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After Bonn: conflictual peace building

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ABSTRACT *The Bonn Agreement of December 2001 lays the foundations for a political transition in Afghanistan after 23 years of war. The agreement excludes the defeated party, the Taliban, while seeking to commit the remaining groups to a long-term and loosely defined peace process. With Afghan regionally based political–military groups defined largely along ethnic lines, and closely linked to external powers, rebuilding national authority will be a slow and conflictual process. Rebuilding the coercive capacity of the state is essential to overcome strong centrifugal tendencies, yet must be timed so as not to get ahead of the restoration of legitimate political authority. International assistance can support the political recovery by being conscious of the need to neutralise the 'spoilers' of the peace process. Making haste slowly in aiding economic recovery can prevent armed competition for power at the centre. To promote this kind of transition, and promote Afghan influence in the peace-building process, the international aid community must fundamentally reorient the strategies and methods of past involvement in the country.*

In a comparative perspective, the 'peace-building' task of the newly established UN mission in Afghanistan has both uniquely difficult as well as more straightforward aspects. The straightforward part relates to the fact that the erstwhile enemy was easily defeated militarily and rapidly melted away. There were no long and difficult negotiations with the Taliban, no ex-Taliban armies to be demobilised or reintegrated, and no political structure of Taliban supporters to be integrated in a postwar order. In this sense, the common framework of a postwar order was that of a conflict which ended in total victory and total defeat. On the other hand, the circumstances of the military defeat that made the Bonn Agreement possible, and the structure of the victorious Afghan side, suggest that fundamental conflict remains and will surface to make the peace-building mission extraordinarily difficult. The Afghan case thus questions the conventional wisdom, partially confirmed by social science analysis, that wars that end in definitive victory on the battlefield provide a more solid foundation for subsequent peace building than those that end in a negotiated settlement.[1]

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The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), established by Security Council Resolution 1401 on 28 March 2002, is the focal point for international assistance to Afghanistan. The mission's primary mandate is to help the Afghan parties implement the provisions of the Bonn Agreement, reached with the assistance of the UN and the USA on 5 December 2001.[2] The agreement provides a detailed framework for an Afghan Interim Administration (the AIA) and the establishment of a subsequent transitional government. It has only the briefest provisions for reconstruction in other areas; for instance, the AIA shall establish a Central Bank and an independent Human Rights Commission, both with the assistance of the UN. There is only a brief reference to foreign obligations (the AIA 'shall cooperate with the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs and organized crime' (V(3)), but a clear affirmation of the high-visibility principle of the participation of women. In the critical military sector the agreement merely states that the AIA would take command of all armed forces, Mujaheddin and armed groups in the country, and that these would later be 'reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces' (V(1)).

The Bonn Agreement, in other words, is only a preliminary step towards a postwar order. Major decisions regarding power sharing in the political and military arena, and principles for reconstruction in the social and economic sector, will have to be taken as part of the transitional and peace-building process. The diversity of interest among Afghan parties, and the large number of international actors involved, suggest that the most difficult part of the peace-building effort lies ahead. This article will examine the contradictions in what is commonly, but misleadingly, called the 'post-conflict' phase, with particular reference to three issues: 1) reconstructing national authority; 2) establishing security; and 3) reforming the structure of economic and humanitarian assistance.

The starting point for peace building

As a contemporary policy term, 'peace building' has a general but imprecise meaning.[3] It is most usually understood as a set of transitional reconstruction activities undertaken in a postwar phase, designed to lay the foundation for longer-term developments such as democratisation, economic development and social justice. As the term progressively came into use in the 1990s, it typically referred to international assistance to implement peace agreements after civil wars, commonly organised under the UN and, more rarely, under *ad hoc* institutions such as the Peace Implementation Council for Bosnia.[4]

Since the starting point for peace building is the outcome of the preceding conflict, it is useful to place the Afghan case in a typology based on missions sorted according to this premise. Three main categories emerge:

1. Missions to existing states recovering from civil wars that typically ended in a compromise and required careful postwar policies of reintegration.
2. Missions to new states that emerged as a result of the conflict. Here, separation made political reconstruction within the successor state easier, at least initially, although factional strife on the winning side often emerged.

3. Missions to weak or 'failed states', which made (re)constitution of national authority the critical issue.

A sub-category of civil wars—those ending in total victory—was statistically frequent among civil wars in the twentieth century, but much less so in the 1990s.[5] The Rwanda conflict in 1994 is the clearest example of total military defeat. Even here, however, the progress of subsequent peace building was dependent on efforts to reintegrate the population associated with the defeated side.

Most of the situations in which the UN engaged itself in 'peace building' missions in the 1990s were of the first kind, ie civil wars that had ended in a compromise of sorts. The fundamental task of peace building was to develop institutions that could reintegrate former enemies. Economic recovery and the repair of diverse infrastructure were of course important, but equally central was the need to rebuild institutions that could serve all citizens and ex-belligerents regardless of class, ethnicity or political affiliation, help them to come to terms with the past, and create confidence in a common future. Reintegration in this broader sense was the main postwar challenge in Central America, southern Africa and Cambodia in the early 1990s, just as it is in Bosnia and Sierra Leone today. In many cases, the peace-building agenda was suggested by a peace agreement that addressed the causes of the conflict, enumerated provisions for reform, and set out the rights and obligations of the parties concerned, including international organisations. The UN-mediated peace agreement in El Salvador (January 1992) and the Dayton Agreement for Bosnia (December 1995) are cases in point.

Afghanistan in early 2002 was different. The Bonn Agreement, which provides a legal and political framework for postwar activities, is not a peace agreement between belligerents. It is merely a statement of general goals and intended power sharing among the victors of a conflict in which their erstwhile common enemy, the Taliban, was suddenly deposed by the intervention of a *deus ex machina*. The military victory was accomplished by an external power whose primary interest was not in defeating the Taliban itself, but in the pursuit of a larger war, in which Afghanistan happened to be one arena. The military logic of the war did not entail a commitment to build a certain kind of peace in Afghanistan. Consequently, the disjunction between these two activities increased the general uncertainty in the postwar period.

The local Afghan parties that suddenly found themselves victorious had barely been united even in the last US-led phase of the war, and had previously been enemies. As competing military factions, they had separate structures of power and different foreign patrons. None represented the major and traditionally dominant ethnic group in the country, the Pashtuns. Numerous scores among the various groups remained to be settled. As a result, while economic recovery and some reintegrative tasks facing the UN mission in Afghanistan were similar to the typical peace-building scenarios of the 1990s, the starting point for international assistance differed sharply, as did the political context. The central political task of peace building was not to overcome the past, but to establish institutions that would prevent future conflicts among the victors.

In this respect, post-Taliban Afghanistan resembled category 2 of new states: Kosovo and East Timor. In these cases the international community helped establish institutions of state and economy for the winning side in a conflict that ended in total (or near-total) victory. As a result, political, military and economic reintegration was much less problematic, and issues of accountability for war crimes could be dealt with according to standards of international justice. The transferability of lessons from these two cases is limited, however, not least by the fact that the UN assumed *de facto* trusteeship in Kosovo, and a *de jure* protectorate in East Timor, governing both territories by direct rule in a transitional period. By contrast, UNAMA was a small operation designed to leave 'a light footprint', in the words of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Lakhdar Brahimi.[6]

Afghanistan in early 2002 had similarities with the 'failed state' category as well. In terms of international peace building, this category was exemplified by the UN experience in Somalia in 1993–95. While a war between Afghan militias and the international peacekeeping force (ISAF) along the lines of the Mogadishu battle did not seem imminent in early 2002, other aspects of the Somali situation are similar. In Somalia, as in Afghanistan, state structures were weak or non-functioning, and military force was controlled by competing clans or warlords. In both cases, the UN tried to establish a national transitional government through a system of indirect elections, and had a wide-ranging agenda for economic recovery, security and humanitarian relief. The peace building efforts in Somalia persisted well beyond the military debacle in Mogadishu. After a year and a half, however, the UN abandoned the national perspective and aid agencies scaled back their activities to support local institutions in a 'building-block approach'.[7]

Thus, in typological terms, the Afghan case, like Bosnia, cuts across the categories identified above. It incorporates the problems of peace building in weak states, and the tensions over how to divide the spoils of peace characteristic of new states. Critical security issues concerning the structure of military force have not been negotiated because there was no peace agreement, only a victory. Future conflicts are supposed to be dealt with through institutions established by the political transition, but the transition itself is in danger of being undermined by the absence of a 'legitimate monopoly of force' as virtually all military power was controlled by various warlords.

Regional international politics exacerbated the conflictual implications of the diffusion of military power. As Fen Hampson and others have argued, regional relations are critical to the success of a peace agreement.[8] Neighbouring states can if not make, then certainly break, a peace agreement. They are uniquely positioned to undermine a core element of the peace-building process—the ability of the state to have a legitimate monopoly of armed force—by providing sanctuaries and secret conduits of arms, training, etc to rebels. Hence even if regional actors do not actively support joint peace-building efforts, their acquiescence in a given agreement is essential. The point applies with particular force to Afghanistan.

For the past two decades, the Afghan conflict has been characterised by the mutually reinforcing effects of external and internal divisions. Divisions among the Afghans virtually invited competitive foreign interference. By supporting

their respective Afghan factions with arms and money, these states fuelled the conflict and intensified the violence. Breaking the cycle of interlocking conflicts thus requires mutually supportive moves at the national, regional and international level. While some of the regional states, particularly the smaller Central Asian Republics, may have incentives to do so, the role of other regional states remains uncertain. The USA and Pakistan have focused on Iran's negative role in arming its clients in western Afghanistan, while the USA in turn has paid and armed warlords in the southeast and the north to help fight Al-Qaida and Taliban. Policy rhetoric that brands Iran as part of an 'axis of evil' served further to transpose external conflicts onto the Afghan theatre. International agreements provided little restraint. The UN Security Council placed no restrictions on arms supplies to the Afghan parties in support of its peace-building mission in the country. The Bonn Agreement has no provisions for ending, or even monitoring, external military assistance to the Afghan parties in order to consolidate the peace (unlike, for instance, the 1991 Paris Agreement on Cambodia).

Reconstructing national authority

After capturing Kabul in 1996 a key objective of the Taliban had been to restore a strong national administration, but their repressive practices and increasingly radical policies served to delegitimise both the regime and its central goal. The political map of Afghanistan in early 2002 was disconcertingly similar to the situation that prevailed between the fall of the communists and the emergence of the Taliban (1992–94), a period of devastating war, particularly over control of the capital Kabul. The immediate post-Taliban Afghanistan was ruled by a handful of powerful regionally based warlords who headed military–political organisations, whose boundaries were defined largely in ethnic or religious terms. The exception was the Pashtun south, where a larger variety of commanders re-established their local fiefdoms, but with no evident unifying candidates at the regional or ethnic level. The various contenders and their rapidly shifting alliances were nurtured by neighbouring powers, which pursued their own security interests in the Afghan theatre, not all of which were conducive to a stable government.

Numerous former warlords had returned from exile to participate in the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida, thereby receiving new arms and money that enabled them to revitalise their organisations. The result was considerable coercive capacity vested in the warlords, but with no parallel capacity at the centre. As Rubin and associates observed, this formed a poor starting point: 'since there is little or no state structure, giving up commanding an armed group in order to become a minister amounts to abandoning power rather than sharing it.'[9] Some observers concluded that a federal structure was the only possible and desirable solution, envisaging an arrangement where existing regional groups were given considerable autonomy within a weak central state structure.

Two types of arguments have been presented in favour of a federal solution. One is a legitimacy argument that emphasises the representativeness of existing regional groups; the other is rooted in pragmatism by emphasising the difficulties of working against the existing distribution of military power.

The first argument assumes that the ethnic (and in part religious) identities have been continuously strengthened throughout the past 23 years of war, so that the primary political affinities of most Afghans now lie at the regional level.[10] This is particularly manifested in the emergence of strong political groups within the Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek populations, and represents a challenge to the traditional Pashtun domination of Afghan politics.[11] A related line of thought makes reference to Afghanistan's political history, in which strong peripheral forces have always resisted state ambitions to establish strong central administrative control throughout the country.[12] Centralising ambitions of past rulers, whether the communist government or the modernist Islamist parties emerging within the resistance of the 1980s, met with opposition of this kind.

The pragmatic argument, by contrast, assumes that existing warlords are so powerful that only co-optation on their terms is a realistic option. Hence, granting considerable autonomy to the regions is the only viable way forward. The foundation of this line of reasoning is that the international community is unwilling to invest in a large-scale, long-term operation in Afghanistan, and that this needs to be reflected in a moderate ambition to stabilise, rather than modernise and democratise the polity. The solution therefore is to work directly with the existing powers, using international assistance to buy them off, while formulating modest standards of governance. This admittedly 'would be a bribe of sorts, and might appear to perpetuate the power of the warlords'.[13]

The alternative to working with the warlords is not, as some of those promoting federalism portray it, a rapid establishment of institutions for democracy and free market transactions, in line with standards of the industrialised world.[14] Few, if any, observers of Afghanistan believe this to be possible. To hold this vision up as an alternative is therefore a straw man. Between the vision of an overnight modernisation, on the one hand, and leaving it all to the warlords, on the other, there is significant room for manoeuvre, as we will explore below. But first, are there inherent and weighty arguments against the alternative formalised as federalism?

The arguments in favour of a federal structure are problematic for several reasons. First, the regional groups are military organisations with little or nothing that qualifies as a civilian administrative structure. To the extent that these organisations have been able to offer anything to the population in terms of social services, it has been through collaboration with aid organisations. In fact, the old national administration, with its three administrative levels—district, province and state—has an administrative capacity that goes well beyond that of the regional groupings. This was true even in early 2002, despite consistent neglect by the aid community during the Taliban period and before. In other words, the choice between federalism and a more unitary state is also a choice between building new administrations anchored at the regional level, and strengthening existing but poor national structures at the national, provincial and local level. In both cases, new capacity and new structures have to be established.

A second problem is the assumption that regional groups have widespread popular support, arising from the increasingly ethnic definition of the conflict throughout the 1990s. The assumption is here made that, whereas the scale, and indeed nature, of the groups opposing centralisation have changed (from locality

and tribe to region and ethnic group), their qualities as identifying entities remain largely the same. The military character of the organisations and consequent narrow basis in civil society further suggests that they have limited representativeness. More important is the question of whether regional identities have now gained primacy over both local ones as defined by tribe or place of origin, and national ones as defined by Afghan citizenship. Whereas ethnicity was exploited politically for all its worth by the military groups in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s, it is unclear why some analysts accept such claims. Olivier Roy, otherwise a proponent of the federal option, admits that the existing organisations have little or no basis in civil society.[15] Conrad Schetter goes further, to conclude that people seem surprisingly critical of the ethnic manipulation by existing leaders: 'despite the "ethnicization" of the war, there was no ethnicization of the Afghan masses.'[16]

Third, there is the issue of foreign interference. All of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups are represented also in the neighbouring states, with the exception of the largely Shi'ite Hazaras, whose cause has been adopted by Iran.[17] There is little doubt that the real threat to political stability in Afghanistan lies not in internal political dynamics alone, but in the interplay between neighbouring states and Afghan groups.[18] One recent example suggests the continuing force of this dynamic: before the Bonn agreement, the Russian government evidently considered the option of having individual neighbouring countries taking responsibility for security in their respective regions of interest.[19] Some observers, including Ahmed Rashid, conclude that external forces would prefer continued chaos to a government not under their influence.[20] Federalism under these circumstances would provide a structure that would encourage competitive interference of a kind that is likely to exacerbate rather than reduce conflict.

Pursuing the alternative of restructuring national authority will require sustained commitment and great political skills. It will no doubt be a long and difficult haul. However, the strategy does not entail starting from zero, as indicated above. The idea of a unitary state and modern state institutions (a national police, army, educational system, etc) are embodied in Afghanistan's constitutions of 1931 and 1964. The latter will be the legal framework for the present state until a new constitution is promulgated (around 2004, according to the Bonn Agreement). While there has always been a distinct gap in Afghanistan between constitutional prescriptions for a unitary structure and the practice of decentralised power, the idea of the unitary state does not have to be invented. The important symbolic role played by the king in the present transition period points to the relevance of this model as a legitimate, albeit not exclusive, constitutional reference point.

The question of constitutional structure cannot be assessed with reference to pragmatic considerations alone. There are normative concerns as well. Given Afghanistan's conflictual past and an apparent widespread, popular desire for peace, a constitutional framework that has a reasonable chance of reducing and managing conflict in the long run must be an important objective. Reconstructing a national authority would provide a better basis than a federal structure for breaking the past pattern of interlocking conflicts between internal divisions and external interference. Similarly, and all other things being equal, a national

authority is in a better position to adjudicate competitive claims for international assistance than self-styled regional authorities, each of whom is likely to seek preferential access to international donors.

If reconstructing a national authority is accepted as the central but long-term objective of peace building, the key question is how to do this while keeping the major potential 'spoilers' on board. All existing military and political groups are potential spoilers. The key challenge is slowly to rebuild the pre-war administrative structure while forming a new political consensus within the framework of a transitional structure. In the process, the regionally based military–political groupings must be co-opted in a way that does not backfire by further deepening and institutionalising existing divisions. This is essentially 'conflictual peace building'; it has no simple recipes, and for UNAMA and international donors to participate effectively in this process will require great skills and knowledge.

On a general level three types of strategies can be readily identified. As Stephen J Stedman argues in a seminal article, there are three different options by which spoilers can be committed to a peace process: inducement; socialisation; and coercion.[21] Inducement as a strategy has been explicitly suggested by proponents of a regional solution, who are concerned that channelling external resources through the centre might trigger conflict over control. Admittedly, a massive infusion of external resources at the centre is a high-risk strategy, likely to undermine efforts to build a more representative central authority. The strategy of reconstructing national authority therefore has to operate within a long time-frame, incorporate a 'make haste slowly' approach, and emphasise a parallel institution building in the public sector. Stepwise assistance which starts in sectors where input is urgent, and where programmes are labour- rather than capital-intensive is in line with this strategy.[22]

The socialisation strategy basically aims at building commonly agreed norms, encouraged either in the form of sanctions or in the form of education. The latter is a long-term strategy that in the case of Afghanistan can build on strong normative foundations—although a weak physical infrastructure. The use of sanctions, including carrots as well as sticks, may be thought to have more immediate effects, but applications throughout the past decade in Afghanistan have met with only minimal success.[23]

Stedman's third option is coercion, which at least in the short term depends on international forces. It was increasingly clear in early 2002 that the international community was unwilling to commit troops to a credible security force outside the capital. Combined with the need to avoid a massive insertion of aid at an early stage, the lack of coercive capacity gave the UN and the international community very little leverage with potential spoilers in the Afghan recovery process. This left a grim prospect for controlling the spoilers, according to Barnett R Rubin: 'substituting offers of assistance for police and military action will fail here as elsewhere. Incentives work best when combined with sanctions.'[24] The question, then, is what kind of coercive capacities exist to draw on, in a delicate division of labour between a hesitant international security force, and a potential future national army that would be seen as legitimate by most Afghans.

Security

In the rapidly growing literature on peace building there is no agreement on what constitutes appropriate sequencing, except that establishing security comes towards the top of the list. It is equally clear, however, that if international forces do not provide security in the transitional period, finding agreement on the composition, function and lines of authority of national security forces is likely to be the most vexing part of the peace-building process.

It was decided early in the planning process for the UN mission in Afghanistan that the international military forces would be separate from the civilian mission. The ISAF was thus modelled on the pattern of 'a coalition of the willing', which became increasingly common in peace-keeping missions in the second half of the 1990s. The advantage of a force like ISAF was that it could be deployed quickly since it was not formed by the UN but consisted of national contingents that operated under a UN resolution. The force was financed on an entirely voluntary basis, and the authority relationship to the civilian mission of the UN, headed by an SRSG, was merely one of 'close consultation' (Res1386/2001, para 4). The international security force thus functioned with minimal institutionalisation in relation to the UN, and within a more uncertain timeframe than was customary for regular UN peacekeeping operations.

The Security Council resolution of 20 December 2001 authorised ISAF deployment only in Kabul and 'surrounding areas'. The Bonn Agreement had held out the prospect of subsequent deployment to other major cities (Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat), but it soon became evident that the only ones strongly calling for further deployment were the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, his SRSG to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, the Chairman of the AIA, Hamid Karzai, and some aid agencies. They faced formidable obstacles. First, the USA was concerned that additional deployment of a peace-keeping force would complicate its own ongoing war against remnants of Al-Qaida and the Taliban. Recalling the agonising dilemmas of the UN and NATO in Bosnia, the USA feared the peace keepers would be taken as hostages by enemy forces to hamper the US campaign, or require a US rescue operation that would divert resources from the war. Second, some countries that otherwise might have contributed troops to the UN-authorised force had instead placed military resources behind the US war in Afghanistan in order to demonstrate their place in the line-up that President Bush had defined as 'either with us, or against us'. This included traditional troop contributing countries such as the UK, Canada and Norway. Indeed, the UK chose to send an additional and sizeable contingent (1700 marines) to serve with the US force in the war in Afghanistan, while maintaining a long-standing announcement to reduce its ISAF contingent (from 1600 to below 1000) and turning the leadership over to another state. By late March 2002 Turkey finally agreed to take over the mantle.

There was also the question of what function ISAF would have if deployed to areas controlled by particularly powerful warlords. In Kabul its mandate was limited to providing a 'secure environment' for the AIA and the UN. If international forces were deployed to the regions, the primary purpose presumably would be to provide security for humanitarian operations and, possibly, to bolster

national authority and improve security conditions generally by asking the warlords to withdraw their units from their respective provincial capitals. This would undoubtedly meet more resistance than had been the case in Kabul. In the capital, the Northern Alliance forces had reluctantly agreed to cantonment outside the city limits in return for political dominance in the national interim authority. There was no similar political reward in the provinces. Cantonment here would court serious military confrontation with the local commanders. Alternatively, ISAF would simply legitimise the power and presence of warlord forces by operating alongside them.

In the absence of an ISAF presence, security conditions for ordinary people in the countryside depended on the warlords and, increasingly, the presence of international forces outside ISAF. Neither prevented a vicious ethnic cleansing of northern Pashtuns early in 2002 in areas controlled by the forces of 'General' Dostum (now Deputy Defence Minister in the AIA).[25] Fighting also broke out among competing commanders in the north, and the main roads in the south and east were insecure. Over time, however, it seemed that the heavy presence of US and allied forces in the south and east put a lid on violence not related to the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida. The USA also sought to bolster the position of Karzai's government by intervening in a round of fighting among rival Afghan groupings in the east. The presence of B-52s in the skies was a visible reminder of their superior firepower. Some Afghans took to calling the air patrols 'the new Vice and Virtue' (a reference to the all-powerful Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue, the zealous religious police operating during the Taliban regime).

The metaphor brought out the important point that the presence of international forces, and the resources they provided to the local military organisations, not only enabled rival groupings to revitalise their organisation. They functioned as a lid on intra-Afghan conflict as well. Once the lid came off, there was a good chance that the status quo ante would be restored, unless security sector reforms had been implemented.[26] In the absence of a peace agreement with even a preliminary framework for the size, composition and authority structures in the new army and the police, these issues had to be negotiated as part of the peace-building process. This clearly would be its most conflictual element. Although foreign estimates of the likely size of the new armed forces of Afghanistan fluctuated wildly,[27] major donors and aid agencies agreed that it would mean immediate and large-scale demobilisation of militia units and military groupings of various kinds.

A critical task in such situations is to keep reforms in the security sector in step with the political negotiations for a transitional government.[28] The political process in Afghanistan had a clear timetable, with a set date for convening a *Loya Jirga* that would appoint the new government. For the international community to start building a national military force in advance of this process would inevitably be seen to influence it. The national army might easily appear as yet another faction. If established before a reasonably legitimate government came into place, moreover, such an army might feel more accountable to its foreign patrons, if accountable to anyone at all. Those who commanded military power on the ground naturally reinforced the case for slow reforms, as they were

unwilling to give up forces in advance of decisions about the political balance in the new government. Leaving the regional political–military groupings intact with no counterpart at the centre, however, was practically to invite the warlords to challenge the political process if they became dissatisfied. An equally strong case for rapid security sector reform was the fact that it should take place before the foreign security 'lid' came off. The largest international military presence in Afghanistan, some 7000 US and allied forces were not there in a peacekeeping capacity under a UN authorisation, but to fight the war against Al-Qaida and the Taliban. Their continued presence would primarily be determined by considerations relating to the war, rather than by complex peace-building processes in Afghanistan.

These conflicting interests shaped the pace of military reform in Afghanistan. ISAF and the USA trained the first battalion of a new national Afghan army, based on recruits contributed from various groupings, which was proudly inspected by Chairman Karzai in April 2002. Yet the unit represented a tiny fraction (a mere 600) of the total number of men under arms (perhaps 100 000) who belonged to the various factions. Evidently, major decisions regarding the size and composition of the new army were left to be negotiated only after the installation of the transitional government in mid-June, as prescribed in the schedule of the Bonn Agreement.

Reforming the structure of economic and humanitarian assistance

The structure of economic and humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan over the past 20 years has been dominated by an emergency orientation. Most projects were short-term and implemented by NGOs; in recent years the aid was loosely co-ordinated within a system established by UN agencies, NGOs and donors.

The aid budget for assistance channelled through the UN system averaged 250 million US dollars annually for the years 2000 and 2001. By contrast, at the Tokyo meeting in January 2002 donors pledged 4.5 billion US dollars to be spent over the next five years. The aid would focus on rehabilitation and development programmes rather than short-term emergency relief projects. A major departure from previous practice is that the Afghan government is to have a formal role in aid allocation and co-ordination. The change poses a major challenge for NGOs and UN agencies that have no tradition of working with government authorities in Afghanistan, but rather have tried to be independent from—and have frequently opposed—governmental influence. This entails major changes in approach and methods of humanitarian agencies working in Afghanistan. Yet, such fundamental reorientation is required if economic and humanitarian assistance is to contribute to peace building rather than strengthen existing divisions and fuel latent conflict.

Historically all forms of assistance to Afghanistan have been closely linked to political and military goals. Some of the largest NGOs now operating in the country started out as part of a solidarity movement that explicitly aided only one side in the conflict, that is, those who fled or fought against the Soviet invaders in the 1980s. This 'partisan' approach sought to overthrow the Kabul government through political, military and humanitarian means. Cross-border humanitarian

assistance to Afghanistan was largely provided through commanders from the various Afghan parties, whereas the refugee assistance in Pakistan enabled 'refugee warriors' to venture into Afghanistan as Mujaheddin (holy warriors).[29]

The number of Afghan NGOs increased sharply after 1989. Some focused on development projects and community advancement, but many more were business oriented. The establishment of a Mujaheddin government in Kabul in 1992 did not change this situation, nor did it bring about a closer relationship between the humanitarian agencies and the state. UN agencies and the NGOs continued their activities largely apart from the government structure. As they assumed a wide range of functions normally associated with the state, including the provision of health and education services, the repair of roads and irrigation systems, as well as limited agricultural reactivation, the humanitarians in effect became a shadow-government and a substitute for the Afghan state. The Mujaheddin parties in the government did not object since the system enabled them to use their resources to strengthen their own organisations and increase their military strength in their perpetual internal conflict. In this period the humanitarian agencies had no joint co-ordination structure to encourage development of joint policies and strategies. There were four NGO co-ordinating bodies, which in turn had limited interaction with the UN system.

The emergence of the Taliban from 1994 onwards brought major changes in relations with the international aid community. When the Taliban started to restrict access to education for girls and the right to employment for women, the international community gradually formed a joint, rights-based approach to the provision of humanitarian assistance. The UN introduced a Strategic Framework (SF) approach for Afghanistan in 1998, as a test case for the UN Administrative Committee on Coordination (UNACC) to develop peace-building strategies in complex emergencies. The aim was to avoid '"disconnects" between political, human rights, humanitarian and development aspects of the [international] response … [and to facilitate] the transition from a state of internal conflict to a just and sustainable peace through mutually reinforcing political and assistance initiatives'.[30]

Under the SF approach projects were to be rights-based and 'principled'—ie based on international human rights standards—and to contribute to peace building. The framework introduced a set of principles to guide assistance for all UN agencies. It only allowed for rehabilitation and development assistance to areas where it could be reasonably determined that the aid would not benefit the warring parties politically or militarily. Institution and capacity building of any 'presumed state authority', ie the Taliban government, was prohibited unless such activities advanced human rights, and authorities fully subscribed to international human rights legislation. NGOs and donors were enlisted in the strategy through development in 1998 of a Principled Common Programming process for 'establishing the assistance community's priorities, programmes and projects'.[31] A national co-ordination structure was established, comprising the Afghan Planning Board (APB), meeting in Islamabad in Pakistan, and six Regional Coordinating Bodies (RCBs) in Afghanistan.

A review of the SF approach undertaken in 2001 seriously questioned its success. Most fundamentally it found a serious disconnect between humanitarian

and political objectives in the international aid community, concluding that aid cannot function as a part of 'peace building' if there is no political investment in the same. As it was, 'political actors have simultaneously delegated responsibility for making the Taliban more respectable to the aid system … and undermined their chances of doing so by their funding practices and insistence on their engagement at the project level'.[32] This study as well as other reports noted that the UN agencies were hardly able to co-ordinate among themselves, and had varying practices of relating to the Taliban. Most humanitarian organisations wanted to establish working relations with the authorities as a means to get projects implemented, but also to encourage the Taliban to soften their stand on human rights issues. Some donors, notably the USA and the UK, held to a hard-line approach based on pressure rather than positive incentives.

There were other obstacles to co-ordination. The UN-led Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) did not provide a total overview over funding requirements and contributions by aid actors. Many agencies did not submit all projects to the CAP as they were seeking independent funding, and donors funded projects outside the CAP process as well as within it. Problems of co-ordination arising from the absence of common baseline data for Afghanistan and from varying systems for assessing needs reinforced the tendency for individual agencies and organisations to establish their own priorities.[33]

Past experience regarding the structure of the aid relationship is relevant to the present situation in Afghanistan. The AIA is a weak central government, struggling to cope with a range of political and humanitarian challenges, which in all probability will also face the successor, transitional government. The new authorities must find a way to co-ordinate their own efforts and collaborate with numerous international economic and humanitarian actors. Most of them have far larger budgets than the transitional government. Many aid organisations also have significant experience inside the country, and have recruited to their staff most of the skilled Afghans that have a higher or technical education. Given the imbalance in capacity, the balance is weighted against the Afghan state at the outset.

Even before the AIA was established, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) had initiated a rapid needs assessment to prioritise rehabilitation areas and set funding requirements for the first donor meeting.[34] The report was developed by 60 external consultants within a timespan of only a few weeks, and with limited consultation with the AIA or Afghan civil society. The AIA rapidly recognised the need for greater governmental control over the reconstruction process and established the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA), under the guidance of the AIA Chairman and a number of ministers. However, as the World Bank observed, this unit itself urgently required capacity building in order to play its intended role.[35] In the meantime international actors were left to exercise decisive influence.

The increase in the number of donors and humanitarian agencies, and the introduction of new layers of donor and UN co-ordination arrangements, added to a complex aid structure. The uncertainty about the role and authority (externally and internally) of the recently established UNAMA, and of the previous aid co-ordination structures represented by APB and RCBs, added to a sense of

fragmentation and flux. The Afghan Support Group (ASG), established in 1997 with a membership of major donor governments, was given the additional function by the Tokyo meeting of co-chairing with the AIA an Implementation Group to meet in Kabul. The group was to serve as the formal meeting point between the Afghan central authority and the aid community. However, a co-chaired ministerial meeting between the USA, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the European Union, established in late 2001, remained as a powerful structure that controlled much of the funding. Additionally, major donors quickly proved reluctant to channel funding through the common trust fund that was agreed to in principle at the Tokyo meeting. Possibly only a quarter of the funds pledged at the Tokyo meeting would go through the World Bank-administered fund.[36] That meant a plethora of individual aid actors who would no doubt provide funds directly to the various Afghan ministries, military commanders, self-proclaimed governors, or NGOs of their liking. This could well exceed the management capacity of the central government, and possibly be undermining it as well by strengthening political–military opponents.

There are additional concerns. Decades of emergency aid have left the UN/NGO community and Afghan administrative structures with limited capacity for reconstruction and development activities. A major effort to build national capacity is a prerequisite for success, but, if the past is a guide, is less likely to be funded than more visible projects. The rapid increase in the number of economic and humanitarian actors is further complicating this issue. As several reports noted, many of the newcomers attracted to Afghanistan by the pledges of almost 5 billion US dollars in aid on the horizon had little knowledge of the complexity of the Afghan situation. They were willing to pay highly for Afghan professionals, thereby draining staff both from government offices as well as from experienced national and international NGOs.[37]

The newcomer agencies might also be more inclined to enter agreements with local commanders to get their projects started, or to get their convoys through, as NGOs usually did in the Mujaheddin period. This would further undermine the national authority.

The central principle and purpose of the Bonn process is to re-establish a national government of Afghanistan. A key element in the entire aid process and the policy discourse around peace building is that the Afghan authorities must have the overall responsibility for reconstruction. Otherwise, the process simply will not be sustainable. In practice, however, the structure of a powerful but fragmented aid community will limit the ability of the Afghan government to influence the reconstruction and development process and, consequently, its capacity to manage a more unified peace-building strategy. An overstretched, weak and ineffective governmental structure might then become an excuse for aid actors to bypass it, further undermining the prospects for a peace-building strategy where Afghans have genuine influence.

Conclusions

Building peace in post-Taliban Afghanistan requires dealing with administrative and political structures that have been shaped by more than two decades of war.

They cannot readily be reconfigured to serve peace. With one unpopular party to the war deposed, the victors appear to have gathered around a transitional agreement. Yet the all-important details of the Bonn Agreement remain to be worked out. Issues that are usually settled by the war or codified in a peace agreement—including the balance of political power and the shape of the new army—must in this case be worked out as part of the transition. The likely result is highly conflictual peacebuilding, including low-level violence.

The first challenge stems from the fact that the international military force which defeated the Taliban remains in the country. Its very presence influences the transition—including important security issues—but its main function is to pursue the war against Al-Qaida and its supporters, and this will determine its future deployment. The consequent disjunction between the logic of the war and its more incidental effects on the peace-building process creates considerable uncertainty in the transition.

The second challenge concerns the importance of the local warlords. Political power is almost exclusively a reflection of coercive power, held by a handful of regional military groups whose organisations are defined in ethnic or regional terms. They are supported by external actors that have invested a great deal in order to secure a government of their liking in Kabul. Rebuilding even a modest national authority under these circumstances will be difficult. However, the alternative of granting autonomy to regional warlords will only encourage further fragmentation and serve to restore past patterns of competitive foreign interference and conflict. The most realistic avenue therefore is to slowly rebuild a modest central authority, and to make haste slowly both in terms of economic recovery and political institution building. This strategy should prevent a sudden concentration of resources at the centre that would be a magnet for armed competition. Similarly, restructuring the armed forces by establishing national command over some armed groups, while demobilising the rest, must be carefully calibrated with the political transition process. Early reform risks creating yet another military faction without a political authority to which it is accountable. Late reform will invite disgruntled opponents to derail the political transition.

The international aid community faces significant challenges to reorient its role and the structure of operations in Afghanistan. While the capacity of a new Afghan government is likely be limited, the entire thrust of the Bonn Agreement and the policy rhetoric of the peace building process is that the government is to have a formal role in the allocation and co-ordination of aid. This principle entails a sharp departure from the practice that has developed in Afghanistan over the past two decades. A major shift in orientation among international aid actors will be needed: from emergency relief to long-term reconstruction and development, from independent action to the building of Afghan capacity, and from fragmentary politicised action to supporting a gradual rebuilding of national institutions.

Notes

[1] R Licklider, 'The consequences of negotiated settlements in civil wars, 1945–1993', *American Political Science Review*, 89 (3), 1995, pp 681–690. His strongest findings on negotiated settlements relate to 'identity civil wars'. The phase of warfare in Afghanistan that ended with the defeat of Taliban in late 2001 was in part 'identity war', but mainly related to the external US-led 'war against terrorism'.

[2] The Bonn Agreement is reproduced in UN/SC 7234, 6 December 2001.

[3] A succinct definition was given by the UN Secretary-General exactly a decade ago. In his *Agenda for Peace* (1992) Boutros Boutros-Ghali distinguished between peace*making*, which aimed to resolve conflicts, peace*keeping*, which was to preserve the state of peace in the first phase after fighting had halted, and peace*building*, which entailed 'rebuilding institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife' (para15). The definition has survived a decade of increasing use in UN and aid circles. The term has been elaborated—at times coming to mean all good causes that deserve funding in a postwar situation—but the essence remains. It was restated recently in the Brahimi Report, which defined peacebuilding as 'activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war' (A//55/305 – S/2000/009, 21 August 2000, para13). The Canadian research-support agency, IDRC, says: 'peacebuilding is the pursuit of policies, programs, and initiatives that seek to create the conditions war-torn countries need to transform or manage their conflicts without violence so that they can address longer term development goals'. 'Peacebuilding and reconstruction', available at www.idrc.ca/peace. Academic definitions include 'supporting the political, institutional, and social transformations necessary to overcome deep-seated internal animosities and strife'. MW Doyle *et al* (eds), *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p 2.

[4] See, for example, E Cousens *et al, Peacebuilding as Politics*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001; and Doyle *et al, Keeping the Peace*.

[5] For a comparative analysis of the outcomes of civil wars, see SJ Stedman, 'International implementation of peace agreements in civil wars. Findings from a study of sixteen cases', in CA Crocker *et al* (eds), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenge of Managing International Conflict*, Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2001; and B F Walter *et al* (eds), *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

[6] 'United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA): Mission Structure', Working Paper No 2, 14 January 2002, UN/IMTF, New York, 2002.

[7] A Jan, 'Somalia: building sovereignty or restoring peace?', in Cousens, *et al*, *Peacebuilding as Politics*, pp 53–88; and II Ahmed & RH Green, 'The heritage of war and state collapse in Somalia and Somaliland: local-level effects, external interventions and reconstruction', *Third World Quarterly*, 20 (1), 1999, pp 113–127.

[8] 'The success of a peace settlement is inextricably tied to the interests of neighboring regional powers and their overall commitment to the peace process.' FO Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail*, Washington, DC: United Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p 217.

[9] BR Rubin, A Ghani, W Maley, A Rashid & O Roy, *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Peacebuilding in a Regional Framework*, Geneva: Swiss Peace Foundation, 2001, p 33.

[10] O Roy, 'Why war is going on in Afghanistan: the Afghan crisis in perspective', *Perceptions*, 5(4), 2001, pp 15–26.

[11] For a brief presentation of the various political groups, see Rubin *et al, Afghanistan*.

[12] MN Shahrani, 'Not "who?" but "how?": governing Afghanistan after the conflict', *Federations*, October 2001 (available at: www.forumfed.org).

[13] M Ottaway & A Lieven, *Rebuilding Afghanistan: Fantasy versus Reality*. Policy Brief 11, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002.

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] Roy, 'Why war is going on in Afghanistan'.

[16] C Schetter, 'The chimera of ethnicity in Afghanistan', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung Online*, 31 October 2001 (available at:www.nzz.ch).

[17] For more on the recent political history of the Hazara, see KB Harpviken, 'The Hazara of Afghanistan: the thorny path towards political unity, 1978–1992', in T Atabaki & J O'Kane (eds), *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, London: IB Tauris, 1998, pp 177–198; and SA Mousari, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: A Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998.

[18] KB Harpviken, 'Afghanistan: from buffer state to battleground—to bridge between regions?', in JJ Hentz & M Boas (eds), *Beyond the Nation State: New and Critical Security and Regionalism*, Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming; and BR Rubin, 'Women and pipelines: Afghanistan's proxy wars', *International Affairs*, 73(2), 1997, pp 283–296.

[19] Similar divisions are not unusual, witness the postwar allied division of Berlin into sectors. Half a century later the international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) divided the territory into 'zones' where national contingents had operational responsibility in their respective areas. In the Afghan case, however, the countries that potentially would have taken responsibility for specific zones would have had a long history of support for its respective warlords, in part based on common ethnicity or religion.

[20] A Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.

[21] SJ Stedman, 'Spoiler problems in peace processes', *International Security*, 22 (2), 1997, pp 5–53.

[22] A Suhrke, A Strand & KB Harpviken, *Peacebuilding Strategies for Afghanistan. Part I: Lessons from Past Experiences in Afghanistan*, Bergen, Chr Michelsen Institute, 2002, pp 50–51; and A Suhrke, A Ofstad & A Knudsen, *Peacebuilding Strategies for Afghanistan. Part II: A Decade of Peacebuilding: Lessons for Afghanistan*, Bergen, Chr Michelsen Institute, 2002, ch 5.

[23] Suhrke *et al*, *Lessons from Past Experience in Afghanistan*, ch 5.

[24] B R Rubin, 'Is America abandoning Afghanistan?', *New York Times Online*, 10 April 2002.

[25] Human Rights Watch, *Paying for the Taliban's Crimes: Abuses against Ethnic Pashtuns in Northern Afghanistan*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002 (available at: www.hrw.org).

[26] For a recent discussion of security sector reform, see OECD/DAC *Security-Sector Reform and Development Co-Operation. A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Policy Coherence*. Informal DAC Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-Operation, Paris: DCD, 2000; and N Ball, *Security Engagement, and New Steps in Security Sector Reform*, paper presented to a conference at the Liu Centre, University of British Columbia, 14–15 February 2002.

[27] A British defence report concluded in late March that a sustainable Afghan army would need 60 000 men, down from an estimated 100 000 armed militia in early 2002 (*Eurasia Insight*, 29 March 2002). A US official review calculated that a realistic aim was an army of 12 000 men trained and equipped by the end of September 2003 (*New York Times*, 21 March 2002). The *Guardian*, found 'most defence experts' concluded that 20 000 troops would be needed to stabilise the country (22 March 2002).

[28] Suhrke *et al, Lessons from Past Experience in Afghanistan*.

[29] See H Baitenmann, 'NGOs and the Afghan war: the politicisation of humanitarian aid', *Third World Quarterly*, 12 (1), 1990, pp 62–85; and A Zolberg, A Suhrke & S Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

[30] UN Administrative Committee on Coordination, *Strategic Framework for Afghanistan: Towards a Principled Approach to Peace and Reconciliation*, Final version, 17 September 1998, New York: UN ACC, 1998.

[31] UNOCHA, *Making a Reality of Principled Common Programming*, Islamabad: UNOCHA, 1998, p 2.

[32] M Duffield, P Gossman & N Leader, *Review of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan* (*final draft*), Islamabad: Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001, p 42.

[33] A Ofstad, A Strand & A Suhrke, *Assessing Needs and Vulnerability in Afghanistan*, Bergen: Chr Michelsen Institute, 2001.

[34] Asia Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank, *Afghanistan: Preliminary Needs Assessment for Recovery and Reconstruction*, Islamabad: ADB, UNDP and World Bank, 2002.

[35] World Bank, *Transitional Support Strategy: Afghanistan*, Islamabad: World Bank, 2002.

[36] At a Joint Press Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan (Tokyo, Japan, 21 January 2002) the UNDP Administrator Mr Malloch Brown was quoted as stating that only 25% of the money expected to come into Afghanistan would be going into the trust fund mechanism.

[37] Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, Central Asia, *Afghanistan: A New Era of Assistance*, Policy Brief 4(1), 13 March 2002, Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, Harvard University, 2002 (available at www.hsph.harvard.edu/ hpcr).