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# AFGHANISTAN'S LONG ROAD TO RECONSTRUCTION

*Larry Goodson*

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Sweltering in the noonday sun outside Herat's grand Friday Mosque last May 20, I was excited to see democracy (of a sort) in action in western Afghanistan. Local dignitaries and members of the Loya Jirga (Grand Council) Commission addressed a crowd of more than six-hundred Afghans who had turned out to cast ballots in Phase I of their newly liberated country's two-stage voting process. In this first phase, they would choose members of the Loya Jirga, whose meeting a few weeks later would select Hamid Karzai as president of an 18-month Transitional Administration. As one of a handful of international monitors present for the Loya Jirga balloting, I too gave a short speech, telling the soon-to-be-voters that the whole world was watching Afghanistan, and that any of them who had a complaint could come to me, as a representative of the international community.

I have since been struck by the irony of my well-meaning remarks, which I delivered with great sincerity at various Phase I polling places in western Afghanistan. In truth, it would have been fairer for the Afghans to have told me, as a representative of the international community, that it was Afghanistan's 27 million people who would be watching us—watching and wondering if the world would stay involved this time and help their country to rebuild itself. My Afghan hosts were too polite to say any such thing, of course, but in fact Afghanistan desperately needs the substantial and committed involvement of the international community, especially the United States, if it is to have any hope of breaking out of the national deathtrap that more than two decades of ceaseless warfare have created.

Not long after that hopeful day in Herat, I would witness the Loya Jirga itself bog down in ways that typified many of the problems besetting Afghanistan in the year following the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban movement that had ruled most of the country since 1996. But on 20 May 2002, candidates and their supporters from Districts 3 through 5 of the city of Herat seemed happy just to be voting. Over the next two days of the Phase I elections in Herat City I watched candidates campaigning openly, making signs, bringing in clearly underage supporters from outside their districts (a maneuver made easier by the scarcity of identity cards), and generally displaying a level of electioneering savvy which seemed to indicate that, given the chance, Afghans could “do” democracy at least as well as Floridians had managed in 2000.

### **The Fatal Fading of U.S. Interest?**

Despite the many problems that marred the Phase I and II indirect elections, the hunger to have a voice was palpable and impressive. That this nascent experimentation with accountable government would be nipped in the bud at the Loya Jirga—the very institution meant to give democracy a chance to flower—was sad if predictable, but it brought home the reality that Afghanistan’s transition even to stability (much less democracy) is highly unlikely. What is worse, after a largely successful military campaign, the United States and the rest of the world may have only a limited window of opportunity within which to aid Afghanistan’s transition. Moreover, they may be losing interest in doing so, which would almost certainly doom any chance that the country might have to break out of the cycle of state failure and violence in which it has been caught for the last quarter-century.

Afghanistan today faces enormous challenges brought on by long years of warfare including the Soviet invasion of 1979–89 and the multisided factional strife that raged throughout the 1990s. The fighting transformed traditional socioeconomic and political conditions, shattered the tenuous state-building project first begun in the late nineteenth century, and altered the regional and global environment in malign ways. Finally, the war removed the counterweights to the kinds of problematic local forces that have always been strong in Afghanistan, even at the height of state-building.<sup>1</sup>

Afghanistan is a country famously riven by ethnic divisions made even deeper by linguistic, sectarian, geographic, and other cleavages. For example, Pushtuns speak Pushtu while Tajiks speak Dari (which serves as a national second language), Hazaras speak Hazaragi, and Uzbeks speak Uzbeki. These are not merely dialects, but can come from entirely different language families: Dari is an Indo-European language related to Persian, for instance, while Uzbeki is related to Turkish and thus comes from the Ural-Altai family. There are religious distinctions



as well. While Sunni Muslims predominate, Hazaras tend to be Shi'ites, as do some Tajiks and Pushtuns. The Pushtuns, who make up 40 to 45 percent of the population, generally live in the south and east, while the Tajiks (about 25 percent) live primarily in the northeast and urban areas, the Hazaras (perhaps 13 percent) in the central mountains, and the Uzbeks and Turkmen (less than 10 percent each) in the north-center. Since Afghanistan has long been a crossroads connecting central, south, and southwest Asia, its ethnic groups spill over its borders: There are Pushtuns in Pakistan, Tajiks in Tajikistan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, and Turkmen in Turkmenistan, while the Hazaras and other Dari-speaking western Afghans have ethnic cousins in Iran.<sup>2</sup>

With the monarchy's fall after a Soviet-inspired coup led by Afghan communists in 1973, the traditional ethnic balance of power came to an end. The way became open for non-Pushtuns to rise to the top. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Afghanistan's nominal president for much of the 1990s, is a Tajik. Smaller groups like the long-suffering Hazaras got arms and organization during the anti-Soviet struggle of the 1980s, and seem eager to relinquish neither. The institutional sources of power, including the army and the state ministries, as well as the social foundations of power such as the *khanate* (a land-based rural patronage system), all became casualties of the long war.<sup>3</sup> With little authority being exercised from the top or center in recent years, power has devolved to the level of local identity groups and subtribes (known as the *qawm*). In

addition, new sources of power have emerged, including armed *tanzimat* (militias) made up often of *ex-mujahideen* (holy warriors) who control portions of the illicit economy and frequently seek to justify their behavior in Islamic or ethnic terms.

To be sure, repairing a situation as grave as the one in Afghanistan would demand of the United States and the larger international community a commitment truly breathtaking in its depth, breadth, intensity, and swiftness of application. Although an effort has been made, especially in the latter half of 2002, the initial U.S. decision to attack the Taliban quickly and with as few U.S. ground troops as possible created the problematic political environment that now exists. It was clear as early as the fall of 2001 that the only approach which would not only smash the Taliban and cripple al-Qaeda but also stabilize Afghanistan and foster a healthier regional environment would require perhaps as many as two full divisions' worth of U.S. and allied ground forces, swift and massive reconstruction (beginning with road-building), efforts to limit meddling by neighbors, and possibly even a temporary U.S. military government to administer the country as a trust.<sup>4</sup> Despite the shock of September 11, it remained hard for a U.S. administration that had come into office deeply opposed to such approaches—to say nothing of a senior U.S. military leadership that was skeptical of peacekeeping missions and highly casualty-averse—to adopt such strategies. So other approaches were tried instead, leaving grave problems that midcourse adjustments and half-measures will probably not be enough to solve.

### Afghanistan After 9/11

After the September 11 terrorist attacks revealed the threat that al-Qaeda posed from its Afghan base, an international community that had all but ignored the country during the dark days of its national self-destruction joined a U.S.-led coalition in a three-pronged response. The goals were to 1) crush al-Qaeda and its Taliban allies through military operations inside Afghanistan; 2) craft a political process leading to a peaceful and at least incipiently democratic new government for the country; and 3) mount a long-term international effort to provide economic assistance for humanitarian relief and reconstruction. One might call this set of goals “guns and butter, with government in between.” Considering each area briefly will provide a context within which to assess where Afghanistan stands a year into its post-Taliban transition and what challenges lie ahead.

The shock of 9/11 made it possible for the United States finally to go directly into Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and the Taliban after several years of pursuing a “contain and isolate” strategy featuring both unilateral and UN-imposed sanctions. The military campaign that began on 7 October 2001 showed the U.S. capacity to project power far from home

and benefited from a successful diplomatic effort to assemble a coalition of the willing, with some 39 countries ultimately contributing materially to the U.S.-led operations.<sup>5</sup> The ease of the U.S. military success surprised many observers familiar

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***The military strategy used in Afghanistan produced long-term political ramifications that have made it difficult to move the country forward.***

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with the earlier misadventures of British and Soviet forces in Afghanistan's harsh terrain. The U.S. deployed forces overwhelmingly superior to those of the Taliban, especially once the Pakistanis switched sides. U.S. combat success flowed from a strategy based on complete air superiority, use of special-operations forces in various capacities including as combat air controllers, and reliance on indigenous anti-Taliban

forces to conduct early ground operations in lieu of U.S. troops. While some 10,000 U.S. troops were ultimately deployed in Afghanistan, especially after local allies proved unreliable at Tora Bora in December 2001, most of these U.S. soldiers remain isolated in two fortified bases—one at Kandahar and one at the Bagram airfield north of Kabul.

The military strategy used in Afghanistan broke the back of the Taliban and scattered much of al-Qaeda to the winds, but it did not produce the capture or confirmed death of either Osama bin Laden or Taliban leader Muhammad Omar. Perhaps more important, it produced long-term political ramifications that have made it difficult for Afghanistan's new government to move the country forward. For example, the use of Northern Alliance forces as proxy troops allowed the return of local and regional warlords and did little to heal the ethnic animosity that had developed in the last decade of fighting. Also, the Pentagon refused to lead or initially even contribute troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandated by the UN Security Council in December 2001 and comprising forces from some 23 countries (led for the first six months by the United Kingdom, and since June 2002 by Turkey with more than \$200 million in U.S. funding). ISAF operations were confined to Kabul, with warlords filling the security vacuum in the rest of the country.

Defeating the Taliban may have been relatively easy, but the Afghan political equation was harder to solve. Afghanistan's long war produced numerous factions, the strongest of which fought openly for control of Kabul after the last communist government fell in 1992. The strife led Pakistan to back the Taliban (literally "religious students"), an armed Islamist movement composed largely of young men from the Pushtun ethnic group, whose mountainous southern homeland straddles the Durand Line, the notional border between Afghanistan and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. The Taliban emerged in 1994, took Kabul in 1996, and by the fall of 1998 controlled all but the northeastern corner of

the country, where a dogged Northern Alliance of minority forces (primarily Tajiks, with some Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Pushtuns) hung on under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the legendary “lion of the Panjshir.” While UN mediators made repeated peace efforts, the international community mostly looked the other way as regional powers backed opposing factions in order to stymie the proxy forces of their rivals or out of solidarity with this or that ethnolinguistic or sectarian group.

The interminable fighting left all major leaders with blood on their hands and hardened ethnic divisions. Since 1747, Afghanistan’s central ruler has nearly always been a Pushtun from that group’s southern Durrani branch; many northerners fought the Taliban because it seemed to be a reassertion of southern Pushtun rule. Given the role that the Northern Alliance played in defeating the Taliban, and with so many local leaders tainted by the war, one major problem was finding a credible Pushtun of some stature to head a government heavily dominated by figures from the Northern Alliance.

Under the Bonn Accords signed by four non-Taliban groups in December 2001, a six-month Interim Authority was established under the chairmanship of Pushtun tribal leader Hamid Karzai, who had spent much of the 1990s in the West.<sup>6</sup> Real power, however, rested with three Panjshir Valley lieutenants of Ahmed Shah Massoud, who had been assassinated on 9 September 2001 by al-Qaeda suicide bombers. Defense Minister Mohammed Fahim, Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, and Interior Minister Yunous Qanooni became leading figures in the Interim Authority. The June 2002 Loya Jirga was to take place under the Bonn Accords as the first step in a process leading to a new constitution and a move to regularized government in mid-2004.

The sobering reality on the ground quickly overwhelmed the best-laid institutional plans. Afghanistan was a country-sized Ground Zero. Incoming interim ministers found their ministries reduced to shells, figuratively and literally, bereft of competent personnel, basic work supplies, and even buildings with electricity and running water. In time-honored fashion, faction leaders and warlords refused to give up control over any patches of ground they ruled. With the resurgence of warlords, the political rebuilding of Afghanistan on the basis of a well-intentioned but misguided attempt to reassert the primacy of the Kabul-based central government came to a halt. The Loya Jirga dutifully named Hamid Karzai president and he kept most of the northern Interim Authority ministers in place. The Pushtuns were left resenting their exclusion, while the continued presence of the warlords and the Islamist overtones of the Loya Jirga (which declared the Transitional Administration the “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan”) were ominous signs.

Afghanistan’s comprehensive destruction meant that stability would not be regained without an international commitment to rebuilding. For nearly 20 years (1981–98), the country had been the world’s largest

producer of refugees. With its staggering humanitarian and infrastructure needs, plus the Taliban's unfriendliness toward NGOs, significant donor fatigue had set in by the late 1990s. Afghanistan became an international backwater and a failed state ripe for the Taliban and al-Qaeda to dominate. To alleviate these conditions, the United States and the international community would have to commit to long-term postconflict reconstruction (often called "nation-building"). In January 2002, a Tokyo meeting of donor states and financial organizations pledged \$5.25 billion through 2006 for reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> The \$1.8 billion pledged for Afghanistan in 2002 was less per capita than was spent in Bosnia, East Timor, Kosovo, or Rwanda.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, most nations were slow meeting their pledges, and about 75 percent of the \$1.5 billion that was spent on aid to Afghanistan in 2002 went to pay for short-term humanitarian assistance, leaving only about \$365 million for the long-term reconstruction projects that Karzai's administration needs to accomplish if there is to be any hope for legitimacy and stability.

The Transitional Administration faces three interrelated, simultaneous, and major challenges, each of which stems mainly from decisions made about and in Afghanistan by the United States and United Nations since 9/11. First, the Karzai government must create a new political structure that balances local and central governments, accommodates political parties, and reestablishes functioning governmental institutions.<sup>9</sup> Second, it must secure the country and protect all its citizens by demobilizing existing militias and creating a national army and police force behind a shield furnished by international peacekeeping forces. Finally, President Karzai and Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani must create the foundation for reviving the moribund economy of a country that was never highly developed in the first place, primarily through management of a massive and multifaceted economic reconstruction effort. In light of how events have unfolded over the past year, how likely is it that Afghanistan will be able to pass these tests?

### **Founding a Workable Government**

The political challenges alone are daunting. Decades of tremendously destructive strife have exacerbated preexisting tendencies toward localism, manifested most clearly in the resurgent warlords, and impeded efforts to reestablish a strong government in Kabul. Pakistan, Iran, and Russia, each for its own ends, continue to manipulate Afghan factions. Constitutional questions also loom—a second Loya Jirga is supposed to lay down a new governmental structure in December 2003, with nationwide elections to implement it set for June 2004.

The vehicle for the post-Taliban transition has been the Bonn Accords, which envisioned a gradual passage to quasi-democratic government by way of an Interim Authority (December 2001 to June 2002) selected



from a handful of Afghan leaders, to a Transitional Administration (June 2002 to December 2003) indirectly elected via the Loya Jirga, to whatever is mandated by the future Afghan constitution. Brokered by the international community under U.S. leadership, the Accords are based on a centralized governance model that is at odds with Afghanistan's traditional and now war-heightened localism. Afghanistan would be better served by a federal system of government than by a unitary or centralist system.<sup>10</sup> Although the West should remain committed to providing the Karzai government with substantially greater assistance than has been given to date, it might be time to reconsider the emphasis on building a centralized authority and funneling all aid through Kabul. The crux of the problem is that such a government would require fractious and mistrustful ethnic groups to create a Lebanese-style power-sharing formula acceptable to all, and would then need substantial resources and enough armed might with which to buy or force recalcitrant local and regional actors to accept its authority. Such a power-sharing arrangement is flatly impossible under current Afghan conditions, and the resources to subdue regionalism—meaning most critically large numbers of foreign peacekeeping troops—have simply not been forthcoming.

The center-periphery question is just one of several difficult issues with which the new constitution will have to reckon. Both the method by which the constitution is being drafted and, reportedly, its content are modeled on the process that led to the 1964 Constitution. The nine-member Constitutional Commission is working away, but will be hard-pressed to finish its draft by spring 2003. In addition to the vexing issue of federalism, the questions to be answered include: Shall the national government be presidential, parliamentary, or something in between? Will there be a constitutional monarch? What role in governance will be played by Islam generally and Islamic law (*shari'a*) specifically? What are to be the rights of individuals, minorities, and women? How are the party and electoral systems to work? Which languages will have official status? A minimalist, federalist constitution that abandons "broad-based government" at the national level, embraces Islamic governance while carefully limiting the scope within which *shari'a* can be applied, and provides for a list of individual rights and protections would be optimal, if it could be achieved. But it is likely that it will prove impossible to resolve all these hard questions, in which case there will either be a) no constitution ready by the date specified in the Bonn Accords, or b) a constitution empowering the existing government, which could be just as problematic as having no new constitution at all. Either way, the likelihood of a new constitutional framework that disempowers the Transitional Administration is low.

The composition of the government is a major issue because "broad-based government"—the watchword of failed mediation efforts

past—does not work. The ethnic divisions have hardened in recent years, especially since 1998, when the Pushtuns who ran the Taliban began deploying their Pakistani and Arab allies to carry out ethnic cleansing against the northern minorities. Even as Pakistan sponsored the Taliban, Iran and other regional actors championed their ethnic clients within Afghanistan.

There are intense disputes over who should get what, and the dominant pull of local politics means that political actors must reward their ethnic supporters to retain power. The southern and eastern Pushtuns, who have been mostly left out of the Karzai administration, call the Kabul government “that Panjshiri mafia,” and are growing increasingly enraged. The biggest failing of the Loya Jirga was that, Karzai excepted, it did not bring new, important Pushtuns from the Ghilzai and Durrani branches into the Transitional Administration. After the machine-gun assassination of Vice-President Haji Abdul Qadir in July 2002, the near-miss attempts on the lives of Kandahar governor Gul Agha Sherzai and President Karzai himself in September showed that the Transitional Administration was only two bullets away from being left with virtually no top Pushtun leaders in its ranks—not a good sign in a country where the last chief executive to leave office peacefully was Abdur Rahman Shah, the so-called Iron Amir, who died in 1901.<sup>11</sup> The decision after the Qadir assassination to protect Karzai with U.S. troops (replaced later in the year by a U.S. executive-security firm) illustrated the fundamental lack of trust among the ruling elites (Karzai’s bodyguards had been provided by Fahim’s Defense Ministry) and the heavy dependence on one man. It also reinforced Pushtun perceptions of Karzai as a puppet of the United States and a possibly expendable front man for the northern-minority-dominated government in Kabul. Near-term political stability thus hinges on Karzai’s health—should anything happen to him, Afghanistan will no longer have broad-based government headed by a moderate Pushtun.

### **From Warlords to Ward Bosses?**

A third problem is the resurgence of the warlords. The U.S. decision to pay them—a time-honored tradition in Afghanistan, it must be said—and use their forces as proxies has strengthened these bloodstained chieftains and embroiled the United States in the byzantine local politics of Afghanistan. In many places the warlords are the real power on the ground, and there is little realistic prospect that they can be displaced (say, by a new national army) any time soon. Since the warlords furnish whatever local government there is, one approach might be to work with some among them, such as the autonomous Ismail Khan of Herat, in order to develop better local governance and stable regional economies. This would change the nature of the game, making it less a matter of “warlords versus Kabul” and thereby taking some of the pres-

sure off the Karzai government to prove that its authority is accepted by every faction. At the same time, the temperature of ethnic politics would cool once there is less at stake in Kabul, and there would be more room for a focus on economic reconstruction in the countryside, where it is most needed.

Developing a federal system of government could help promote “dewarlordization,” as local and regional chiefs would receive resources only to the degree that they promoted disarmament, better governance, and economic development. The idea must be to transform the warlords into something like ward bosses, or in Afghan terms, khans. Devolution of some power to the local level would also buy the Kabul government time to rebuild fragile institutions including its own ministries (many of which now function in name only, with international NGOs performing much of their work), and to concentrate on lobbying the international community for badly needed support.

Not all the warlords and faction leaders, however, are tractable opportunists. Some, such as Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdur Rasoul Sayyaf, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, are hard-core Islamists who are profoundly opposed to many liberal reforms, such as rights for women, press freedom, and secular government. Indeed, Islamism retains a good deal of strength. At the Loya Jirga, senior Islamists were highly vocal and called for the new Transitional Administration to be an Islamic government. Moderates found themselves pilloried, threatened, and ultimately sidelined.<sup>12</sup> Most Afghan leaders today derive their authority from a combination of appeals to Islam, illicit economic activities (such as the opium trade), and gunmen. More traditional forms of authority—such as Sufi networks, royal lineage, clan ties, age-based wisdom, and the like—play a continuing, albeit attenuated, role. Modern education and elections are resisted as threats to the present order. Hamid Karzai, who is relying on both traditional and modern sources of authority in his challenge to the warlords and older Islamist leaders, embodies this struggle for the soul of Afghanistan. However, Karzai’s inability at the Loya Jirga to free himself from the older Islamist warlords both demonstrates his weak position and reflects a decision to pursue short-term stability at the expense of long-delayed justice.

The warlord problem is one of the tallest hurdles in Afghanistan’s path. Developing a decentralized or federal system of government will empower local leaders, many of whom have nasty records and rivalries that cannot be settled easily. Moreover, there are several levels of warlords, and the pull of localism often means that regional warlords have only tenuous control over nominally subordinate local commanders. The difficulty will be in decentralizing political power without reducing the country to a patchwork of regional fiefdoms. There will be no clear-cut or easy solutions to this problem. Demobilization of local militias will only work if it can be applied evenly across all local rivalries, or if

another, locally accepted force fills the security vacuum that ending the militias will leave behind. Unless the constitutional Loya Jirga provides a framework, tension between Kabul and local powers will continue, especially since the existing situation allows both to be reinforced—Kabul by the flow of foreign aid and the efforts to reconstruct national institutions such as the army; the warlords and faction leaders by outside parties interested in using them for various purposes. Some warlords may make the transition to peacetime politicians, but others may have to be eliminated as political players if long-term stability is to be achieved in Afghanistan. Recalcitrant warlords could play the classic role of transition-to-peace spoilers, and must be prevented from doing so with a mixture of inducements and force. The international coalition must be prepared to muscle warlords who refuse to become peaceful politicians either into line or out of the game.

The last piece of the political puzzle that must be solved in Afghanistan is the problem of persistent meddling by neighboring powers, which is a primary reason why so many warlords and ethnic faction leaders remain powerful. Iran and Pakistan especially have found it a useful place to pursue regional geopolitical aspirations in a fairly risk-free way. Pakistan's Interior Ministry and Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), for example, lent potent assistance to the Taliban. Iran countered by helping the Northern Alliance. Without a doubt, these regional actors will keep trying to manipulate Afghan affairs. Since 9/11, Russia, Uzbekistan, and India also have pursued regional geopolitical aspirations within Afghanistan. Just as predictably, Afghanistan's internal dynamics will have "spillover effects" in the region. This two-way interplay makes it hard to promote particular political outcomes in Afghanistan, which continues to play a role in the plans not only of nearby powers, but also of "substate" (Pakistani provincial governments, the ISI), "sub-substate" (provincial factions, religious movements and parties), and "nonstate" actors (organized economic interests, tribal groups, drug mafias). Steps that might help to control malign regional influences include economic and political nation-building aid to Pakistan and Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors, improved U.S.-Iranian relations, and steps to prevent Arab or neighboring governments from having too large a role in the reconstruction process. In reality, however, the neighbors intend to keep playing their "Great Game," which they expect to be able to pursue in full cry once—as they expect—the United States loses interest in Afghan affairs.

### The Loya Jirga

The 2002 Loya Jirga elections illustrate the problems in making the transition to good governance. The Loya Jirga is a stylized version of the *jirga* (council) system of local self-government used by Pushtuns

for millennia. National leaders in the past convened grand councils to legitimize major decisions that had already been made (the constitutional Loya Jirga of 1964 is a case in point), but had never expected one actually to take substantive decisions, since these councils always reflected too many local and regional divisions. What happened at the 2002 Loya Jirga reveals the wisdom of this distinction.

The Loya Jirga was designed to be as representative as possible of the population, given the lack of accurate census data. Using the existing 32 provinces and 370 administrative districts as a starting point, 1,051 delegates were indirectly elected, with each district guaranteed at least one representative. In the Phase I voting, adults of both sexes from a given district or urban ward gathered to choose between 20 and 60 electors. A few weeks later, these electors met to name from among themselves a designated number of delegates to the Loya Jirga. To administer these elections, the country was divided into nine regions, each centered on a major city. Each region had an election team, headed by members of the 21-person Loya Jirga Commission and assisted by political officers of the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, to conduct the Phase I and II elections in that zone. Twenty-seven international monitors also were dispersed around the country to observe the elections, offer guidance and assistance where possible, and report irregularities. I was one of the monitors, assigned to the Western region and based in Herat. Phase I and II elections began in late April 2002 and occurred through early June 2002. In addition to the 1,051 elected members, 399 seats were supposed to be provided to members of the Interim Authority, refugee populations living outside Afghanistan, internally displaced persons, nomads, religious and civil society elites, and women (who were guaranteed a hundred seats). The grand total of Loya Jirga delegates was supposed to be 1,450,<sup>13</sup> but Loya Jirga Commission members approved last-minute appointments meant to ensure Karzai's election, bringing the total number of official delegates to more than 1,600.

Irregularities in numbers large enough to raise questions about the validity of the process occurred during both phases all over the country. Mostly these problems were the fruit of manipulation or intimidation by local and regional strongmen intent on keeping foes or simply independents out of the Loya Jirga. The regions centered around Herat, Kandahar, and Gardez, respectively, had the most problems. There were verified reports of underage voting, candidates with ties to terrorist or other illicit organizations, bribery, intimidation, illegal detentions, torture, and election-related violence resulting in deaths, including the murder of a Loya Jirga candidate in Ghor Province. A member of the Loya Jirga Commission told me that his regional team received "hundreds of complaints" per day.

The Loya Jirga met from 10 to 21 June 2002 in a huge tent erected on

the campus of the Polytechnic College in Kabul. From the beginning it was evident that the Loya Jirga would be marked by many of the problems that had marred the Phase I and II elections. Despite the efforts of faction leaders and warlords, the quasi-democratic process of indirect elections had produced some independent delegates, and so intimidation continued at the Loya Jirga itself. To make things worse, provincial governors and prominent warlords were given last-minute credentials and seats of honor in the front row, ensuring that many delegates would be unable to vote or behave independently. Agents of the National Security Directorate (the secret police) were allowed to monitor the site, and a senior security officer sat on the stage and observed the counting of the ballots during Karzai's election. Some delegates were targets of open intimidation. Especially frustrated were the Pushtuns, many of whom grew angry upon learning that U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad had pressured the elderly former king Mohammad Zahir Shah into standing aside and placing his support behind Karzai's candidacy for head of state.<sup>14</sup>

In the end, the Loya Jirga only managed to elect Karzai president and listen to a lot of meaningless speeches while the real decisions about the composition of the Transitional Administration were being made elsewhere. According to the Bonn Accords, the Loya Jirga was also supposed to approve the structure of the Transitional Administration and key appointments, but Karzai never presented a serious proposal concerning the structure of the government, and after several days of discussion about a national assembly led nowhere, he announced the creation of commissions to oversee various policy areas. On the last day he named three vice-presidents, a chief justice, and 14 ministers. By then it was clear that little about the political situation in Afghanistan had changed. If anything, the Loya Jirga showed that most power still lies in the hands of strongmen, that ethnic rivalries continue to smolder, and that questions of governmental structure are highly intractable. This is a recipe for disaster, as failure to construct a form of governance that fits Afghan conditions means a default to the status quo, which is a Karzai-fronted but Fahim-dominated government in Kabul, with local and regional warlords governing around the country, always ready to play Kabul against their supporters in neighboring countries.

### **Security and Reconstruction**

Security is the critical issue for Afghanistan's future and the primary topic of concern to Afghans. The warlords' resurgence threatens a return to the pre-Taliban years of the early 1990s, when a plethora of armed factions fought constantly. A stable future requires security and governmental institution-building, both of which have been limited by U.S. choices to devote resources elsewhere. The multinational ISAF

keeps the peace in the area of Kabul (a city now reportedly numbering 2.7 million people) with some 4,800 troops, while the 10,000 troops in Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom (about 75 percent of whom are from the United States) primarily stay within their bases. President

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***Many of the political challenges facing Afghanistan might be resolved through greater international—meaning U.S.-led—commitments to peacekeeping and nation-building.***

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Karzai, UN Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and every leading specialist on Afghanistan have called for an expansion of ISAF, or some form of expanded peacekeeping. In July 2002, a report by the Henry L. Stimson Center recommended ISAF's expansion into a peacekeeping force of 18,000 troops based in all major Afghan cities at a cost of up to US\$4 billion the first year.<sup>15</sup> But the United States insists that building a new national army is the way to go, despite growing evidence that at

the end of the two-year transitional period Karzai's government will only have about a third of the forces it needs to provide security.<sup>16</sup> Although the United States helps to fund ISAF and in August 2002 dropped objections to its expansion (so long as no U.S. troops or additional U.S. funds are required), the absence of U.S. leadership has doomed any serious international peacekeeping role outside of Kabul. Total spending on peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan during the past year was \$540 million, or about 5.4 percent of the roughly \$10 billion that it cost the U.S.-led military coalition to operate there.

Many of the political challenges facing Afghanistan might be resolved through greater international—meaning U.S.-led—commitments to peacekeeping and nation-building. On both these vital issues, U.S. policy has been overly hesitant. Recognizing that a truly national Afghan army or security force is a long way off, the United States should have joined and led ISAF and expanded its mission outside of Kabul, giving commanders both the forces and the rules of engagement needed to keep the warlords in line and to prevent Afghanistan from slipping back toward anarchy and civil war. As continuing bombings, assassination attempts, and insurgent rocket and mortar strikes make clear, the threat is real. Things have been mitigated somewhat by the continuing presence of the 10,000 coalition troops, who act as de facto peacekeepers thanks to the "B-52 Effect."

In autumn 2002, the U.S. administration began to alter its position on peace operations and nation-building as the absence of significant military targets plus ongoing insecurity in the Afghan countryside produced a case of salutary "mission creep." In September, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz called for a renewed commitment to Afghan reconstruction and a wider role for peacekeepers (albeit without U.S. leadership or frontline participation), suggesting a cautious coming to

terms with the need for a less halfhearted embrace of the peacekeeping mission. In late November, U.S. officials announced a plan to deploy “Joint Regional Teams” of combat soldiers and reconstruction specialists to six cities initially. These teams—each numbering roughly 80 soldiers and civilians—are to set up secure bases from which civil-affairs specialists and engineers can begin working on nation-building activities. Britain and other coalition allies are also expected to participate in these operations, reflecting the growing awareness in Washington and other capitals that to move beyond the warlords will require both more security forces and more-energetic reconstruction. There is a risk that these bases and the people using them could become targets for anti-Western elements, as insurgent attacks have been occurring with greater frequency since August 2002, although as of this writing in early December 2002 they have been largely ineffective.

Postconflict reconstruction (or nation-building) will provide the ultimate hedge against the return of instability and terrorism. In Afghanistan, nation-building means at a minimum rebuilding vital physical infrastructure (starting with roads), removing the hundreds of thousands of mines that have been laid over decades of war, giving farmers crops other than opium poppies to grow, channeling some of the energy that goes into smuggling into legitimate production and trade, and building the basic institutions of governance. As sweeping as the reconstruction needs are, it is important that the goals remain largely restorational. Efforts at profound transformation will meet resistance based in Afghanistan’s traditional culture.<sup>17</sup> Assistance must also foster institutional capacity and not merely flow to projects that suit donor needs but in the process disrupt the local economy.

Although nothing will stabilize Afghanistan as much as rebuilding its roads, hospitals, and schools, and in the process giving jobs to its underemployed gunmen, the world has been slow to deliver on its pledges of billions in aid. This has occurred in part due to the exigencies of the funding cycle in large aid organizations, the security concerns of international donors, and the unexpectedly heavy demand for short-term relief to sustain an Afghan population at risk of starvation due to several years of drought and the rapid repatriation of more than a million refugees. Nonetheless, following the Loya Jirga and the Qadir assassination, the Karzai government demanded more and faster reconstruction help lest Afghanistan relapse into anarchy, a concern echoed by Western analysts and pundits.

Recent developments on this front give reason for guarded optimism. In October 2002, the Afghan government issued a new currency in an effort to curb hyperinflation, and the international donor community endorsed the Karzai government’s reconstruction plan, clearing the way for another \$2.5 billion in aid. In November 2002, ground was broken on a \$250 million U.S.-led project to rebuild the Kabul-Kandahar portion of



Afghanistan's key trunk road, and the U.S. Congress passed the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, which authorizes \$3.3 billion in aid over the next four years. The conundrum remains that only outside organizations can make reconstruction happen so fast, meaning that these achievements will do little to nurture the indigenous institutional capacity which Afghanistan will need in order to sustain and build on them. Still, there seems little doubt that the political situation is too ominous to allow policy makers to wait for Afghan-led development efforts to take hold.

With nation-building as with peacekeeping, there are no shortcuts and no substitutes. Either the world helps this crippled nation to heal and rebuild, or it is sure once again to become a lawless haven for terrorists and criminals. The choice is that stark. Among the probable benefits of tackling the nation-building challenge aggressively will be: 1) a deflation of the "war economy" as public-works and scholarship programs gradually draw young men into peaceful pursuits that make them less ripe for recruitment by warlords; 2) economic development and higher living standards that will help to undermine the appeal of radical Islamists and make it easier for Afghan emigrés with skills to return home; 3) a boost in legitimacy and popularity for the Karzai government, which will be able to claim credit for tangible achievements such as the building of new roads, schools, and health clinics; 4) a gradual increase in the strength of moderate political forces at the expense of warlords and radical Islamists.

### **The Whole World Is Watching**

With a single post-Taliban year behind it, the Karzai government struggles with a formidable set of political, security, and reconstruction challenges, but it does not do so in a vacuum—events in Afghanistan are unfolding before a broader audience. Failure to stabilize, rebuild, and to some extent modernize Afghanistan would threaten the security of the country's neighbors, while a serious U.S.-led commitment to nation-building would demonstrate to the Muslim world that U.S. leadership of the international order can be positive, and would help undermine the appeal of Islamic militancy. The challenges, the risks, and the chances of short- and possibly medium-term failure are obviously large, but so will be the long-term payoff if Afghanistan can be successfully rebuilt and crafted into a forward-looking, pro-Western, moderate, law-governed, and at least somewhat democratic Muslim state in the heart of Asia.

As the West and the Muslim world confront the challenge of Islamist extremism in an age of high-tech terrorism, there are important lessons to be learned from Afghanistan. First, an ounce of nation-building prevention will be worth a pound of military-operation cure. The ensemble of approaches summarized under the term "nation-building," for all their slowness and difficulty, must be vital parts of any strategy to blunt radical

Islamism's appeal. Second, while nation-building will not always require the comprehensive reconstruction of the polity, economy, and physical infrastructure of a bludgeoned land, it does require all these things in Afghanistan, and so a sustained international effort under U.S. leadership is indispensable. Third, the political component of nation-building must fit local cultural, ethnic, political, and social realities. For Afghanistan, this means creation of a federal government with gradual "de-warlordization" and demobilization of private militias, not the tug-of-war between northern minorities and Pushtuns that the structure of the present Transitional Administration is fostering. Fourth, to move beyond the entrenched problems of a failed state, an adequate force of international peacekeepers and aid workers must provide the security and drive the physical and political reconstruction, respectively. Well-meaning or cynical decisions to "leave it to the locals" merely allow the preexisting problems to fester.

If the United States can stay the course in Afghanistan, assisting the transition there for decades if need be, then Afghanistan may provide a "demonstration effect" showing that Muslim countries—even those which start from tremendously unfavorable circumstances—can achieve decent governance, economic development, and friendly relations with the West. If the events of the past year are any indication, however, Washington has been slow to take the right steps to lead to this happy conclusion. The situation is not beyond rescue, and recent developments have been good, but the overall trends are bad. And the clock is ticking. With a possible U.S. war with Iraq looming and other humanitarian crises undoubtedly over the horizon, experts predict at best a year or two of international attention before Afghanistan slips once again out of the newspapers. During that golden window of opportunity, Afghanistan must be rebuilt into a fully functioning member of international community or the opportunity presented by the overthrow of the Taliban will have been squandered. If it is, that will be the bitterest tragedy yet in a country that has known little but tragedy for far too long.

## NOTES

1. Larry Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Larry Goodson, "Afghanistan—Picking up the Pieces," *Hoover Digest* 1 (2002): 57–67.

2. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

3. A substantial anthropological literature discusses both the social foundations of Afghanistan's prewar rural system and its transformation during the war. See, for example, Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880–1946* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969); Hasan Kawun Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), chs. 6 and 7; Olivier Roy, "The New Political Elite of Afghanistan," in Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi, eds., *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994),

72–100; and Barnett R. Rubin, “Redistribution and the State in Afghanistan,” in Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi, eds., *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, 187–227.

4. I argued in favor of such a U.S. role, but my advice was not popular. See Larry Goodson, “U.S. Troops Must Go In,” *New York Times*, 14 November 2001.

5. Anthony M. Cordesman, *The Lessons of the Afghan Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2002), 51–60.

6. “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions” (the “Bonn Accords”). Another option might have been to establish a transitional government headed by the United Nations, as in East Timor, but early leanings in Washington and among senior UN officials were for an Afghan-led government that would finally attempt to realize the pleas for “broad-based government” made so often during the late 1990s.

7. CARE International in Afghanistan, “Rebuilding Afghanistan: A Little Less Talk, a Lot More Action,” *Policy Brief*, 1 October 2002.

8. CARE International in Afghanistan, “Rebuilding Afghanistan,” 2002, 2.

9. “The Afghan Transitional Administration: Prospects and Perils,” ICG Afghanistan Briefing Paper, 30 July 2002.

10. Nazif M. Shahrani, “The Future of the State and the Structure of Community Governance in Afghanistan,” in William Maley, ed., *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1998), 212–42; Nazif M. Shahrani, “War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan,” *American Anthropologist* 104 (September 2002): 715–22; Marina Ottaway and Anatol Lieven, “Rebuilding Afghanistan: Fantasy versus Reality,” *Carnegie Policy Brief* 12 (January 2002).

11. The one exception was Interim President Sibghatullah Mojaddidi, who left office peacefully (if reluctantly) after two months in 1992.

12. Personal observation, also noted in International Crisis Group Afghanistan Briefing, “The Afghan Transitional Administration: Prospects and Perils,” Kabul/Brussels, 30 July 2002.

13. Advisory Handbook for District and Regional Indirect Election Teams, UNAMA, 2002.

14. One Pushtun tribal leader close to the king told me on the floor of the Loya Jirga that he had the signatures of more than 1,200 Loya Jirga delegates on petitions favoring the king for head of state. See also International Crisis Group Afghanistan Briefing, “The Afghan Transitional Administration: Prospects and Perils,” Kabul/Brussels, 30 July 2002.

15. William J. Durch, “Security and Peace Support in Afghanistan: Analysis and Short- to Medium-Term Options,” *Stimson Center Report*, 31 July 2002.

16. Concerns over losing their best soldiers and the ethnic composition of the force have made many warlords reluctant to send troops to the new Afghan National Guard training battalions. Upon completion of the training cycle, the new Afghan battalions have quickly lost at least one-third of their troops, due to inadequate pay and in order to return to home provinces. See Anthony Davis, “Karzai struggles to consolidate Afghanistan’s fragile peace,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, August 2002, 23.

17. John Stuart Blackton, “Afghanistan, Foreign Aid and U.S. National Interests,” *The National Interest*, 13 November 2002. See also Barnett R. Rubin, “A Blueprint for Afghanistan,” *Current History* (April 2002): 153–57.