming Afghanistan into a democracy. With the help of the international community, the government is striving to democratize the political system of the country, establish national military and police forces, and reform the judiciary to safeguard that system. The success of these efforts is dependent on an independent, professional media.

To support the development of the media, the government of Afghanistan should dedicate the next several years to ensuring that it defines a clear set of rules and regulations that balance freedom of expression and the capacity of the Afghan public to absorb change with the ultimate goal of adhering to provisions of individual rights of freedom of expression as enshrined in the UDHR. The first step would be for the government of Afghanistan to approve a slightly amended version of the current draft of the Mass Media Law. Amending the text to include the establishment of a more transparent adjudication process for cases involving violations based on the Mass Media Law and adding an annex to the law that contains a more defined list of what is considered to be offensive to the religious sensitivities of the people would remove some of the inherent ambiguity in the text and remove some possibility for subjective application of the

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15. Article 5 of the 2007 Mass Media Law is similar to Articles 3 and 7 of the Constitution. It states as one of the aims of the law the observance of the right of freedom of speech in mass media as enshrined in the UDHR and of the provisions of the principles of Islam.

law's provisions. For example, a stricter definition of Article 21 (Meshrano Jirga version) of the current Mass Media Law would limit the possibility of broad-range censorship.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the creation of a Mass Media Commission as envisaged in Article 42 of the Mass Media Law would establish an independent body whose salary is drawn directly from the state budget rather than the Ministry of Culture and Information's budget, which would lessen the influence of the government on media oversight. One of the struggles of the next ten years will be for the executive branch to ensure that once media protections are put in place, they outlive the current administration. Right now, President Hamid Karzai—the individual—is spearheading the effort. However, lessons from Afghanistan's history should give a clear warning that leaving the fate of media freedoms to the whim of one branch of government, or one individual, does not secure this lifeline of democracy from abuse should an executive be elected who does not believe in democracy or who is easily susceptible to pressures against media freedom.

While establishing a sound legal framework, the government should also work to remove its ownership of media outlets. One step would be to convert the state-owned Radio Television Afghanistan into an organization based on the public service model that focuses on national interests with government intervention accepted only in ensuring a media market and not in selecting media content.<sup>17</sup> This could partly provide C-SPAN-style programming, bringing the workings of the government and the National Assembly into a more transparent system. Where economically and technologically feasible, the government should seek to establish dedicated countrywide radio and television programs to bring this public-service-model media to as many Afghans as possible. This would remove the infusion of the government spin on media, allow for a more transparent view into government workings, and provide the opportunity for Afghans to evaluate for themselves ideas, government process, and political realities.

To professionalize the media, the next ten years should be dedicated to improving educational opportunities for media practitioners. As the country strengthens and broadens its overall educational system, emphasis should be placed on training the next generation of journalists. The government

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16. Article 21 of the Mass Media Law passed by Meshrano Jirga states the following: "Private radio and televisions are obligated to observe the principles and provisions of the holy religion of Islam, and national, spiritual and moral values and psychological security of the Afghan nation in the programs."

17. The idea of the Public Service Model for Afghanistan was proposed by Martin Hadlow and Rhonda Breit at a presentation made to the Ad Hoc Independent High Commission of Communication and Information for Afghanistan, UNESCO, Paris, March 16, 2006.

and international community need to make improving existing journalism schools and establishing new ones a priority, as this education is pivotal to the success of the media in recognizing Afghanistan's linguistic and historical plurality and forging a collective national experience for Afghans from all walks of life. Emphasis needs to be placed on enhancing overall journalism and information and communication technology education, providing more qualified instructors, state-of-the-art technology, and more competitive entrance requirements. Additionally, the media must begin to self-regulate, to adopt standards, and to professionalize their corps to ensure quality production and analysis. Media practitioners need to agree on a universally accepted code of conduct and ethics to ensure fair, accurate, and balanced reporting and analysis.

As the laws and media profession evolve, there will be a need for ensuring sustainability of this new, more independent media. Much attention will need to be focused on improving donor coordination to maximize investment and avoid duplication of effort to ensure a more equitable distribution of international funding for media development. As the media outlets, buttressed by government and foreign assistance, emerge as successful business entities, they will need to be weaned from those assistance dollars. Through encouraging a culture of paid advertisement, commercials, and other income-generating schemes, the media outlets can improve their self-sufficiency and long-term survivability.

Creating an environment in which a professional, independent media flourishes will open up Afghanistan to myriad ideas, philosophies, and political thoughts that can help broaden the media audience's social and political experiences. For instance, exposing the Afghan television audience to entertainment that includes songs and dances from Islamic countries would demonstrate to the Afghan public that in most Islamic countries television programming, such as found in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Pakistan, includes song and dance, even by women. Not only will this introduce external ideas but also reintroduce Afghans to their own history and culture. Using mass media to reconstruct Afghanistan's historical narrative can provide the forum for the reexamination of Afghanistan's history that is critical to the success of its nation-building journey. The mass media can act as the medium for discussion and the challenging self-reflection that this will require. One challenge here will be to ensure that programming is representative of the plurality of the Afghan experience. Afghanistan's media needs to speak for all of the country and not only Kabul. As such, more outlets, especially in television, need to respect the linguistic diversity of the country and not only offer Dari-language programming.

Afghanistan's experience with democracy is evolving. It is currently experiencing the growing pains of a nascent democracy. As it struggles through adolescence, it will be confronted with self-doubt, recognition of limitations, and the challenges of balancing expectations with realities. Media is the forum for Afghanistan to examine itself, to critically evaluate its perceptions, beliefs, and policies, and to determine for itself its national identity. As one of the fundamental pillars of a democratic society, media deserves a dedicated effort to ensure its independence, professionalism, and protection.

## 6

# A Human Rights Awakening?

*Nader Nadery*

A commonly held false belief among international actors in Afghanistan is that human rights is an alien concept to the Afghan people and thus should not be considered a priority area in the post-Bonn Agreement state-building agenda. This misperception is fostered by some Afghans, many associated with the government, who are threatened by the establishment of the rule of law that protects the rights of the many and punishes those who violate those rights.

The truth is that the concept of human rights has a strong religious, social, and moral basis in Afghanistan. As the poet Sa'adi wrote,

All human beings are in truth akin;  
All in creation share one origin.

When fate allots a member pangs and pains,  
No ease for other members then remains.

If, unperturbed, another's grief canst scan,  
Thou are not worthy of the name of man.

This passage is an example of a morality preached throughout the history of Afghanistan that reflects a deep conceptual understanding of human rights values. Although the term “human rights” as a set of codified norms may not be familiar among Afghans, they have a much clearer understanding of the notion and the concept of universally accepted human rights values. Indeed, recent studies conducted throughout Afghanistan show that there is a strong sense of human rights as “rights granted by God to allow people to live in society in freedom, under circumstances of equality.”<sup>1</sup> As the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission determined after it conducted more than 250 focus groups in 2004, Afghans knew fundamental human rights as “the right to live and the right to its necessary components of food, shelter, clothing, and basic health care; Islamic rights; the right to security and justice; and the right to an occupation and employment; freedom of thought and speech;

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1. *A Call for Justice* (Kabul: AIHRC, January 2005).

ethnic, religious and gender equality; political rights such as the right to participate in free and fair elections; and the right to education.”

The great challenge for Afghanistan, moving forward, is how to implement those rights fairly across political, ethnic, and gender boundaries amid insecurity and traditional cultural practices. Afghans must draw upon their deepening sense of entitlement to basic rights, strengthened during the last three decades of conflict, to institutionalize a human rights movement that will heal the wounds of years of systematic atrocities, and establish the rule of law so fundamental to the success of the state-building efforts of the Afghan government and its international partners. This movement must include the breadth of Afghan society, from traditional leaders to urban civil-society organizations.

Achieving this optimistic vision in human rights for Afghanistan—with the legacy of a long history of violence and cruelty—is not an easy task. But such an approach should not be considered idealism; it should be considered a necessary element of any process that will succeed in transforming Afghanistan from a failed state to a peaceful and prosperous nation.

## Signs of Progress

Afghanistan has made some progress in achieving institutional strength in the field of promotion and protection of human rights since 2001. First, Afghanistan’s constitution, adopted in January 2004, guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all citizens, including, for the first time in its constitutional history, equal rights for men and women (Article 22) and a reference to Afghanistan’s international human rights obligations (Article 7). The fact that a national human rights commission is functioning and is constitutionally mandated (Article 59) to work toward the promotion and protection of human rights is also a significant development.

Second, human rights education is a core subject in teacher-training now, and human rights training is part of the mandatory training curriculum for the Afghan National Police. Human Rights Units have been established at the Ministry of Interior and in many of the police stations around the country to investigate complaints against the police. These units have a vague mandate, lack professional capacity, and have very limited authority to take corrective actions against police personnel found in breach of human rights standards. However, their establishment and presence within the police system is a critical first step in creating a suitable environment for the strengthening of a human rights oriented culture in law enforcement institutions.

Third, the government of Afghanistan submitted its first economic, social, and cultural rights report to the UN Human Rights Council in 2008 and is also producing its first-ever human rights periodic treaty report for the council.

Fourth, freedom of expression and a vibrant, albeit unprofessional, media are also dramatic signs of progress in the post-Taliban era.

## Insecurity and Institutional Weaknesses

Despite this progress, there is lack of a genuine human rights commitment on the part of the government of Afghanistan and very little political will to address human rights protection as a core responsibility of the state. Thus, the government has failed to take proper and tough measures against serious human rights abusers, hindering progress and putting at risk those gains that have been made in the last seven years.

Over the last several years, Afghanistan has consistently ranked in the top ten failed states by *Foreign Policy* magazine, which assesses countries on a wide range of issues, including their performance in human rights and public services. In 2008, Afghanistan scored an 8.4 out of 10 for human rights, indicating a systematic failure of the policymakers in Afghanistan to create a culture of human rights in the country.

Systematic human rights violations have been a part of policy for the various regimes in Kabul since 1979. A culture of ignorance and disrespect of core human rights values has been cultivated within the state institutions, especially in the security, police, and justice sectors. Government appointments of those representing an era of terror and civil war have further exacerbated the situation. As a consequence, it is very difficult for public-sector institutions to gain a level of trust among the people. A study in September 2007 by the AIHRC concluded that 67 percent of Afghans do not consult government institutions because these institutions most often serve the interests of the powerful and facilitate impunity for those who commit human rights atrocities.<sup>2</sup>

Systematic vetting of officials in elected and nonelected positions is a critical step toward building trust in public institutions. A vetting process established for the presidential, parliamentary, and provincial elections in 2004 and 2005 failed to disqualify dozens of known human rights abusers, most of whom maintain illegal militias. Similarly, an advisory panel on senior appointments was established in March 2007 in accordance with the 2006 Afghanistan Compact and the government of Afghanistan's

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2. *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan* (Kabul: AIHRC, September 1, 2007).

Action Plan for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation. The panel only became functional in August 2008, however, representing a two-year delay in the compact benchmarks without any accountability. Still, it remains uncertain whether the panel will be able to do its job properly.

The lack of a functioning judiciary is another major obstacle in the realization of human rights. The Afghan justice sector has been affected by the three waves of ideological destruction over the last thirty years and today suffers from a lack of political will for meaningful reform. The justice sector, seven years after the Taliban, remains highly politicized, increasingly unfriendly toward human rights protection, and rife with corruption. Over a ten-month period in 2007–08, a total of 2,845 cases of human rights violations were investigated and registered by the AIHRC. Of these, the commission estimates that 46 percent are cases where judicial intervention or competence would have prevented these violations. For example, 329 violations of the right to due process and 1,843 cases where effective remedy was not granted could have been addressed or prevented by proper judicial practice or intervention.

Increasing insecurity throughout the country is only worsening the situation. Women pay an especially high price in this regard. Freedom of movement and access to education for girls and women are highly restricted by armed groups. In fact, Taliban insurgents have spared no effort to attack schools and women employed by the public and private sector and aid organizations. The Ministry of Education said that Taliban insurgents set fire to 42 percent of girls' schools in Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, 49 percent in Paktika, 69 percent in Zabul, and 59 percent in Helmand in the last three years.<sup>3</sup> Parents' fear of Taliban retaliation has prevented thousands of other children from attending school.

Insecurity has also provided justification for an already unwilling Afghan government to ignore promotion and protection of human rights and has discouraged even previously supportive members of the international community from pursuing the cause of human rights. Several states, including the United States, are wrongly convinced that this time of instability is not right for making human rights a priority in Afghanistan. There has long been a false choice presented between "peace" and "justice," which ignores the reality that the causes of insecurity and instability lay in a lack of rule of law, which fundamentally contributes to the decline in public trust of state institutions. The Taliban has been able to exploit the

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3. *A Campaign of Death and Terror: Insurgent Abuses against Afghan Civilians* (Kabul: AIHRC, 2008).

lack of public confidence in government, deteriorating the political and security situation even further.

Attacks on media personnel and journalists by insurgents have risen dramatically, while the government has increased interference and attempts to impose restrictions on the independent media. According to the Afghan Journalist Association, at least twelve journalists were kidnapped and killed by the Taliban in 2008, while more than thirty others were arbitrarily detained, intimidated, and humiliated by government officials.

## Traditional Practices

Cultural attitudes and traditional negative practices also remain fundamental obstacles to promotion of human rights in Afghanistan and are likely to remain so for a long time to come. These traditional practices are deeply embedded in Afghan culture through the practice of customary law and through the collective social attitudes of Afghan society that have shaped the way most individuals think and behave.

The majority of Afghans either do not have access to formal judicial institutions or believe they are corrupt. As a result, they rely instead on traditional mechanisms to resolve their disputes. In the absence of a functioning judiciary and a strong government, human rights defenders must rely on the traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms as the only venue through which disputes are actually settled and remedies provided, even though these very mechanisms also perpetrate abuses. In many cases, such mechanisms can provide fair outcomes and restore peace to the community. But at the same time, as the United States Institute of Peace and others have concluded, "The outcomes produced by the informal system are far from ideal. At their best, they rely on social cohesion and conceptions of fairness to solve problems and maintain community harmony. . . . [But] some traditional forums perpetuate gross human rights abuses such as forced marriage and extrajudicial killings."<sup>4</sup> In many areas, the conflict has brought about a shift in the elites and elders of communities across the country, giving more power to armed groups than traditional elders.<sup>5</sup>

Another problematic aspect of these traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms is the exclusion of women from the process and lack of concern for their rights or well being in the outcomes these forums produce.

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4. "Conference on the Relationship Between State and Non-State Justice System in Afghanistan" (briefing paper, United States Institute of Peace, Kabul, Afghanistan, December 10–14, 2006).

5. Myron Weiner and Ali Bannazizi, *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

According to a study conducted by the Afghan Women and Children Research Center, *baad*, the practice of trading women for marriage to resolve a dispute or debt, is still common. This involves not only forced marriage but also sometimes sending a girl from a perpetrator's family to a victim's family, which may result in severe mistreatment.<sup>6</sup> Child marriages, denial of inheritance rights, and dowry rights are other forms of negative traditional practices that are commonly seen in different parts of rural Afghanistan. These practices will remain long-term challenges toward full realization of human rights in the country.

Traditional local leaders may also undermine free political participation. For example, community elders may announce punitive actions against those who do not follow the decision by the elders to support a specific candidate in an election. Reports on the lead up to and conduct of the 2005 parliamentary elections by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, AIHRC, and the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan recorded several high-profile incidents in which elders in the southeastern provinces of Paktika and Khost announced sanctions against those who did not support their chosen candidate. There were also many reports of voter intimidation by armed groups.

Article 54 of the 2004 Afghan Constitution requires the government to adopt measures to eliminate these negative practices and to "ensure the physical and psychological well-being of the family." It also mandates government to remove "traditions contrary to the principles of the sacred religion of Islam." There is as yet no language defining these "contrary" practices, nor any mechanism put in place by the government to detect and penalize their commission.

Working with community-based mechanisms to ensure that these councils stop applying or endorsing harmful traditional practices should therefore be a top priority. The government's justice-sector strategies in 2005 and 2008 have held that the government must provide oversight of informal justice by the formal justice sector in order to avoid decisions that contradict human rights principles.

## The Way Forward

The challenges to significantly improving human rights in Afghanistan are colossal, but a carefully thought-out strategy that encompass short-term and long-term achievable objectives is key to addressing these critical prob-

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6. *Bad, Painful Sedative* (Kabul: Women and Children Legal Research Foundation, 2004).

lems. The political will of the government of Afghanistan and its international partners is an essential prerequisite for achieving any of these goals.

In the short term, a key objective should be to end impunity for past and present crimes committed against the powerless by powerful people. Implementation of the Action Plan for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation, which was adopted in December 2006, would be a crucial step in achieving this goal. As a first step, the government must fully utilize and respect the recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Panel on senior government appointments.

To end impunity and protect human rights, the government must also transform the justice sector through a comprehensive plan that addresses the police, prosecutor's offices, and the judiciary. This plan must include a review of laws and procedures and the administration of each of these institutions. Most importantly, it should incorporate a strategy for capacity building and training and developing new human resources through a human rights friendly approach. Additionally, the recent National Justice Sector Strategy approved by the Afghan government has many positive points and must now be implemented but with greater attention to human rights than addressed in the strategy.

It is vital that Afghan civil-society organizations also develop a strategic vision of advocacy focused on the protection and promotion of human rights. Consistent pressure and advocacy by civil society will hold the government accountable and will force it to address serious human rights issues. The civil-society sector has blossomed in many ways since 2001, but it requires significant new investment to bear fruit. The role played by civil society in putting pressure on the Afghan Parliament to improve the recent media law is an excellent example of the potential for positive change through a coalition effort.

Negative traditional practices will remain a long-term challenge to the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan. A concerted and systematic effort involving the Afghan government, the Parliament, the judiciary, religious leaders, and civil society will be required to modify and eliminate socially rooted practices. As a first step, the executive and legislature should work to define the most problematic traditional practices, developing both innovative programs to engage society and legislation that penalizes rights violators.

Ultimately, citizens and civil society are key to building the perception that ordinary Afghans are entitled to their rights and that even traditional practices do not justify their violation. Afghan citizens must be brought on board through human rights education. It is critical for citizens to develop a strong sense of responsibility toward one another and society and a shared

sense of citizenship. To achieve this objective, human rights education and awareness raising programs must be infused with Afghan cultural values that are in accordance with international human rights standards. The elders, community forums, and moderate religious leaders should be engaged in human rights promotion all the way from the village level to district, provincial, and national levels.

Finally, the international community must hold the government of Afghanistan accountable to these commitments. International aid money should, in part, be conditioned on the government's progress in achieving the human rights benchmarks set in millennium development goals and other international compacts that Afghanistan has signed with the international community. Human rights are not the responsibility of any one group—citizens, civil society, the state, or the international community. Only when these groups are all working together can progress truly be achieved.

# The Arrested Development of Afghan Women

*Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam*

In a dusty, sun-drenched plain in one of Kabul's suburbs, women squatted in small groups under the watchful eye of cable-wielding Taliban, waiting for a relief distribution of food items. As a relief delegate surveying this sea of blue burkas in 1998, I wondered who was under the all-enveloping cloth. Some of these women had seen ten and even twenty years of war and suffering already, and it was difficult to imagine what the future held for them in a context of ongoing conflict and violence. The international assistance community was slowly pushing the boundaries of women's projects, anticipating an uphill struggle with an increasingly intransigent Taliban leadership, but little did anyone know that a series of unexpected events over the next ten years would make the lives of women such as these very different in some ways while leaving many aspects of their day-to-day existence unchanged. Apart from a brief hiatus after the fall of the Taliban, the situation of conflict and violence restarted with renewed vigor, making Afghanistan a volatile context in which to predict outcomes and plot future trajectories for any group.

There have been many positive developments in healthcare, education, and employment, but much more needs to be done to encourage families to make accommodations that lead to more gender equitable outcomes, particularly in healthcare and education. Families need to be reassured that the state can provide a safe and wholesome environment in which women can be allowed to emerge and operate, without, for instance, the threat of public violence. Assistance organizations and policymakers need to find ways to help women negotiate better outcomes for gender-related conflicts within their families and communities. Finally, it is clear that without a viable poverty reduction strategy that does more than pay lip service to gender considerations, the lives of millions of women and girls will not improve in the immediate or distant future.

## Women and the State

The family was and remains for the majority of women—rural and urban, provincial and Kabuli—the focus of their activities and energy. Being an accepted member of the family, joining a family through marriage, and creating and guiding a new family is the key to survival and societal acceptance. Afghanistan's culture and Afghan interpretations of Islam stress private life as the arena in which women are meant to expend their energies, thrive, be supported, cherished, and honored. For example, one well-known Pashtun saying states that women should be in the house or in the grave, while another depicts the women as the "light of the house." A woman with no support from immediate or extended family simply cannot survive economically or socially. The state has rarely provided economic or political support to such women and state attempts to change the lives of women have often been viewed with suspicion.<sup>1</sup> With the breakdown of any form of legitimate rule throughout years of war and violence in Afghanistan, families formed a lifeline for many women to such an extent that those who lost their family's males usually fell into a life of destitution and exploitation. The reality for women is that they have no other choice but to stay within their prescribed roles, particularly in a post-conflict setting with a weak government, growing insecurity, and economic hardship. This can be an exceptionally bitter pill to swallow for those who know that life can be different.

State policy toward women has been decided by male leaders, most recently in response to international pressure rather than widespread agitation or lobbying by ordinary women. For the majority of women, relations with the state have always been mediated through family males. Where the state historically brought change was usually in the lives of women from elite families who were paraded as success stories but who were often under pressure to pursue family ambitions. History has shown that elite women have rarely had the power or interest to foster change for the bulk of ordinary women. Economic status is highly relevant as the experiences of poor women have always differed markedly compared to those from better-off segments of society. Women from poor, rural, remote, or insecure areas were rarely touched by developments in Kabul and other urban centers and continue to exhibit low gender-development indicators relative to the rest of the country. As a result, putting women from elite groups into public and political positions rarely serves the interests of women as a whole and does not lead to the formation of women's lobbies represent-

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1. See David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

ing a broad spectrum of Afghan society. The new Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has no political power and little capacity to implement the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, which was recently endorsed by the government. Women are now found in the Parliament, the cabinet, ministries, the judiciary, and the security forces, and there are plans to increase the number of women in the civil service,<sup>2</sup> but this sort of proliferation has been seen in the past and its impact is ephemeral.

The impetus for gendered change largely relies on international pressure on the government, which has to perform a balancing act to avoid a backlash from conservative elements at home. In the past, this balancing act led to a pendulum effect in which moderate governments with policies that favored women's emergence in public were followed by fundamentalist regimes that oppressed women and limited them to the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup> Women were treated benignly or greeted violently, depending on the swing of the pendulum and the nature of the regime, and only found safety if they did not emerge from the family sphere. There has been little attempt by government to enter and alter women's existence in the inner sanctum of the family. Despite ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003, for instance, the current government has no intention of overstepping boundaries and inviting a conservative backlash. Deteriorating security conditions have also historically led regimes to crack down on women's liberties, and women's rights are generally the first casualty in the rush to concede to conservative elements. As long as women themselves do not become a social, economic, and political force in their own right, this pendulum swing will continue.

State provision of essential services to women has been patchy.<sup>4</sup> For example, there has been some improvement in the provision of services—mostly implemented by NGOs—with the roll out of the Basic Package of

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2. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) stated that 20 percent of the government workforce will be women by the end of 2012–13 and that the number of women in the civil service will rise by 30 percent. Afghanistan National Development Strategy 1387–1391 (2008–2013) (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008), [www.ands.gov.af/ands/final\\_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%20Strategy\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/final_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%20Strategy_eng.pdf) (accessed October 30, 2008).
  3. See Maliha Zulfacar, "The Pendulum of Gender Politics in Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 25, nos. 1 and 2 (2006): 27–59.
  4. Only 9 percent of rural households surveyed in 2003 reported a health facility in their village and only 19 percent of rural births were attended by a skilled attendant in 2006, although this figure was more than 60 percent in urban areas. Ministry of Public Health, "Afghanistan Health Survey, 2006," [www.moph.gov.af/hmis-reports/health-survey/afghanistan-health-survey-report](http://www.moph.gov.af/hmis-reports/health-survey/afghanistan-health-survey-report) (accessed October 30, 2008).

Health Services and the Back to School campaign.<sup>5</sup> There is growing recognition that the problem lies as much in women and girls not being allowed to access services as in actual lack of service provision. Much remains to be done to address this issue. Formal attempts to boost employment opportunities for women have been minimal. The government now recognizes that certain categories of women are chronically poor or vulnerable and has made provisions in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy for a small number to benefit from employment generation. This ignores the complexity of poverty and vulnerability, especially for women. It is clear that the state has to facilitate the advance of women held back by conservatism, oppression, ignorance, neglect, or poverty and to help women cooperate and negotiate with informal institutions that can hold them hostage.

## Informal Institutions

The short reach of the Afghan state beyond Kabul limits its ability to reach women in the provinces and rural areas and among the poorer segments of society. In such environments where the state arguably has no presence and is not currently engaged in female-focused change, informal institutions and networks—notably family, community, and market—take precedence. These institutions and networks are also most often the ones that force the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction when state policies are considered to be overstepping the mark. Women rarely achieve power and prominence in informal economic or political structures that wield real power in the provinces and hinterlands, although modest numbers of women are entering formal governance structures and a smaller number of them are manipulating access to resources to set up their own small, informal patron-client networks. Such informal institutions have to be identified and brought into processes attempting to change the lives of Afghan women and girls.

Women have as yet to create a powerful domestic lobby—a real women's movement or broad-based women's coalition in Afghanistan that can represent poor and marginalized women and provide an alternative support base for all women, unsupported by male-dominated families and

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5. According to the ANDS, "The Back to School campaign launched in 2002 aimed to get 1.5 million children enrolled in primary and secondary education. From under one million in 2001, the school population has grown to 5.7 million in 2007. New enrollments into grade one have ranged between 12 and 14 percent per annum in the last five years. Two million of the enrolled children (or 35 percent) are girls—a 35 percent increase in five years. In keeping with the exponential increase in enrollment, the number of schools has trebled to 9,062 in 2007, including 1,337 all-girls' and 4,325 coeducational schools." Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 117.

communities. Such groups have to demonstrate outreach beyond Kabul and have the possibility to affect both formal and informal institutions. Although there has been a growth of small women's groups operating as non-governmental organization, these groups are reliant on goodwill and funding from the international community and are largely trapped between donor dictates and pressure to conform to cultural stereotypes. They rarely represent the interests of ordinary Afghan women or rock the boat by supporting women to step outside prescribed roles. Without concerted efforts to build and support broad coalitions of women who have a vested interest in empowering women supporters, women will continue to look to men for permission to advance.

## Public Violence

A critical but neglected area in state building in Afghanistan has been the ability of the state to protect women from violence, especially in the transition of women from the private to the public sphere. Conflict, mass displacement, and encroaching Islamicization severely strained or altered reciprocal arrangements within communities, including those that protect women in specific circumstances, such as inter or intratribal conflict. This led to a breakdown in social policing by communities and households. With the descent into anarchy in the 1990s, women were exposed to much greater levels of sexual violence. This has remained unacknowledged as many of those whose militias were responsible have not been held accountable. Today, many women in conflict-affected areas of the south and east continue to face sexual violence, abduction, or forced or underage marriage. However, the magnitude of these abuses and the identity of the perpetrators all remain a mystery as discussion of sexual violence remains taboo.

Under mujahideen and Taliban control, the punishment of women became a demonstration of Islamic fervor, setting a precedent for nonfamily members to take it upon themselves to punish women for infractions perceived to threaten diffuse notions of "honor." Under the banner of protecting women's "honor," the Taliban exercised violence against women and denied them access to basic services and opportunities relating to their education, health, rights to justice, and livelihoods. Forms of public violence including deliberate attacks on girl students and women teachers continue today and remain unpunished.<sup>6</sup> There has been no real political acknowledgment, will, or commitment to stop such acts as public

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6. See UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report 2008 (New York: United Nations Children's Fund, 2008), [www.unicef.org/har08/index.html](http://www.unicef.org/har08/index.html) (accessed October 30, 2008).

manifestations of deliberate, violence against women and girls. Such incidents have a profound impact on the confidence of women and the willingness of their families to allow them to engage in public life. Contributing to public violence, violent behavior against women and girls in the private realm of the household generally continues to be perceived as “natural” and a right for family males. This situation is unlikely to change for children and women without national policies and action plans. There have been some efforts to address private violence against women and to make the issue public. The MoWA has an arrangement with a number of NGOs that are charged with providing shelter for abused women and there have been small advocacy campaigns, but this hardly represents a firm commitment from the state to reduce violence against women.

## **The Role of the Family**

Historically, what elite families allowed their women to do was not seen as a precedent for ordinary women to follow, because such families were viewed as being corrupted by exposure to foreign influences or driven by external interests. Change for families has, however, led to profound change for women, with accompanying accommodations between the sexes that have not been adequately researched. Notably, many of these changes came about as a result of families being displaced to other Muslim countries, where Afghans witnessed girls going to school, women holding jobs, and girls and women accessing healthcare with no loss of honor for their families and communities. Even after returning to Afghanistan, many of those families began to integrate prowoman developments into their own conceptualizations of well-being and culture. They lent support to educational and health programs and business opportunities for women where they existed and continue to carve out a culturally acceptable space for them. Families have also been influenced by other factors in embracing change. These include media attention to the plight of women under the Taliban and economic duress. Also, increasingly educated men want wives and daughters with a certain level of education and knowledge of hygiene. For some, attitudes gradually shifted from considering women or girls’ attendance at clinics, schools, or a job as damaging to family honor to viewing such activities as crucial to family well-being.

Despite these changes, many girls are still forced to drop out from education because a girl with too much education is considered difficult to marry. Women may still be impeded from accessing healthcare by male or female family members for a range of reasons. Women’s ability to access

an income can create tension, particularly as women want the weight in family decision making that should be theirs by right. More needs to be done to show the benefits of women and girls' full access to services and participation in all aspects of family and community life. Many women who grew up in Iran, Pakistan, or farther afield have found it difficult to return to a more cloistered life in Afghanistan—some return, some suffer depression, and a small number struggle to overcome the restrictions that they face. They do not find the support that they need to change their environment and they do not have the tools to avoid conflict and negotiate better outcomes within their families and communities. Such unresolved tensions contribute to a situation of incomplete or arrested development.

Although women have begun to ponder whether they should accept unhappy marriages, abuse, and violence within the family, especially as they learn more about their rights through increased media attention, they have no other sources of support to help them survive alone without the legitimacy and respectability conferred by the presence of a male family member. Theoretically, the law gives them choices about, for example, life partners, but no authorities are willing to help women exercise those rights as yet. Women's access to justice and protection remains woeful. In a country where land ownership conveys power and economic possibilities, women are often impeded from claiming inheritance by male family members and most women do not own property in their own right.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in many parts of the country, women continue to be treated as chattels.

Outdated and one-sided notions of honor and shame pervade and underpin cultural norms and practices that emphasize female modesty and purity and define men as breadwinners and protectors of the family. Manliness or gherat is measured in terms of control of one's womenfolk. One of the main outcomes of this association is that concerns about the threats to women's integrity and security have led to the imposition of rigid gender-based "rules of the game." This system has become one-sided because women must adhere to their "rules" by dressing modestly and acting with propriety while men can eschew theirs—for example, by throwing widows out on the street rather than supporting them. Much of the focus on "honor" can be read as anxiety among men about how they will have

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7. See Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *Women's Groups in Afghan Civil Society: Women and Men Working towards Equitable Participation in Civil Society Organizations* (Kabul: Counterpart International, 2006); Liz Alden Wily, *Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2003); Liz Alden Wily, *Land Relations in Bamyan Province: Findings from a 15 Village Case Study*; *Land Relations in Faryab Province: Findings from a Field Study in 11 Villages* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

to reorient themselves in relation to the shifting position of women in society. If handled incorrectly, this shift could exacerbate hostile resistance to women's rights for the foreseeable future.

## Adolescents

Sixty-eight percent of the population of Afghanistan is under the age of twenty-five,<sup>8</sup> making adolescents (and children) important policy targets. Yet, there is no national youth program or framework for addressing any issues specific to this age group. There are no national efforts targeted at helping adolescent boys and girls explore and debate existing gender relations. Girls growing up in Afghanistan are receiving mixed messages. Ten years ago there were very few accessible role models for women. Most women would cite the heroine of the Afghan War, Malalai, or less frequently Mina, martyred head of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, as inspirations. Now there are many role models, including Sima Samar, head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, parliament members Shukria Barakzai and Malalai Joya, and Habiba Surabi, Afghanistan's first-ever female governor. Their value as role models may be hotly contested, but educated young women now see the possibility of achieving the same status as these women and may face barriers and conflict as they strive to do so.

Young people have dramatically increased access to information about the world beyond their family via radio, television, mobile phone, and the Internet. They increasingly want to be part of the international community but feel unsupported in their efforts to end their isolation. While the state publicizes support for women's empowerment, the reality is that nobody can assist young girls if their family denies them access to education, healthcare, or the right to leave the house and look for work. They rarely have the power to question or change their quality of life and they may even be exposed to different forms of abuse and violence. Furthermore, they may be denied recourse to justice. Even families with a benign outlook see an environment where those who perpetrate crimes and abuses against women and girls go unpunished, making them more anxious about allowing their daughters to emerge in public.

Currently, despite the efforts of the Afghan government, one out of four children will die before their fifth birthday if child mortality rates do

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8. United Nations Development Programme–Afghanistan, “National Joint Youth Programme,” [www.undp.org.af/WhoWeAre/UNDPinAfghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj\\_youth.htm](http://www.undp.org.af/WhoWeAre/UNDPinAfghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj_youth.htm) (accessed October 30, 2008).

not improve.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, every fourth child will leave school before the age of nine,<sup>10</sup> many to assist parents with housework, agriculture, or business. Without a high school or university education, these children will be locked into low or unpaid labor arrangements.<sup>11</sup> One in nine mothers, many in their teens, will die in childbirth or shortly after if maternal mortality health indicators do not improve.<sup>12</sup> These indicators are exacerbated in areas of heightened insecurity. In addition, it is estimated that 42 percent of Afghans live on or below the poverty line, meaning that approximately 12 million Afghans do not meet their minimum daily food and nonfood requirements.<sup>13</sup> If government policies and programs do not adequately reduce poverty in the next ten years, many children and especially girls in poor families will not have access to good nutrition, healthcare, or education. In rural areas and more remote locales, unchecked environmental degradation will lead to women and children walking farther and taking more risks in search of water, fodder, and fuel. Water shortage, deforestation, soil erosion, and drought will lead to family crises, profound changes in livelihood patterns, and possibly exacerbated gender discrimination within families, such as dramatically lowered marriage ages for girls as families try to reduce the number of mouths to feed. Women and girls in these categories will live a short life of drudgery and morbidity.

## Conclusions

To conclude, there are a number of areas where the state and informal institutions can be encouraged and assisted to take a stronger role. Women can only truly stand on their own two feet if they are secure from public and private violence. In line with the state's commitment to CEDAW, there is a need for state and local leaderships to take a stronger position vis-à-vis violence against women and to improve women's access to formal and informal justice. This is part of the process of creating the right environment that will encourage families to increase freedoms for women and girls. Improved education will bring about attendant improvements in

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9. UNICEF, "Afghanistan: Background," [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_background.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_background.html) (accessed October 30, 2008).
  10. See Amir Mansory, *Drop Out Study in Basic Education Level of Schools in Afghanistan* (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 2007).
  11. See Hector Maletta, "Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan 2003–5," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43 (2008): 173–96.
  12. UNICEF, "UNICEF and Partners Come Together to Help Reduce Maternal Mortality in Afghanistan," [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_39281.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_39281.html) (accessed October 30, 2008).
  13. Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 27.

health and possibly other areas, but only if the state can mobilize families to keep girls in school. Improvements in health will see a drop in infant and maternal mortality rates, but not unless there is specific targeting of poorer women in rural or remote areas. It is clear that the state needs to continue to improve its track record in providing services to women and girls. Informal institutions from the family upward also need to be encouraged to remove obstacles to access, mostly through continued exposure to information about the positive outcomes of improved access for Afghan society as a whole. At the family and community level, it is necessary to help women and girls resolve conflicts and tensions by giving them better negotiating skills and even bargaining chips. Improving women's access to inheritance is just one way of achieving this goal. The state should also recognize that women are not a homogeneous whole and that to improve the situation of women, special attention will have to be paid to the needs of poorer women and girls and adolescents in particular, who carry great potential for change.

Finally, without better awareness from Afghan policymakers and people of how family dynamics consistently advance and arrest the development of women, it will be difficult to translate state policies into reality. This in turn requires better understanding of the unequal power plays involved in maintaining "face" and supporting notions of honor that only favor men. This requires sound analysis, carefully stimulated reflection, and healthy debate at the popular and policy level. The extraction of women from the honor equation is absolutely critical for the advancement of women. Ultimately, however, until women understand that they have rights as individuals and a sense of women's solidarity is engendered, it is unlikely that Afghan women will have the political power needed to hold on to strategic gains and to stop the pendulum swinging against them once more.

## 8

# Culture and Contest

*Jolyon Leslie*

As for members of any society, the notion of culture is an important aspect of national identity for Afghans. Along with tradition—which ranges from religious and social customs to certain uses of language—culture serves as a mirror by which Afghans express and understand what it means to belong to the “imagined community” that is their nation. For this reason, it is difficult in today’s Afghanistan to distinguish between what may be perceived as culture and tradition. From the manner in which Afghans greet and address one another to the songs that they sing and the dances that they perform, culture and tradition help to link the diverse communities that inhabit the land known as Afghanistan.

As with so many other aspects of contemporary Afghan life, culture is a site of contest. At the heart of this contest is the tension between official commitments to respect for cultural diversity and pluralism, as articulated in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, and the perception within socially conservative communities that many of the newfound freedoms and innovations pose a threat to their Afghan identity. Added to this, with a legacy of state control and political manipulation of cultural life, many Afghans today seem to sense that their culture is under siege.

One of the arenas in which this cultural contest now plays out is the Internet. Beyond the grasp of civil servants accustomed to having control over people’s lives, cyberspace offers many Afghans—especially the young—access to ideas, information, and contacts that were denied to their parents. With the potential to enrich Afghan culture, the Internet can also have a negative impact and is viewed by many Afghans who fear that their cherished cultural identity—and the established norms and behavior that this implies—could be lost in a welter of external influences.

The notion of cultural identity in contemporary Afghanistan stands at the intersection of religion, social behavior, and the arts; it is the latter realm that the state aspires to influence through promotion or control. In particular, the fine arts and the media have been vehicles through which successive regimes have tried to project a vision of Afghan identity domestically and internationally. For example, the promotion by the ruling elite of Western styles of architecture and the performing arts in the 1920s and ‘30s went hand in hand with the wider process of social reform. If

Afghans were to be “modern,” the elite believed that they needed to both inhabit a new type of built environment and be exposed to unfamiliar concepts of cultural expression. Similarly, in the 1970s and ‘80s, “kultur” became part of the revolutionary vision promoted by leftists. And now, today, while the present vision for Afghanistan might be couched in developmental language, many civil servants use aspects of culture as a vehicle for promoting the state. For example, the traditional *atan* dance, commonly performed by Pashtun men and used by the Soviet-backed regime in the 1980s as a demonstration of its nationalism, is again in use as a symbol by the government in the face of a largely Pashtun-led insurgency.

## The Culture of Division

Although culture is an issue that could help to bind Afghans together, leaders of differing political persuasions have long used it as a means of setting them apart from the “other.” The resistance to the social reforms of Amanullah Khan in the 1920s was as much a reaction to perceived intrusions on a conservative social culture as a political movement. Both while in exile and while in power in Kabul between 1992 to 1996, mujahideen leaders used the notion of Islamic culture to define a conservative image of Afghan identity that was, by implication, free of alien (that is, Soviet) influence. Also drawing on conservative traditions, the Taliban attempted to impose what they deemed to be a “purer” vision of Islamic culture that they felt had universal relevance across the Islamic world (*umma*). And since 2001, as part of a conscious portrayal of the nation as victim, Afghan politicians attribute the country’s “loss of culture” (whether material or intangible) to foreign hands. The defense of “Afghan cultural values” has long been used as a rallying cry by rulers and their opponents alike in the face of real and perceived threats.

Even today, there is an uncanny symmetry across the political divide in the portrayal of a physical and cultural domination by outsiders. On the one hand, the armed opposition persuasively portrays its struggle as one of defense of Afghan values in the face of a puppet regime that is unable to curb the military and social intrusions of foreign military forces on which it depends for survival. On the other hand, a diverse range of politicians in Kabul rail against the hugely popular Indian soap operas carried by private television channels, which are portrayed as being antithetical to Afghan cultural values. The very notion that the identity of a nation that includes millions of returnees who successfully assimilated new aspects of cultural expression from their host communities can be perceived as under threat

from mere television programs bears out the manner in which cultural issues are being manipulated.

It is perhaps due to this continuing manipulation of culture for political ends that a good deal of contemporary creative endeavors in Afghanistan now takes place outside of the official realm. Just as was the case in the past, a clear distinction between the public and private realms persists in most Afghan lives. The state tends to be kept at arm's length from family or community, even if official acknowledgment and support for cultural activity can be a source of pride and may bring with it material or other benefits. As they become less reliant on state support, creative Afghans now seek out myriad alternative opportunities in their various fields. The proliferation of small foundations and non-governmental organizations across the country has contributed to a renewed interest in cultural issues, as has access to ideas and information through the private media and the Internet.

The case of the regulation of media is, due to its political sensitivity, complex. A new media law that provides for legal regulation as an alternative to the current direct control that the state exerts has been championed by a diverse coalition of politicians—not all of whom are “liberals”—and civil-society groups. While careful to present an enlightened image to their international sponsors, the government in Kabul continues to oppose substantive reform, portraying their control as essential for the defense of Afghan values and the maintenance of national stability.

No longer the primary player in a complex social and cultural landscape, civil servants in the Ministry of Information and Culture have, with limited resources, grappled with a mandate that straddles broadcast and print media, literature, archaeology, conservation, fine and performing arts, tourism, and youth. With many institutions still staffed by civil servants with experience only of a state-centred approach, in which control is perceived to be their primary responsibility, progress on realigning the official role within the cultural realm has been limited. This is clearly borne out in the gulf between a provision in the 2004 Constitution, which states that “pluralistic media development and culture are . . . necessary for the achievement of the MDGs (millennium development goals), from education to poverty eradication, from health to environmental sustainability and gender equality . . . and empowering an informed civil society,” and a caveat in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, which states that “sensitive issues such as gender policies, public health, national security . . . cultural survival and national values cannot be reasonably handed over to the private sector.”

A gulf between rhetoric and reality also pervades the “benchmarks” that have marked the various stages of the political transition since 2001.

In the culture realm, returning Afghans and donors alike seemed to have unrealistic expectations about the nature and scope of transformation that might be possible after the long conflict. In many cases, initiatives seem to have been conceived with the assumption that cultural activity had been entirely wiped out during the war and subsequent Taliban era and that it was therefore necessary to begin from scratch. One example is the manner in which excitable donors to musical initiatives continue to portray their support as the “revival of a forbidden art”—much to the bemusement of musicians who had quietly continued to play their instruments through the Taliban era, just as they had under previous bans by mujahideen factions. Along with other artists, Afghan musicians need time to recover and develop their skills, and deserve acknowledgment and sustained professional support more than pity as victims of a period of intolerance.

## **A Vision for Culture**

The state’s official vision for the sector, as articulated in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, is to “maintain unity while celebrating diversity” and to “respect the pluralistic culture, values and history of Afghanistan, based on Islam.” In the subsequent ANDS document, the contribution of culture is described in more overtly political terms as the promotion of “continuity, tolerance, national integrity and stability.” Intended largely for an external audience, this latter statement neatly delineates the contest that lies at the heart of contemporary Afghan culture; the tension between a “modern” vision of pluralism and freedom of individual expression (tolerance) and the reality of social conservatism (continuity), and a legacy of state control (national integrity) and political manipulation (stability).

Just as has been the case through Afghanistan’s modern history, it is today as difficult as ever to reconcile these tensions. In the current context, it seems important that national cultural policy both acknowledges what has not changed by affirming the diversity of existing traditions and outlines what should change by identifying realistic opportunities for innovation. In order for these dimensions to develop in tandem, investments in information and education would seem to be critical to ensure that Afghans of all walks of life know more about their rich cultural history. Indeed, with nearly half of the current population under the age of sixteen, there is scope for social and cultural issues to be more effectively communicated through both the national broadcast media and integrated into the educational curriculum at all levels. As one example, the appropriately named Hidden Afghanistan exhibition of artifacts that has toured Europe and the United States has not been accompanied by any meaningful cultural education

inside Afghanistan. Together with support for training of professionals in relevant fields, investments in information and education might ensure that the next generation of Afghans is better equipped to address the complex range of issues that will affect future cultural development.

To reflect the contemporary reality, a national cultural strategy also needs to define the roles and potential of government, non-governmental, and individual contributions to the development process. More specifically, creative ways need to be identified to ensure that official involvement facilitates the diversity of cultural activity well beyond the scope of existing policies and practice by relying on due process of legal regulation, such as the media law, rather than by trying to reassert direct control over cultural activity.

Moreover, a strategy for cultural development needs to be realistic. Not only should it reflect the actual capacity of institutions and the chronic lack of professional skills or experience in some fields, but it should also understand the pace at which transformations might be possible. In some quarters, it has seemed that innovation and change has been pursued for its own sake, while little heed has been paid to the continuity that prevails in many aspects of cultural life in Afghanistan.

If the vision is to be realized through workable programs, these need to be clearly prioritized and sequenced, as not everything will be possible at one time. For example, one of the benchmarks set out in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact was the preparation by 2007 of a complete "inventory of cultural treasures," with a commitment to limit looting, to halt the illegal export of artifacts, and to restore damaged monuments by the end of 2010. With no national register of archaeological sites, let alone an effective system of listing historic monuments, the skills to embark on conservation initiatives, or the capacity to enforce the law, these targets remain little more than tokens. The government has failed to come up with a strategy for achieving these targets, and most external donors have failed to align their investments with them.

## **Problems and Obstacles**

In a context of huge loss of cultural memory and material, coupled with a disruption of formal and informal processes of education, the critical obstacles to cultural development seem to be the legacy of politicization and direct state control of many aspects of culture and the media; a lack of skills and experience among Afghan professionals; and a chronic lack of imagination and coordination among both Afghan and external players.

As if taking a cue from the overtly political nature of much of the external support provided for culture since 2002, over which the government initially

had limited control, official practice increasingly seems to be driven by a form of assertive nationalism. In marked contrast to the tone that pervades their pronouncements to their international sponsors, some Afghan politicians seem intent on exploiting growing domestic discontent by blaming the faltering process of reform and development—in culture and other fields—on outsiders. The protracted negotiations around the new media law are but one example of how reforms are portrayed as a threat. It is particularly ironic that an administration that is currently mounting a legal challenge to this law on the grounds that it is “unconstitutional” seems oblivious to the fact that those behind the ongoing insurgency have already outflanked it by demonstrating a consummate mastery of the Internet—which lies beyond official control.

In pursuit of a growing official preoccupation with control, many civil servants seem to perceive themselves as protectors of an Afghan cultural identity that seems to be little more than a political legacy from past regimes. Even though the writ of the Ministry of Information and Culture may not in fact extend far and its capacity remains threadbare, its manifest failure to adopt a more facilitative approach—even after six years of international investment—represents a huge missed opportunity for cultural development in the country. Despite repeated commitments since 2002 to a new form of governance, as much energy now seems to go into pointless struggles for control as into tangible support for activities that are presented as priorities or into practical programs that might effectively integrate culture into a wider process of development. As in many other sectors, externally funded programs continue to be viewed by some civil servants as a resource with which to extend political, ethnic, or factional patronage. Together with patchy management and, in many cases, pressure from donors to spend contributions quickly, this often results in failure and mutual recriminations.

The same quick-fix approach has handicapped many of the efforts to develop professional skills among Afghan cultural institutions. In the absence of a coherent strategy for the sector, it remains impossible to set clear priorities for training and skills development in critical fields. There has been little support for the notion of undertaking a systematic analysis of needs across the cultural professions and disciplines. As is the case in other sectors, external donors continue to rely largely on highly visible, set-piece interventions (with a largely urban focus) rather than on processes that might take time to bear fruit and that depend on investments for success. One illustration of this syndrome lies in the National Museum in Kabul, whose gleaming equipment and finishes provided by dozens of well-intentioned donors lies largely unused due to a lack of trained Afghan staff.

After more than six years of investments, the museum remains little more than a shell—a building without a coherent program of activities. While ineffectual management clearly plays a part in this situation, it has been exacerbated by the piecemeal approach of donors who expect the director to work with an ill-matched jigsaw puzzle of equipment and skill sets.

To an extent, the roots of the current lack of direction in the cultural realm go back to the early stages of the transition, when the United Nations failed in its mandate to coordinate and assist the Afghan administration in developing effective strategies and setting priorities in the cultural arena. Since this unpromising start, Afghan officials have struggled to catch up in the face of deepening challenges, while having to listen to repeated commitments from their international partners to try harder and coordinate more effectively. Under the circumstances, they can perhaps be forgiven for remaining skeptical about the nature of international “engagement” in this and other spheres.

## Recommendations

If there is one lesson to be drawn from the experience of the past six years in Afghanistan in the cultural realm as elsewhere, it is the need for realism and focus. This is not to deny the need for some form of guiding vision for culture, but it and any associated strategies need to be grounded in the social, economic, and political realities of the country if they are to be workable. In order to arrive at a more effective approach toward cultural development, it is vital for Afghans to do the following:

- Locate education at the heart of any strategy for cultural development. Future generations of Afghans are more likely to effectively safeguard their heritage and participate in cultural initiatives if they are aware of the rich base on which they can draw and develop. This requires investments in a national broadcast media that will serve as a vehicle for raising awareness and promoting debate about culture and other development issues across the country. The integration of cultural subjects into the formal educational curriculum, for which appropriate materials need to be developed and teachers need to be instructed in their use, should also be considered a priority.
- Acknowledge that it is ordinary Afghans who are in many cases the custodians of traditional culture and who need to be part of the debate about the process of development. As things stand, there is a risk that the focus on “high” culture for the urban elite ignores those who might otherwise make a valuable contribution to grassroots programs

that celebrate the continuity of traditional culture and whose experience and knowledge needs to be acknowledged and fostered.

- Focus on what is achievable in the current circumstances. For example, there is little point in setting an objective to assign thousands of guards to protect archaeological sites across the country from further looting, with little notion of how they will operate in areas where the writ of the national army and police does not run. Failure to take account of the facts on the ground will only result in failure of cultural and other initiatives, no matter how well-intentioned.
- Create a viable role for official institutions in which they facilitate—rather than try to control—the arts and media. It is the imagination of Afghans—and not the policies of any government—that has enabled a rich culture to develop over time, and it is Afghans who should continue to decide on its value or relevance to their lives. This is an intensely political issue that will take time to address and requires imagination and compromises along the way.
- Foster processes of creativity and, where appropriate, innovation through longer-term support for cultural programs that are conceived by Afghans. Meaningful cultural development will not be built on the quick-impact events that are favored by Afghan politicians and some external donors alike.
- Learn lessons from the successes and failures of cultural initiatives in other parts of the region as a basis from which to design programs tailored to the Afghan context.

At a time when the significant transformations that have taken place over the past six years in the lives of many Afghans risk being obscured by uncertainty among the international community about its goals in the country, it is important to acknowledge the extraordinary richness and continuity of cultural activity in Afghanistan, and to learn from this in order to determine how best to contribute to its development.

# Afghanistan and Its Region

*William Maley*

On the morning of Monday, July 7, 2008, a vehicle packed with explosives was detonated at the main gate of the Indian embassy in Kabul, killing more than forty. The victims included Indian diplomats, Afghans queuing for visas, traders in the street, and passing motorists.<sup>1</sup> At one level, the attack was simply another in a string of atrocities that have claimed lives in the Afghan capital since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001—starting with a now largely forgotten blast outside the Spinzhar Hotel in downtown Kabul in September 2002. But at a deeper level, it also symbolized Afghanistan’s entanglement in a region marked by complex, interlocking security dilemmas and patterns of distrust. Afghanistan’s long-run stability, and that of the region more broadly, will in large measure depend on how effectively these challenges can be addressed.

What further complicates the management of these challenges is that they are deeply rooted in the strained relations among states in the region, with state-backed nonstate actors serving as a further aggravating influence. This long-standing character of regional tensions means that a heavy burden of suspicion hangs over the region like an ominous cloud. Producing long-term and durable solutions to the region’s problems is thus not simply a matter of coming up with ideas that to outsiders might seem to offer “win-win” solutions; it is also a matter of recognizing that the distrust among key actors is so serious that implementation of measures to improve regional relations will likely be derailed unless confidence-building and reassurance measures are used effectively.<sup>2</sup> All this creates an exceptionally difficult environment in which to engage in meaningful peacebuilding.

The aim of this essay is to flesh out some of these complexities. It begins with a brief account of how Afghanistan’s region took shape politically. It then turns to some of the specific relationships that have proved to be problematic for the region: the relations between India and Pakistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran and the United States, and the United States and

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1. Abdul Waheed Wafa and Alan Cowell, “Suicide Car Blast Kills 41 in Afghan Capital,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2008.
  2. See Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 183–213.

Pakistan. Finally, it addresses the need for mechanisms through which tensions in some of these relationships might be ameliorated and offers specific recommendations. Unfortunately, one lesson that emerges is that the internal structures of political systems in some key regional states do not greatly assist the building of cooperative relationships. Well-designed and carefully implemented diplomatic steps from actors in the wider world are likely to be needed if much progress is to be made, and this is likely to be a major agenda item for the next U.S. president.

## A Region Takes Shape

What is Afghanistan's "region"? Is it part of the Middle East? Or South Asia? Or West Asia or Central Asia? The question is perhaps not as trivial as it seems. Not "middle" enough to be part of the Middle East, and not "south" enough to be part of South Asia, Afghanistan has suffered from processes of cognitive mapping—especially in key bureaucracies in Western countries—that place it at the periphery of areas in which other countries and issues appear to play more central roles. This was never more obvious than in the aftermath of the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992, when Afghanistan virtually disappeared from the screen.<sup>3</sup> Yet in another respect, the search for precise regional boundaries is a fruitless one. A whole range of factors—geographical, cultural, economic, and political—might be used to define a region, and they need not all push in the same direction. What is more important to emphasize is the fluidity of regional categories. For example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 thrust upon the newly independent republics of Central Asia the need to find new ways of relating to their neighbors and new ways of legitimating political power.<sup>4</sup> This in turn affected Afghanistan as a potential route for the export of resources from those republics.

Rather than fixate on the problem of defining and labeling regions, it may make more sense to focus on the historical means by which territorial states have arisen within a broad area and to identify some of the fallout from these processes. None of the processes at work was calculated to produce a contented neighborhood. In the nineteenth century, Afghanistan became the focus of what was popularly called "the Great Game"—a struggle for influence between Russia and Great Britain in what was a region

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3. See Roy Gutman, *How We Missed the Story: Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, and the Hijacking of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008).
  4. Robert Canfield, "Restructuring in Greater Central Asia: Changing Political Configurations," *Asian Survey* 32, no. 10 (October 2002): 875–87.

of growing strategic significance.<sup>5</sup> Afghanistan's boundaries reflected the capacity of great and major powers—Russia, Great Britain, and Persia—to dominate adjacent territories, and demonstrated their tacit understanding of the benefits of a buffer state that would prevent them from direct border confrontations. Boundaries set in this way did not necessarily pay much attention to the interests of local populations; the classic manifestation of this was the division of the Pashtun ethnic group with the drawing of the so-called Durand Line between Afghanistan and British India in 1893.<sup>6</sup>

In the region more widely, no division was more dramatic in its long-term ramifications than the partition of India in 1947. This event—which should stand as a permanent warning of the risks associated with hasty territorial division as a means of solving complex issues of intercommunal tension—set the scene for poisonous relations between the two units that partition generated, India and Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> The hostility between these two powers has waxed and waned and taken different forms at different times. Its effects, however, have been felt in a number of spheres. On the one hand, it has proved to be a serious obstacle to the development of effective architectures for regional cooperation. For example, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) proved to be a notably weak body, not least because its deliberations were prone to being swamped by rivalry between its two main members. On the other hand, the collapse of the Afghan state in the years following the April 1978 Communist coup provided a perfect theatre in which India and Pakistan could compete for influence at the other's expense. This "exporting" of rivalry has had dire effects on Afghanistan and its people.

## Key Relationships

India-Pakistan relations operate at a number of levels and reflect the influence of diverse policymaking groups. The two countries fought wars over the contested former princely state of Kashmir in 1948 and 1965 and had a major military exchange in 1999 across the so-called Line of Control near the Kashmiri town of Kargil.<sup>8</sup> They also fought in 1971 in the context of East

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5. See Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6. See Louis Dupree, "The Durand Line of 1893: A Case Study in Artificial Political Boundaries and Culture Areas," in *Current Problems in Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Conference, 1961), 77–93.

7. Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 173–82.

8. For more on the wars, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Pakistan's transformation into the independent state of Bangladesh. The issue of Kashmir is an intractable, unresolved point of tension, while the memory of the loss of East Pakistan has entrenched in the minds of at least some in the Pakistan Army the conviction that India would like to obliterate Pakistan altogether. Given that each is a nuclear-weapons state, such fears are far-fetched, but the risks of miscalculation by Indian or Pakistani decision makers understandably alarm some observers in the wider world. With hindsight, Pakistan's Kargil adventure appears to have been an attempt to frighten the United States into pressuring India to come to the table over Kashmir; if so, it miscarried disastrously, with the Clinton administration blaming Pakistan for recklessness in an explosive environment.

In parts of the Pakistan military particularly paranoid views of the region are to be found. Pakistan experienced military rule from 1958 to 1962, 1969 to 1972, and 1977 to 1988, and from Gen. Pervez Musharraf's coup in October 1999 to 2008. A rationale offered for such intrusions into politics has been an overarching duty to save Pakistan from existential threats. One observer has gone so far as to label Pakistan an "insecurity state," and arguably there are some circles in the military, particularly the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, that would have much to fear from lasting improvements in Pakistan's regional relations, because the justification for spending so heavily on the military would shrink.<sup>9</sup> Resentment in Pakistan at the cordial relations between India and Afghanistan since 2002 is palpable and undisguised. Well-founded or not, Pakistani perceptions that the security environment is unremittingly hostile need to be taken into account in crafting workable peacebuilding strategies for the region.<sup>10</sup>

The problems of India-Pakistan relations have spilt into Afghanistan in diverse ways. Afghan anger that the 1947 partition process did not offer "self-determination" to those Pashtuns who separated from their coethnics in 1893 led to tense relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan for much of the three decades after partition—and paradoxically, warm relations between Muslim-majority Afghanistan and Hindu-majority India, albeit under the rubric of a formal Afghan policy of "non-alignment" (bi-tarafi).

9. Thomas Perry Thornton, "Pakistan: Fifty Years of Insecurity," in *India and Pakistan: The First Fifty Years*, eds. Selig S. Harrison, Paul H. Kreisberg, and Dennis Kux, 170–88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The Pakistan military is also heavily involved in the economic life of the country through its control of key corporate actors. As a result, there is a significant stratum of Pakistanis with an economic interest in the perpetuation of a powerful military. See Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007). For further background on the Pakistan Army, see Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

10. See Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November–December 2008): 30–44.

Pakistan in turn hoped for a compliant Afghanistan to provide it with “strategic depth” in the event of conventional conflict between Pakistan and India. These factors, together with an official policy of “Islamization” in Pakistan following the 1977 military takeover, led Pakistan to favor radical Islamic groups rather than nationalist parties when it became a (Western-backed) host for Afghan refugees and Afghan resistance forces (mujahideen) following the April 1978 Communist coup in Kabul and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.<sup>11</sup>

Pakistan’s role as a generous host might have won it long-term influence in Afghanistan. However, by overplaying its hand, it lost all that it had seemingly gained, and more. When the Communist regime collapsed in 1992, Pakistan did its best to promote the extremist Hezb-e Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which was deeply unpopular in Afghanistan. When this failed to bring any real rewards, Islamabad switched its backing to the ultraconservative Taliban movement, turning it into a military force.<sup>12</sup> Although this policy collapsed in ruins with the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan has been a profoundly ambiguous ally to Afghanistan and the United States in dealing with terrorist threats.<sup>13</sup> In a bout of candor in August 2007, President Musharraf went so far as to state that “there is no doubt Afghan militants are supported from Pakistan soil. The problem that you have in your region is because support is provided from our side.”<sup>14</sup> Given Pakistan’s past practices, Kabul understandably suspects an active ISI role in sustaining the Taliban, and much expert commentary supports Kabul’s skepticism,<sup>15</sup> with some pointing to a two-track Pakistani approach

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11. For a detailed account, see Rizwan Hussain, *Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005).
  12. See Anthony Davis, “How the Taliban Became a Military Force,” in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley, 43–71 (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 219–22.
  13. See Ashley J. Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008).
  14. Taimoor Shah and Carlotta Gall, “Afghan Rebels Find Aid in Pakistan, Musharraf Admits,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2007.
  15. See, for example, Frédéric Grare, *Rethinking Western Strategies Toward Pakistan: An Action Agenda for the United States and Europe* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007); Shaun Gregory, “The ISI and the War on Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 12 (2007): 1013–31; Seth G. Jones, “Pakistan’s Dangerous Game,” *Survival* 49, no. 1 (2007): 15–32; Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2008); and Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008).

in which ongoing support for radicalism exists alongside a professed commitment to a stable Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

One reason why Pakistan's destructive effects on Afghanistan have received less attention than they merit is that the attention of major powers has often been elsewhere. Operation Iraqi Freedom constituted a huge distraction from the Afghanistan situation, but another has been the preoccupation of Washington and other capitals with developments in Iran. At the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in November–December 2001, Iran under President Mohammad Khatami played a cooperative and constructive role,<sup>17</sup> and in 2003, via the Swiss ambassador to Iran, a proposal was conveyed to the United States for a “grand bargain” to settle outstanding issues between Washington and Tehran. However, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld reportedly killed this remarkable offer.<sup>18</sup> Following populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as president in 2005, relations went rapidly downward.<sup>19</sup> The United States and Israel found Iran under Ahmadinejad a frightening prospect, especially given Iran's uranium enrichment program. The Iranian leadership, seeing U.S. troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and witnessing the superheated rhetoric of neoconservatives in Washington, felt just as insecure.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth highlighting that Iran's role in Afghanistan has not been remotely as destabilizing as Pakistan's, although there is some evidence that certain entities within Iran may have fed weapons to the Taliban both to keep the United States tied down in Afghanistan and to demonstrate what Iran could do if it were attacked by the United States. Iran has a significant interest in the emergence of a stable Afghanistan and has no strategic interest in the reappearance of the Taliban as a significant force. With an alarming domestic drug abuse problem, Iranian police are actively involved in counternarcotics activities on the Afghanistan-Iran border. Iran has also supported a rail link between eastern Iran and western Afghanistan that in the long run could foster the development of an integrated mass-transport

16. Marvin G. Weinbaum and Jonathan B. Harder, “Pakistan's Afghan Policies and Their Consequences,” *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 25–38, 27.

17. See Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan,” *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 235–56; James F. Dobbins, *After the Taliban: Nation-Building in Afghanistan* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2008).

18. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 243–50, 341–42.

19. See Ali Ansari, *Iran under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation*, Adelphi Paper no. 393 (New York: Routledge, 2007).

20. As Ali Ansari has put it, “Iran has been on the strategic defensive for two hundred years.” Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 240.

system connecting South Asia to Europe by land. In light of these factors, there is something surreal about the amount of attention that Iran's limited military activities have received. But there should be no doubt that were the United States or Israel to attack Iran, its capacity to wreak havoc in Iraq and Afghanistan would be considerable—something which senior figures in the U.S. military plainly fear.<sup>21</sup> Iran is an integral element of Afghanistan's region and is in a position to block any broad regional settlement that it sees as detrimental to its interests. For this reason, some regularization of U.S.-Iranian relations is vitally important, perhaps along the lines of what Ray Takeyh has called "a policy of selective partnership on an evolving range of issues."<sup>22</sup> A stable Afghanistan could be one such shared objective.

But that said, it is extremely unlikely that much progress will be made in stabilizing the region until the United States sorts out its relations with Pakistan. On paper, the two states have long been on friendly terms, with Pakistan designated a "major non-NATO ally" by the United States in June 2004. Yet the friendship has been fitful and often indifferently managed,<sup>23</sup> with considerable manifestations of naïveté on Washington's part. One serious misjudgment was the implicit assumption that stability in post-1992 Afghanistan could be achieved by consigning it to a Pakistani sphere of influence: this proved to be a recipe for the flourishing of transnational radicalism.<sup>24</sup> Another has been the belief that policy toward Pakistan could be grounded primarily in individual relationships: this contributed to a situation in which Washington found itself tied to the fortunes of President Musharraf, even as they declined precipitately. It had no real back up strategy apart from the cultivation of another individual, Benazir Bhutto, whose assassination in December 2007 left U.S. policy in a shambles. The United States is now deeply unpopular within Pakistan: many leaders of the Pakistan Army see the United States as a selfish and unreliable "ally"; the civilian political class resent Washington for its efforts to prop up Musharraf after the February 2008 elections; and many within

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21. See the remarks of Adm. Michael G. Mullen, quoted in Josh White, "A Shortage of Troops in Afghanistan: Iraq War Limits U.S. Options, Says Chairman of Joint Chiefs," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2008.

22. Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 226.

23. For background, see Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001).

24. See Gutman, *How We Missed the Story*, passim; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); and Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

the general public dislike wider U.S. foreign policy and find rhetoric about “democracy” and the “rule of law” hypocritical in the light of U.S. support for Musharraf—not to mention “extraordinary renditions” and the use of detention without trial at Guantanamo Bay.

The United States now finds itself in a truly awful quandary. Raucous public pressure on Pakistan runs the risk of triggering further anti-American sentiment and of making Pakistani politicians who respond positively to such pressure look like puppets, with real risk for their own popularity and legitimacy. Yet private pressure (“quiet diplomacy”) has consistently failed as a device for dealing with Islamabad. Most serious of all, Washington’s inability to deal effectively with Pakistan has grave implications for the situation in Afghanistan. It is read in Afghanistan as an indication of weakness on Washington’s part and as a sign that ultimately the United States cares more about its relationship with Pakistan than about stability in Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup> Why should ordinary Afghans be expected to sacrifice their lives to resist the Taliban if a great power such as the United States is unwilling even to give voice to a strong public position over the Taliban’s use of Pakistani territory? The United States must find a way out of this quandary if there is to be any hope of lasting stability in Afghanistan and its vicinity.

Beyond the regional actors most directly involved in Afghanistan, there are others with “watching briefs” of various kinds. Three Central Asian states—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—border Afghanistan directly. Each, however, has problems of its own that limit their capacity to be involved actively in the affairs of its southern neighbor. Turkmenistan is in the process of reconsolidation following the sudden death of President Saparmurad Niyazov (“Turkmenbashi”), whose monstrous personality cult masked the weakness of the regime’s institutionalization. Tajikistan remains a chronically weak state in the aftermath of its civil war of the 1990s. Only Uzbekistan has the potential to influence significantly events in Afghanistan. However, it too is a troubled state. Its relationship with the United States, cooperative for some years after the 9/11 attacks,<sup>26</sup> has now largely broken down as a result of Tashkent’s abominable human rights record, manifested in the May 2005 Andijon massacre.<sup>27</sup> As longer-term economic partners for a stable Afghanistan, they might have something

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25. See William Maley, *Stabilizing Afghanistan: Threats and Challenges*, Policy Brief no. 68 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008).

26. See Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Uzbekistan and the United States: Authoritarianism, Islamism, and Washington’s Security Agenda* (New York: Zed Books, 2005).

27. See *Uzbekistan: Stagnation and Uncertainty*, Asia Briefing no. 67 (Bishkek/Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 22, 2007).

to offer, especially Turkmenistan, long recognized as a major source of oil and natural gas.

Behind these states looms the specter of Russia. Its position toward Afghanistan is marked by multiple ambivalences. At one level, memories of the Soviet Union's bitter experiences in Afghanistan remain very much alive. Russia's ambassador in Afghanistan, Zamir N. Kabulov, has claimed, more in apparent sorrow than anger, that NATO is repeating Moscow's mistakes, arguing, "Our approach is pragmatic. Why should we be jubilant at the prospect of the Americans being defeated by people who will take us on again, as they did in the 1990s in Chechnya?"<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the attitude of the Russian leadership under President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin toward NATO has taken a markedly hostile turn, which was prominently on display at the time of the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest and has become even more obvious in the wake of the August 2008 Georgian crisis.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Russia may well opt to play its own cards in Afghanistan and invest less in cooperating with the wider U.S./NATO mission. This is important to bear in mind when talk surfaces of possible negotiations among the Afghan government, Western powers, and the Taliban, because a possible Russian response would be to seek to rearm anti-Taliban groups in Afghanistan to preempt the recrudescence of Taliban power.

## Paths Forward

The vision of a stable Afghanistan in a stable region seems far off, but there is no time better than now to begin promoting it. The threat of Talibanization that Pakistan faces has been long in the making,<sup>30</sup> but if it is not promptly confronted, the situation will only get worse. For Islamabad, there may be a great temptation to cut deals with the Pakistani Taliban in order to win some breathing space. But all that deal cutting would likely do is create a downward spiral in Afghanistan, with a heightened risk of the Talibanization of Pakistan in the medium term. To avert this danger, a set of measures is required that addresses the security concerns of individual regional states while signaling that destructive behavior will bring nega-

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28. John F. Burns, "An Old Afghanistan Hand Offers Lessons of the Past," *New York Times*, October 19, 2008.

29. See *Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout*, Europe Report no. 195 (Tbilisi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 22, 2008).

30. William Maley, "Talibanisation and Pakistan," in *Talibanisation: Extremism and Regional Instability in South and Central Asia*, ed. Denise Groves (Berlin: Conflict Prevention Network, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2001), 53–74.

tive sanctions. There is no single action that will solve the region's problems, but three particular measures should be pursued without delay.

First, it should be recognized that without a regionally based approach, no single state's problems are likely to be resolved. Interconnectedness is the name of the new Great Game. This applies both to the politics of the region and to specific issues such as water management, energy supply, transport, and infrastructural development.<sup>31</sup> The potential for regional cooperation is considerable and was recognized in the Kabul Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation that was endorsed by regional states at a conference in December 2005. The significance of regional cooperation was also recognized in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. The challenge, however, is not one of accepting the importance of regional cooperation. It is the challenge of making it happen in the face of serious political and psychological obstacles.

Second, the problem of Pakistan must be confronted. This requires polite but relentless signaling that as a sovereign state, Pakistan has duties as well as rights, and one such duty is to prevent anyone from using its soil to attack a friendly neighbor. Afghanistan and its allies are fully entitled to press this case: it is their citizens who are dying because of sanctuaries in Pakistan. A good point at which to start would be the arrest of the Afghan Taliban leadership in Quetta and of key figures in the so-called Haqqani network, steps that are well within the capacity of the Pakistan military. This would not eliminate all causes of Afghan disaffection, but it would send a powerful signal that the wind had changed direction. Further, many Afghans who currently oppose the Karzai government might well reconsider the wisdom of such a posture. But addressing the problem of Pakistan also requires active and sustained support for the civilian government to address problems of poverty and those related to the country's underdeveloped health and education sectors, and a recognition that Pakistan's security fears must be ameliorated if it is to be a constructive actor.

Third, an active and integrated diplomacy, led by a new U.S. administration, should seek creative ways of fostering regional cooperation. In the first instance, this will require careful listening, with a substantial commitment of resources in prospect to underpin enhanced human development across the region. It will also require an administration that is prepared to

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31. For the politics of the region, see Barnett R. Rubin, Ashraf Ghani, William Maley, Ahmed Rashid, and Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Peacebuilding in a Regional Framework*, KOFF Peacebuilding Reports no. 1/2001 (Bern: Swiss Peace Foundation, June 2001). For discussion of specific issues, see Barnett R. Rubin and Andrea Armstrong, "Regional Issues in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan," *World Policy Journal* 20, no. 1 (2003): 31–40.

seek a new relationship with Iran. But above all, it will require leadership at the highest levels. The region is not beyond salvation, but if it is neglected, it could easily turn into a West Asian “Badlands,” offering an expanded version of the conditions that led to the 9/11 attacks.<sup>32</sup> Afghanistan, after decades of suffering, deserves better than this.

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32. See Daoud Yaqub and William Maley, “NATO and Afghanistan: Saving the State-Building Enterprise,” in *The Bucharest Conference Papers*, ed. Robin Shepherd, 5–17 (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2008).



# The Intertwined Destinies of Afghanistan and Pakistan

*Marvin G. Weinbaum and Haseeb Humayoon*

That the futures of Afghanistan and Pakistan are bound together is a near truism. Both countries have historical perceptions of being bruised by the other. They have been better at exploiting each other's vulnerabilities and elevating fears than at cooperation. Despite their prickly relationship, few doubt that the successes and failures of one state will have strong bearing on the other. This arises most of all from intersecting national security and economic interests and from their partially overlapping ethnic composition. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are subject to many of the same regional and global forces that draw them international attention and concern. Plainly, neither country can realize its national aspirations unless their differences are better managed if not resolved.

Even for a region that thinks of its history as stretching across centuries, ten years can be a long time in the political lives of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This becomes starkly apparent when one recalls the changing face of the political landscape since 1998, when the Taliban were sweeping militarily across northern Afghanistan and Pervez Musharraf was appointed army chief under a popularly elected civilian government headed by Nawaz Sharif. In the tumultuous succeeding years, the world witnessed a military-led government in Islamabad beginning in 1999, international military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, a near-major war between Pakistan and India in late 2001 and mid-2002, and the emergence of a constitutionally elected president and parliament in Kabul in 2004 and 2005. Then came the rejuvenated Taliban insurgency and the restoration of civilian government in Pakistan in 2008.

One or both countries could possibly undergo further critical changes over the next ten-year span that will greatly affect their relationship. Internal political developments can alter the political complexion of the two countries. National leaders with views and agendas radically different from their predecessors may emerge along with new ruling coalitions. Numerous externalities may intrude that influence domestic politics and international alliances and dependencies. Wild cards include

an American attack on Iran and Iran's emergence as a nuclear power state with regional hegemonic aims. Kabul and Islamabad would also be heavily affected by a serious outbreak of conflict between Pakistan and India or, alternatively, a resolution of their dispute over Kashmir, which would result in a dramatic improvement of ties between Islamabad and New Delhi.

The relationship over the next decade may conceivably present a rough extension of current conditions and trends over the next decade. Under such a scenario, Afghanistan would remain in a problematic relationship with Pakistan and be mired in a stubborn insurgency that ebbs and flows. Its dependence on international armies and finances would not diminish appreciably. Foreign assistance would be strategically better targeted and coordinated, but aid from Pakistan would lag that of Iran and India. Refugees would continue to be repatriated to Afghanistan, while others would manage to return to Pakistan. Although Islamabad would likely extend its influence within Afghanistan under this scenario, it would have only nominal control of portions of its tribal borderlands and would continue to be unwilling or unable to stop militant extremist and terrorist groups involved in the Afghan insurgency. A tug-of-war between the many contending centers of power in Pakistan—the military establishment, the political parties, and local strongmen—would continue to paralyze the emergence of any strong and unified strategy in dealing with extremism and militancy. Similarly, a struggle between Pakistanis supportive of proximity to the West and India, and those against such cooperation, would be expected to test the courage of political decision makers. Further, Afghanistan and Pakistan would see gradual but modest improvements in trade and increased drug trafficking across their border.

Other scenarios in which all or most of the key vectors of change point more strongly in a positive or negative direction can also be plausibly posited. An optimistic scenario would foresee a normalization of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and anticipates four developments that could bring about a more constructive relationship. These include the easing of their border dispute, the extension of constitutional rule to the neglected tribal areas of Pakistan, the suppression of domestic extremism and terrorism, and the realization of the aspirations of both countries for expanded trade and an energy corridor that helps to integrate their economies. This scenario ultimately finds Afghanistan and Pakistan arriving at a better understanding of their mutual strategic interests.

There are many obstacles that lie in the way of realizing such an optimistic outcome, portending a more pessimistic scenario that foresees the ascendance of radical forces and extremist ideology and their consequences

for stirring ethnic tensions, impeding trade, and furthering political instability. It also foresees the reemergence of the military in Pakistan, an aggressive policy agenda set by Pashtun nationalists in power in Kabul, and greater involvement of India in Afghanistan. The scenario further envisions a weakening international presence as a buffer between the two countries—and Pakistan joining other covetous regional neighbors to prey on a disintegrating Afghanistan. Although such a scenario is a particularly gloomy one, it remains a realistic possibility.

## **Key Elements Required for Success**

Afghanistan and Pakistan must make progress on a number of critical fronts if, over the next decade, they are to become reasonably cooperative and peaceful neighbors. Progress on each front will likely require extraordinary political will in both capitals, sustained positive international involvement in the region, and supportive publics.

### ***Resolving the Border Dispute and Extending the Rule of Law***

A stable, long-term relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is almost impossible to conceive without two parallel developments: (1) Kabul's formal recognition of the Durand Line as the legitimate boundary between the two countries, and (2) Islamabad's incorporation of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into the political and legal systems that apply to the rest of Pakistan.

Settling the border dispute along the Durand Line would help to give closure to the irredentism that threatens to swallow much of Pakistan's northwest for the creation of an ethnic Pashtun state (Pashtunistan) or a "Greater Afghanistan." In turn, recognition of the border would undo some of Pakistan's insecurities emerging from Afghanistan; and thus help to replace the historically prevalent cynicism with much-needed confidence in the two countries. As often stated, it is unreasonable for Pakistan to take responsibility for a border that Afghanistan refuses to officially recognize. Similarly, it is unreasonable for Afghanistan to recognize areas that the Pakistani establishment has often painted as "autonomous" in order to escape responsibility for ills arising from those areas.

Kabul's recognition of the border will be eased if Pakistan decides in the next decade to integrate FATA into its North-West Frontier Province or create a separate province. The current state presence in Pakistan's tribal areas, which is grounded in colonial era designs, such as the appointment of "political agents" and the draconian Frontier Crime Regulations, is breeding backwardness. Meanwhile, bringing the rule of law to the important

provinces of Afghanistan's south and east will both ease acceptance of a formal boundary and also strengthen links with the government in Kabul. All these changes should improve the capacity of both countries to deal with militancy and terrorism.

Easing border tensions could also reduce ethnic pressures within the two countries. Afghanistan's disproportionate and at times insensitive elevation of relations with Pakistan's Pashtuns—from President Sardar Daoud's vocal support for Pashtun nationalists inside Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s to President Hamid Karzai's June 2008 talk of sending troops across the border partly "for the defense of the Pashtuns in Pakistan, who are oppressed everyday"<sup>1</sup>—is condemned by most of the rest of Pakistan. In the Punjab, the country's most populated province, it brings home the fears of Afghanistan's involvement in Pakistan's breakup along ethnic lines. Meanwhile, Kabul's persistent attempts to champion "Pashtun rights" on the other side of the border does not go down well with most of the other ethnic groups inside Afghanistan. Some Tajiks and others argue that historically Kabul has spent monetary and political capital on Pakistan's Pashtuns to no avail except to provoke its neighbor. Overall, progress on the border question and political reform of the FATA can calm ethnic anxieties on both sides and empower moderate forces seeking an end to the militarization of the border region.

Resistance to settling the border dispute and FATA's integration into Pakistan's constitutional order can be expected from several quarters. Removal of the border issue will deny Afghan leaders a valued instrument that has been used periodically to stir up nationalist sentiment among Pashtuns on both sides of the frontier and distract the Afghan population from real issues. Smugglers and drug traffickers have reason to fear tighter border controls. Insurgent and jihadi groups are likely to oppose movement toward greater cooperation between the Afghan and Pakistani governments that restrict their freedom of action. Even with official recognition of the border, indigenous strongmen who enjoy their special status may resist FATA's incorporation into the Pakistani political system. Above all, the effective recognition of the Durand Line as an international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan will require a far more politically secure central government in Kabul than may exist even in ten years. Similarly, the integration of FATA into Pakistan's political firmament is unlikely while a civilian government in Islamabad is economically and politically imperiled.

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1. For video of Karzai's comments, see "Karzai Threatens to Send Army into Pakistan," Quqnoos.com, June 17, 2008, [http://quqnoos.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=900&Itemid=45](http://quqnoos.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=900&Itemid=45) (accessed October 29, 2008).

### ***Combating Insurgency and Extremism***

The suppression of the Afghan insurgency and official and popular rejection of radical leadership in Pakistan's tribal areas over the next decade will require better security, economic development, and political reform. If Afghanistan and Pakistan realized their shared interest in combating the threats from terrorism and extremism, perhaps Islamabad would also be prepared to curb the activities of those domestic jihadi groups that lend support to anti-Kabul forces in Afghanistan. An end to the safe haven in Pakistan for the hardcore Taliban and dissident mujahideen leaders sworn to destroy the Kabul regime would reduce violence and greatly increase the possibility for reconciliation with remaining militants. On both sides of the border traditional tribal leadership would be revived and a presence created for legitimate state institutions. Both the Afghan and Pakistani armies would have acquired—with foreign assistance, training, and better equipment—a greater capacity for counterinsurgency. While some suspicions may remain, Afghans and Pakistanis would work cooperatively in sharing intelligence and conducting joint military operations.

A major obstacle stands in the way of achieving progress on this front. Islamabad must relinquish the idea of using a Pashtun proxy force to protect its interests in Afghanistan. It continues to serve as Pakistan's reserve strategy in the event that a Kabul government turns openly hostile toward Pakistan or the Afghan state begins to disintegrate, in which case Islamabad would compete with all of Afghanistan's neighbors for spheres of influence in the country. The instrument of Islamabad's Afghan insurance policy remains the resilient Taliban movement, which many Pakistanis—not only those in the tribal areas or inside the military establishment—have viewed sympathetically. Above all, the Pakistani military must be prepared to break its traditional protective ties to the Afghan Taliban and extremist mujahideen leaders and reign in those elements in its intelligence services that have long helped to sustain cross-border militancy.

### ***Expanding Trade and Energy Cooperation***

Afghanistan's challenge is to transform itself from a landlocked and vulnerable country to a land bridge that bolsters Pakistan's and the region's economic well-being. It is possible to visualize a robust trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan in ten years. The 2008 trade figure of little more than \$1 billion could grow with the economic recovery of Afghanistan, and better governance and security in Afghanistan's and Pakistan's borderlands could help transform much of the black-market trade into licit commerce. Customs-free Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) can be erected on both sides of the border, providing a strong stimulus to local

economies by creating employment in depressed areas. Pakistan should be able to increase its development assistance to the Afghan government, especially in road construction, and by offering skills training to Afghans in various fields in the public and private sector. Training programs for Afghan judges, prosecutors, and advocates could contribute to business confidence. Private investment, already growing, can also expand, especially with greater legal protections. It was commercial interests in Pakistan that in part ignited Islamabad's support of the Taliban in 1994. These same commercial interests, along with those in Afghanistan, can in the future contribute to suppressing the insurgency and encouraging stability in both countries.

Completion of major economic development projects driven by the needs and resources of both countries would help to draw them closer. Sharing the burdens and fruits of a major project could provide decision makers in both capitals with a powerful stake in maintaining a peaceful border and persuasive reasons for cooperative behavior. Two projects offer particular promise for mutual economic empowerment: the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline, and Pakistan's deepwater seaport of Gwadar. The pipeline promises linking Afghanistan with Pakistan and India in an economic bond. TAPI is a potentially high-return project that can change the fortunes of the region. Increasing energy demands in Pakistan and India have raised TAPI's market value to the supplier, Turkmenistan, and to intermediaries such as international financial institutions and energy firms. Once fully functional, TAPI is projected to transport 65 billion cubic meters of gas annually to the three markets. That would make it one of the key energy lines in the region.

Pakistan's Gwadar port offers another potential major economic stimulus that could strengthen ties between Kabul and Islamabad. By connecting Central Asia with markets in the Persian Gulf and South Asia through Gwadar, Afghanistan becomes the key to Pakistan's dream of having a flourishing trade with Central Asia. Integrating Afghanistan's "ring road" as a corridor to Central Asia for Gwadar will create Pakistani dependence on Afghanistan's political stability and the quality of its roads. Without Central Asian commerce, the largely Chinese-built Gwadar will fall short of its predicted economic utility.

The hurdles to realizing expanded trade and energy transfers in the region are formidable. TAPI will have to cross Afghanistan's volatile south on its way into Pakistan. In Pakistan, it would run through Baluchistan and be vulnerable to sabotage by antigovernment insurgents. Further progress on tariffs and price agreements along with funding from the Asian

Development Bank are also prerequisites for sustaining an international consortium to build and maintain the pipeline. As for trade, customs and border regulations remain an onerous burden on commerce. And without improved Pakistani-Indian relations, Islamabad will continue to deny road access for Indian goods destined for Afghanistan.

For Pakistan to realize its vision for Gwadar, it needs Afghanistan to facilitate Central Asia's access to the port. But given Afghanistan's history of transit troubles with Pakistan, it is logical that Kabul will seek to diversify its own access routes to sea, which would have the benefit of diversifying the access to sea options of Central Asia as well. This brings into the equation Iran's Chahbahar port, an Iranian-Indian enterprise often seen as a competitor to Gwadar. With the October 2008 completion of the Zaranj-Delaram road built by India, and the extension of Iranian railway tracks to Herat, it is clear that Kabul is making speedy progress toward circumventing Pakistan's monopoly over Afghanistan's access to sea. If Afghanistan relies heavily on Chahbahar and thus undercuts Gwadar's capacity, Pakistan's insecurities are certain to be roused. While a regional trade paradigm less dependent on Pakistan for access to the sea may be logical, it would certainly set back Kabul's relations with Islamabad. Afghanistan will have to be sensitive to the importance of Gwadar to Pakistan and consider it a major factor in its ability to foster or hinder confidence with Islamabad. In an optimistic scenario, Kabul would not favor the Chahbahar port as a substitute to the Gwadar port but would rather see it as a complement to the Pakistani-Chinese port.

### ***Recognizing Mutual Strategic Interests***

Only a greater appreciation of their convergent national interests can place Afghan-Pakistani relations on solid ground. Assuming that international terrorism remains a regional and global concern over the next ten years, an optimistic scenario finds both countries viewing terrorism and militant extremism as common threats and agreeing on the means to counter them. Sharing a similar vision of the future, the two countries will have recognized their mutual interest in interdicting the drug trafficking that has so distorted the Afghan economy and fueled insurgency, and that also takes a heavy toll on a Pakistani society with growing numbers of heroin users. Both countries would be less prone to lay blame on the other for its security problems. In particular, in an optimistic scenario, Pakistan will have succeeded in dispelling the notion that its policies have sought to perpetuate Afghanistan as a weak, pliable state. In turn, Pakistan would be rid of the assumption that the Kabul government invites India to acquire a strategic

position from which to support insurgency and radicalism in Pakistan. For Afghanistan's part, its friendly policies toward India will show greater sensitivity to Pakistan's fears of encirclement. And Kabul would be prepared to own up to the fact that the insurgency in Afghanistan—in addition to being imported from Pakistan—has become somewhat indigenously rooted.

But progress on these fronts requires that leaders in both countries acquire a stronger commitment to finding their common stakes. There are powerful interests in both countries that profit from keeping suspicions and grievances alive. A better job will have to be done by leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan in conveying altered perceptions to their publics. Regional strategic thinking is difficult without removing long-held obsessions, such as those by Afghans over Pashtun nationhood and those by Pakistanis over perceived Indian and Afghan perfidy. A new dynamic is required: while Afghanistan and Pakistan remain linked to the United States, they must be allied with each other as well. Both capitals are likely to continue to put a high premium on their relationship with Washington. The United States could be in a better position to play a constructive, facilitating role in bridging differences between them by adopting a more regional approach through an overarching policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## **A Pessimistic Scenario**

Short of a worst-case scenario that involves major armed conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan, relations between the two countries would most sharply deteriorate if either were to fall under the sway of extremist forces that the other was struggling to resist. One possibility envisions the Taliban and its allies having gained territorial ascendance in Afghanistan's south and east and a beleaguered Islamabad government hard-pressed to fend off its own Islamist militancy. Unresolved bilateral tensions could increase the spread of Salafi ideology and militancy in Pakistan's borderlands and in neighboring Afghan provinces, leaving virtual no-go zones for the governments of both countries. Traditional Pashtun tribal leadership in the east of Afghanistan would probably erode on the same scale as it already has in Pakistan and, along with other Islamist militants, al Qaeda would be emboldened. Perhaps most seriously, Pakistan could return to promoting adversarial relations among Afghan ethnic groups by more aggressively funding and equipping religious-oriented Pashtun-centric groups. It could also revive plans to acquire

strategic depth through clients contesting for political power in Afghanistan.

Intensified lawlessness and uncontained extremism in the border areas would endanger licit trade between the countries and threaten military shipments to international forces in Afghanistan. An associated lack of progress in Afghanistan's drug wars will have both validated fears about the creation of a narco-state in Afghanistan and adversely affected Pakistan as well. It is not difficult to imagine that with mounting political instability, fueled by economic hardship, a failed democratic government in Pakistan will yield to the army's intervention. In a near-worst-case scenario, an Islamic-military alliance would be formed that openly identifies with the Afghan insurgency.

In the myriad ways that relations could worsen, Pakistan may be in a better position to injure Afghanistan's national interests than the reverse. Yet Kabul is not without a capacity to poison relations. In Afghanistan, a government that is openly hostile to Pakistan and overly sympathetic to India could emerge, a breakdown that would almost certainly be accompanied by deteriorating relations between Islamabad and New Delhi. Most confrontationally, Afghanistan could allow India a more substantial presence in the country, even inviting the Indian military to deploy its troops. Still further, Afghanistan might decide unilaterally, likely with Indian assistance, to utilize most of the water that currently flows into Pakistan—specifically the Kabul River. The on-again, off-again accusations of Pakistan having dumped its nuclear waste in Afghanistan's Helmand Province could resurface, especially if now backed by evidence. Were ardent Pashtun nationalists to emerge in the Kabul government, they may try to incite nationalist feelings across the border. The nationalists could reignite the Pashtunistan issue, either out of conviction or in a cynical attempt to distract the general population from real economic and security concerns that the Kabul government has failed to address.

At least as long as the major components of a U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership remain in place, overtly antagonistic policies by Islamabad toward Afghanistan are likely to be restrained. Similarly, while an international military and economic role in Afghanistan continues, the emergence of a government in Kabul implacably hostile to Pakistan is minimized. Without an international presence for the foreseeable future, Afghanistan's constitutional government seems unlikely to survive. A takeover by the Taliban would be almost certain to renew the regional civil conflict of the 1990s. Pakistan and other neighbors could then be expected to intervene as patrons to warring Afghan groups and create their separate geographical spheres of political influence.

## A Mutual Future

The case is sometimes made that a democratic convergence of Afghanistan and Pakistan will enhance the possibilities for improved relations in the future. A familiar argument is that governments based on popular consent are more likely to resolve their differences amicably. Since 1947 and Pakistan's statehood, Afghanistan and Pakistan have had simultaneously democratically elected governments for only a little more than two years—in the early 1970s and again since February 2008. In the first period, with an increasingly dysfunctional constitutional government in Afghanistan and Pakistan just recovering from the debacle of East Pakistan, neither country was particularly focused on the other. By contrast, their relations as democracies have occupied a prominent place on their respective agendas following the election defeat of a military-dominated government in Pakistan in favor of civilian rule in 2008.

History provides no clear guide to the importance of democratic and authoritarian regimes in framing bilateral relations. In the mid-1970s, a previously Pakistan-baiting Afghan president, having overthrown the king and constitution, reached out for assistance from his Pakistani and Iranian neighbors, as well as from the Arab states. Sardar Daoud, once the chief instigator of the cause of Pashtunistan, embarked on a foreign policy designed to reduce his economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union. His warm overtures to Pakistan were cut short with the military coup in Islamabad in 1977 and when a Communist regime overthrew Daoud the following year. Over most of the eleven-year rule of Gen. Zia ul-Haq, Pakistan was a front-line state against Afghan rulers and their Soviet benefactors. Even when Islamabad returned to democratic government in 1988, Afghan policy remained in the almost exclusive purview of the Pakistani army. It was, in fact, during the unstable Pakistani democratic regimes of the 1990s that the strongest rapport formed between the countries. But those ties were with the oppressive Afghan Taliban, a stepchild of the second Benazir Bhutto regime. The Taliban regime continued to receive Pakistan's patronage under the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif.

On becoming chief executive in 1999, Gen. Musharraf inherited the close Taliban ties and retained them until forced to reverse course after 9/11. While mutual recriminations characterized the presidencies of Pervez Musharraf and Hamid Karzai, friendly exchanges between Islamabad and Kabul following the election of a civilian coalition government in February 2008 seemed to herald warmer relations. But within months the Afghan leader had lost patience with Pakistan's army and government policies that aimed at striking deals with pro-Taliban extremists and that had apparently

resulted in an intensification of cross-border violence. Relations appeared to improve again following the election of Asif Ali Zardar to Pakistan's presidency in September 2008, although it will take more than cordial personal ties between the country's leaders to resolve lingering antipathies. Deeply ingrained popular feelings of resentment among Afghans against a neighbor perceived as covetous and a deep sense among Pakistanis of Afghan ingratitude will need time to dissolve. Without more secure democracies in both countries, the temptation of political figures to exploit grievances is likely to persist.

Looking toward the future, the historical antagonisms and current differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan are most likely to be overcome in two very different circumstances. One is asymmetrical, where a Kabul government falls under the sway of Pakistan and effectively becomes a client state, as occurred during the Taliban-Pakistan alliance between 1996 and 2001. The other possibility, certainly more desirable, would come with Kabul and Islamabad's mutual recognition that their sovereign national interests are closely intertwined. This seems most likely to occur when Pakistan's leaders adopt an Afghan policy grounded in economic pursuits and free of the influence of India-centric defense doctrines. Afghanistan, for its part, will need to ground its approach to Pakistan in a realistic definition of its vital interests and free itself of the emotional bonds and traditional suspicions that burden a rapprochement. Institutionalizing an already initiated peace jirgah (grand assembly) involving influential people from all walks of life could be a means to facilitate cross-border communication and help resolve disputes. Ideally, progress in political and social reforms should take place in both countries. Civil society and the media should be allowed to flourish so that there can be regular dialogue between leaders and their publics toward an improved climate of trust. The way ahead over the next ten years for bilateral relations might reasonably be, then, to give democracy a serious chance in both countries.



# Contributors

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# About the Future of Afghanistan Project

The Future of Afghanistan Project was launched in 2008 by the United States Institute of Peace in response to the need for a unified, strategic, long-term vision for Afghanistan. More than seven years into the international intervention in Afghanistan, there is a sense of backsliding and a loss of focus. Most assessments and prescriptions focus on the near term, analyzing what is happening now and what must happen over the next twelve to eighteen months to “turn things around.” At the same time, most commentators note that there is a broad lack of unified strategic vision between and among the Afghan government and their partners in the international community.

The purpose of the Future of Afghanistan Project is to create a strategic vision of where Afghanistan could be in ten years, outlining the obstacles to achieving the long-term objectives and the policies, activities, and resources needed to accomplish them. The Future of Afghanistan Project is bringing together leading thinkers and policymakers to address these gaps. A series of essays, speeches, and panels will assess the obstacles to achieving long-term objectives in Afghanistan and examine the policies, activities, and resources needed to accomplish them. This project aims to create realistic expectations of what is possible in Afghanistan over the next decade, while also serving as a unifying framework for ongoing Afghan and international partnership.

For more information about the Future of Afghanistan Project, including additional essays and records of events, please visit <http://www.usip.org/peaceops/afghanistan/future.html>.



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The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and development, and increase peacebuilding capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by directly engaging in peacebuilding efforts around the globe.

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