AFGHANISTAN IN 2002

The Struggle to Win the Peace

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Abstract

The year 2002 was one of rebirth and rebuilding in Afghanistan following a drawn-out civil strife that ended with the downfall of the Taliban regime in the U.S.-led coalition war on terrorism. But the struggle for peace proved to be much tougher than winning the war. International financial support and political backing helped Afghanistan move toward creating a broad-based government, improving security across the country, and rebuilding its devastated economy. However, the enormous humanitarian and development challenges involved require a sustained and multifaceted response as well as a long-term international commitment to assist the war-torn country in restoring peace, normalcy, and economic stability.

The year 2002 marked the end of a drawn-out civil war in Afghanistan and the beginning of a recovery and healing process. The U.S.-led coalition war on terrorism in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 scored quick and spectacular military achievements, opening the way for Afghanistan to free itself from the grips of extremism and the scourge of international isolation. In less than two months, the Taliban regime was shattered, the al-Qaeda establishment broken up, and its leadership forced to run. But the struggle for peace proved to be much tougher than winning the war. More than two decades of violence and instability had destroyed the country's political and economic infrastructure and inflamed ethnic, sectarian, and regional divisions in the multiethnic nation.

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The challenge of rebuilding post-Taliban Afghanistan has been immense and multifaceted. It has required the creation of a broad-based national government, the establishment of security throughout the country, and the reconstruction of a war-devastated economy. None of these efforts could happen in a vacuum. They had to be intertwined into a coordinated effort, directed by a unified strategy and supported by the international community. Moreover, the process was influenced from the outset by the legacy of the drawn-out war in Afghanistan, the way the Taliban regime was overthrown, and competing interests of internal and external forces involved in the Afghan situation.

Political Exigencies and Military Realities

The dominance of military considerations within the U.S.-led coalition affected political developments after the demise of the Taliban. The military operation was primarily aimed at destroying the terrorist network based in Afghanistan and eliminating the security threats stemming from instability in that Central Asian country. The situation allowed the anti-Taliban forces to become the ally of the coalition forces. Exploiting the sudden fall of the Taliban under the U.S.-led coalition's air strikes, the Northern Alliance,[1] the only organized anti-Taliban military faction in Afghanistan, moved swiftly to fill the vacuum by seizing control of major cites, including the capital Kabul.

The coalition expected that the formation of a broad-based government would precede the fall of the Taliban in Kabul. But the militia's sudden evacuation of the capital opened the way for the Panjshiri-led Tajik faction of the Northern Alliance to seize control of the city in defiance of international demand. The victors immediately reincarnated the pre-Taliban bureaucracy dominated by the Shura-i-Nazar Tajiks.[2] This monopolization of power precluded the emergence of an ethnically balanced post-Taliban government. The Pashtun forces that took over in most of the southern provinces were too scattered to form a counterbalancing bloc vis-à-vis the Northern Alliance.

As military victories outpaced political arrangements, the international community rushed to broker the formation of a broad-based Afghan government that the country's diverse ethnic and political groups would support. However, negotiations on the structure of the new government between four Afghan political/ethnic groups at the U.N.-sponsored conference in Bonn was strongly influenced by the military situation on the ground. Having control

1. The Northern Alliance was a grouping of predominantly Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara factions that waged a long war against the Taliban.

2. The Shura-i-Nazar (Supervisory Council) was formed by the late Ahmad Shah Masoud in the northeastern provinces of Afghanistan within the predominately Tajik Jamaat-i-Islami (Islamic Society) party. Much of the group's strength was based in the Panjsher Valley, Masoud's home district.

of major cities in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance showed no flexibility about sharing power equally with other groups, including the exiled Rome faction headed by the elderly former king, Zahir Shah, who led the political opposition against the Taliban. With hard realities of military power prevailing, the Northern Alliance took the lion's share in the power-sharing arrangement stipulated by the Bonn Agreement and signed by the Afghan factions on December 5, 2001. The accord called for the establishment of a six-month Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) to govern the country, beginning on December 22, until an emergency Loya Jirga (Grand Council)[3] selected a broad-based Transitional Authority to lead Afghanistan pending the election of a fully representative government within two years.[4] Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council authorized the deployment of a 4,500-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, partly to offset the impact of military domination by the Tajik faction in the Afghan capital.

Although Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from the Rome group, was selected to head the AIA, the governing administration was dominated by the Panjshiri faction of the Northern Alliance, which controlled the military, foreign affairs, police, and intelligence. In the meantime, regional leaders and warlords who had seized control of the provinces maintained their own private armies, sources of income, foreign linkages, and autonomous administrations. The situation deepened factional distrust, stemming from the ethnic division over the past two decades, and fueled widespread public discontent, particularly among the Pashtuns—the largest single ethnic group in Afghanistan.

The hallmark of Afghanistan developments in 2002 was an intense struggle to restore ethnic balance to the government through a political process that had begun in Bonn, to establish security and the rule of law throughout the country, and to rebuild the nation's war-devastated economy. Meanwhile, the U.S.-led, anti-terrorism war continued.

The Political Process

The U.N.-sponsored political process aimed at unifying Afghanistan under a legitimate central government was marred by factional competition for power that intensified ahead of the Loya Jirga in June. The main reason factional rivalry did not develop into armed clashes similar to those in 1992 was the presence of coalition forces and international peacekeepers in the country.

3. The Loya Jirga (Grand Council) is a traditional Afghan institution called into being by the state to make or endorse decisions of major national concern. It is an extrapolation from the model of the tribal and local Jirga or council that allows consensual decision making on community matters.

4. "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions," Bonn, December 5, 2001, Article 1.

It was hoped that the emergency Loya Jirga would broaden the base of the government, assert civilian leadership, promote the democratic process, and take authority away from the regional leaders.[5] The key point that the Afghans as well as the international community expected from the Loya Jirga was that the meeting would correct the ethnic imbalance produced by the Bonn meeting. However, that was an unduly high expectation from the process. As a linear expansion of tribal and local *jirgas* (councils) into a national institution by Afghan rulers since the beginning of the last century, the Loya Jirga has traditionally lacked the cohesion and sophistication needed for making independent decisions on national issues in an incoherent state. Consequently, it was prone to being manipulated by the convening rulers. The Loya Jirga of June 2002 was slightly different for many reasons. It was not called by a ruling government, nor was it convened under the influence of a strong central authority. The situation facilitated a freer debate among the delegates but allowed the regional strongmen and warlords to influence the process through political pressure, intimidation, and spread of money. Further, the involvement of the international community provided foreign actors with stage-managing opportunities.

In the absence of a better alternative, the Loya Jirga has long been considered a national institution for making decisions on key issues. The Loya Jirga that met in Kabul from June 10-21 brought mixed results. It was the first time in 23 years of war and instability that representatives from across the country came together to elect a head of state. Further, and contrary to the recent past, the armed factions chose to advance their interests through the political process rather than resorting to violence. But the outcome of the process did not live up to public expectations. Strongly influenced and manipulated by the warlords,[6] the meeting hardly addressed the main concerns and failed to establish a balanced and representative transitional administration.

The Loya Jirga was mandated to select the head of state as well as the structure of the Transitional Authority and to approve its key officials. Despite some procedural irregularities in electing the head of state, the Jirga came up with a clear winner (Hamid Karzai) through secret balloting. But procedural confusion about approving the structure of the Transitional Administration blocked open debate on the creation of a national assembly with legislative and budget appropriation powers. Another disappointment of the Loya Jirga was that the new cabinet was still dominated by Northern Alliance Tajiks.

5. For details, see the report from the International Crisis Group report, "The Loya Jirga: One Small Step Forward," Kabul/Brussels, May 16, 2002.

6. Author's interview with several Pashtun and Tajik commanders in Kabul, March and June 2002.

Another issue that blemished the credibility of the Loya Jirga process and the legitimacy of its result was the discontent of the supporters of former King Zahir Shah, who was excluded from consideration in the process. Although the former monarch publicly declined his candidacy for any official position, it was widely believed that his ouster was engineered by heavy-handed American and United Nations maneuvering. This perception was given credence in view of the former king's previous statements expressing his readiness to assume any role the Afghan nation might require. The supporters of Zahir Shah had different motives for backing him. They were inspired by the former monarch's symbolic significance for national unity and/or by his potential for counterbalancing Panjshiri domination of the government. On the other hand, his opponents included the Islamist factions, who associated the Shah with secularism and fought behind the scenes to block his return to Afghanistan. Other strong opposition to the king came from the Panjshiri-led Tajiks, who dominated the post-Taliban government and wanted to retain their control. And there were still others who saw a government headed by the king and his immediate entourage as an ineffective administration unable to respond to the challenges faced by the country.

Security and the Rule of Law

Fragmentation of power in Afghanistan is the main source of insecurity throughout the country. In the absence of an effective central security establishment, the transitional administration depended on the military muscle of factional militias. While the U.S.-led coalition forces have been engaged in military action against al-Qaeda and Taliban pockets, the ISAF is deployed only in Kabul. Repeated requests by the Afghan authorities, the United Nations, and international human rights organizations to expand the ISAF to other major Afghan cities were denied or not answered.

Building the Afghan National Army (ANA) and security forces to police the war-devastated country is an alternative to expanding the ISAF. Helping Afghanistan to create its own military and police is a top priority of the international community, but the magnitude of the challenge has been underestimated. While the fragile transitional administration needs immediate security to stabilize the country and rebuild the economy, the project of rebuilding the national military and police is a relatively long-term undertaking.

The U.S.-led effort to build the Afghan National Army has been slow, marred by problems in attracting recruits and by the lack of support from the Ministry of Defense, which is dominated by Qasim Fahim's Panjshiri clique, which sees the ANA as a threat to their power.[7] A new plan for forming the

7. David Buchbinder, "Afghans Ask: Whose Army Is It?", *Christian Science Monitor*, October 17, 2002.

army, drafted by a government commission and released by the Ministry of Defense in October, was criticized by the president and his foreign backers as an attempt to perpetuate the dominance of factional militias in the ANA. The plan awards the militiamen command over military units when they reenlist in the ANA.[8]

At a December 2 meeting in Germany, marking the first anniversary of the Bonn Agreement, President Hamid Karzai announced that his government would establish a streamlined national army of up to 70,000 troops under civilian control and wage an intense campaign to disarm the militias that still dominate the countryside.[9] Although the number of the newly trained ANA soldiers is still under 2,000, a small contingent of them in December joined the battle against illegal activities.[10]

As the central administration's authority hardly extended beyond the capital, regional strongmen played their power games. Throughout the year, clashes continued between local commanders, stemming from old rivalries or the desire to control or consolidate more territory. In the troubled provinces of Paktia and Khost, the often violent standoff between the government-appointed governors and rebel forces kept the region in the grips of instability. In the north, tension between forces loyal to Rashid Dostum, the leader of the Junbish Mili Islami (the National Islamic Movement), and militia units controlled by the Tajik commander Atta Mohammad, continued with intermittent clashes in Samangan and areas south of Mazar-e Sharif. In the west, ethnic differences and rival claims for control of the Shindand District led to recurring skirmishes between the militias loyal to the Herat strongman Ismail Khan and those supporting the local Pashtun leader Amanullah. In an effort to rein in the country's powerful warlords, President Karzai in December issued a decree banning political leaders from taking part in military activity.[11]

Throughout the year, terrorist activity continued across the country, from the troubled southeastern provinces to the crowded streets of Kabul. The victims included two members of the Afghan cabinet. In February, Minister of Civil Aviation Dr. Abdur Rahman was murdered by an angry mob at the Kabul airport. In early July, Vice President Haji Abdul Qadir, an influential Pashtun leader, was gunned down outside his office. Both murders were be-

8. Afghan Ministry of Defense, "Assassat-i Sakhtar-i Tashkilati Ordu-i Mili wa Jamawari Asleha" (The principles of organizational structure of the National Army and Arms Collection), Kabul, October 2002.

9. Mark Landler, "Afghans Plan a New Army of 70,000," *New York Times*, December 3, 2002.

10. Robert Burns, "New Afghan Army Destroys Two Checkpoints," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2002.

11. "Karzai Moves to Rein in Warlords," BBC News, December 16, 2002.

lieved to be politically motivated. The violence culminated in simultaneous strikes on September 5 in Kandahar and Kabul. President Hamid Karzai narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. The same day, a powerful car bomb exploded in a crowded street in downtown Kabul, killing at least 25 people and injuring scores more.[12]

The lack of security encouraged increased poppy cultivation in many provinces, making Afghanistan once again the top opium producer in the world.[13] Poor security conditions also took a heavy toll on human rights across the country. Targeted violence and looting by ethnic militias uprooted Pashtun communities across northern Afghanistan, where Pashtuns are a minority in the Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated areas.[14] The violence forced more than 100,000 Pashtuns to leave their homes and livelihood and become refugees in the south. Further, the security vacuum in the north led to a rise in attacks on humanitarian aid workers and Afghan civilians. In the south, the instability created by the collapse of the Taliban brought to power competing warlords who were involved in intimidation, violence, and creation of general insecurity.[15]

Economic Reconstruction

Reconstruction of Afghanistan's war-ravaged and drought-stricken economy has been considered the key to peace and stability in the country. Rebuilding Afghanistan has also been intertwined with the strategy of war on terrorism. In April, President Bush announced a major American role in rebuilding Afghanistan under a comprehensive reconstruction plan comparable to the "Marshall Plan" devised for the reconstruction of the post-war Europe.[16] Bush warned that military force alone could not bring "true peace" to Afghanistan, and that stability would return only when the country rebuilds its economic and cultural infrastructure.

However, the actual needs of reconstruction far outweighed the available resources. A preliminary needs assessment by the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Asian Development Bank in January estimated that reconstruction would cost about $5 billion in the first two and a half years, the

12. Pamela Constable, "Afghanistan Violence Flares," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2002.

13. The U.N. report estimates the total production of opium this year at 3,400 tons compared with 185 tons in 2001, when the Taliban had banned the crop. See Alessandra Rizzo, "U.N.: Afghanistan Top Opium Producer," Associated Press, October 29, 2002.

14. Human Rights Watch Report, "Afghanistan: Paying for the Taliban's Crimes," New York, April 2002, vol. 14, no. 2 (C).

15. Ibid., "Ethnic Attacks in Afghanistan," New York, April 9, 2002. Also see Human Rights Watch statement, "Afghanistan: Warlords Return," Mazar-e Sharif Afghanistan, June 6, 2002.

16. James Dao, "Bush Sets Role for U.S. in Afghan Rebuilding," *New York Times*, April 18, 2002.

expected term of the transitional administration in Afghanistan. Reconstruction costs for five- and 10-year periods were estimated at $10 and $15 billion dollars, respectively.[17]

At an international donor conference in Tokyo, held January 21–22, $4.5 billion was pledged over five years including $1.8 billion for 2002. However, the disbursement of the promised funds has been slow and incomplete. According to Afghan government sources in September, of the $1.8 billion pledged for this year, $600 million was transferred to the United Nations, another $600 million to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and about $90 million to the Afghan government.[18] By the end of the year, the donors had not yet fully met their pledges. At an international conference in Oslo (December 17–18), the donor states pledged $1.24 billion in aid to Afghanistan in 2003, with the potential of as much as $2 billion. A substantial part of the aid money (about 70%) was spent on humanitarian assistance programs. One reason for this is the unexpectedly large and costly repatriation of refugees. As of the end of December, more than 1.8 million Afghans had returned from neighboring countries to Afghanistan in one of the world's largest and fastest refugee repatriation movements.[19] Moreover, some 400,000 internally displaced people also returned home.

Despite some achievements in the education sector and the introduction of a new currency in October, no such major reconstruction project has been undertaken. Poor security across the country discouraged implementation of large reconstruction projects or major foreign investment. In order to promote economic development, in August the government adopted a new law to encourage and protect domestic and foreign private investment.[20] However, bureaucratic roadblocks and corruption turned back many potential investors. The top priority projects, particularly the construction of roads, have yet to begin. Rebuilding Afghanistan's major highways is expected to have enormous political, economic, and social impact. As a landlocked country without railroads, Afghanistan depends on roads for vital activities. Except for a stretch of the 120-kilometer-long highway from Herat to the Iranian border, no major road construction work has been done. In September, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Japan pledged $180 million to build the

17. Author's conversation with several U.N. officials, Tokyo, January 21, 2002.

18. My conversation with Afghanistan's Minister of Reconstruction Amin Farhang, Kabul, September 2002.

19. UNHCR Briefing Notes, Geneva, September 27, 2002. Also see, Jonathan Fowler, "U.N. Afghanistan Refugee Head: Donors Must Do More to Rebuild the Country," Associated Press, December 19, 2002.

20. The Law on Domestic and Foreign Private Investment in Afghanistan, Article 1, Kabul, 2002.

highway linking Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat. Construction on this main artery was started on November 10.

The slow pace of tangible reconstruction activity in the country caused public frustration. The central government cannot win the trust of the people unless it shows signs of improving the economy. This year less than $300 million was spent on reconstruction. Furthermore, the disbursement of the bulk of the aid resources to organizations outside the control of the central government frustrated Kabul's efforts to strengthen its position and political credibility.

The year saw continuous debate among Afghan leaders and their foreign advisors on reconstruction policy. Many government leaders favored a centrally controlled macroeconomic approach to building the nation's economic infrastructure that would help expand the central government's authority and provide substantial employment opportunities. On the other hand, proponents of grass-roots development promoted a microenterprise approach to build community-based businesses and infrastructure. They argued that heavy involvement of the government in reconstruction projects at the expense of NGOs promotes statism—a situation that hinders the development of civil society. A balanced combination of both approaches is winning support among many policy makers.

The War on Terrorism

Efforts to rebuild Afghanistan continued as the coalition forces waged military action throughout the year to root out the remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. The fall of the Taliban in December 2001 and the breakup of the al-Qaeda terrorist network in the country did not mark the end of Operation Enduring Freedom but opened a new and a more difficult phase of mopping up and consolidating what had been achieved in the first phase. With Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leader Mullah Omar still unaccounted for and the remnants of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters still eluding the chase, the presence of nearly 10,000 coalition troops, including 8,000 U.S. servicemen, is still seen as a necessity. However, few major combat actions have been waged since the battle of Tora Bora in December 2001, when bin Laden and his al-Qaeda fighters made a last stand before slipping away across the mountainous Afghan-Pakistani border.

Operation Anaconda against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces that regrouped in the Shahi Kot Valley of Paktika Province in March was the last major battle of the year in Afghanistan. A combined force of nearly 2,000 U.S., Afghan, and other coalition partners dislodged the enemy forces from their stronghold. Although many enemy fighters slipped away and the U.S. forces suffered more casualties than in any other single combat engagement in Afghanistan, the battle was a clear success. The enemy had created a fortified

region in which it could seriously hurt U.S. forces. The coalition force proved itself well and captured the valley. The al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants have shown no desire to fight another set-piece battle.

The battle of Shahi Kot was followed by several mopping-up operations in the valley during the summer while U.S. special forces and hunting parties scoured the mountainous hideouts and caves in several areas, particularly in Paktia, Khost, Paktika, Kunar, Oruzgan, and Helmand Provinces. They recovered large hidden caches of arms and ammunition and captured hundreds of suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda supporters. American forces remain concentrated on the airfields of Kandahar and Bagram as well as on smaller, isolated posts. For the U.S. forces, this has been the least costly war in human losses. According to figures provided by the U.S. Central Command, a total of 41 Americans have died in and around Afghanistan, including 18 by hostile fire since fighting began on October 7, 2001.[21]

The presence of coalition military forces in Afghanistan and their operations in unstable areas served as a deterrent for preventing major factional clashes or defiance of the central authority by regional leaders and warlords. Their presence also played an important role in fighting terrorism, providing external security, and checking the influence of foreign countries that had supported rival Afghan factions in the past. A recent U.N. report indicating that al-Qaeda has opened new training camps in the remote eastern Afghan province of Kunar[22] underscores the need for the continued presence of the coalition forces in Afghanistan. On the other hand, competing demands to empower the central government and the need of coalition forces to work directly with and support regional leaders in their military operations, particularly in southern and eastern provinces, complicated the tasks of centralization of the government and entrenching long-term stability in the country.[23]

As the year drew to a close, the U.S. military, in a significant shift of policy, adopted plans to set up eight to ten new bases around the country to boost reconstruction and regional security that would contribute to projection of power of the central government into the provinces.[24] The move, dubbed by some observers as an act of nation building, is hoped to help community development and enhance the legitimacy of the U.S.-backed Afghan government.

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21. Eric Schmitt, "Inquiry Finds American Was Killed by Fire from U.S. Gunship, Not Enemy," *New York Times*, October 29, 2002.

22. Colum Lynch, "Al Qaeda Is Reviving, U.N. Report Says," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2002.

23. Jason Berke and Peter Beaumont, "West Pays Warlords to Stay in Line," *The Observer*, July 22, 2002.

24. Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. to Set Up New Bases to Help Afghanistan Rebuild," *Washington Post*, December 20, 2002.

Meanwhile, the physical and political collateral damage of coalition forces' activities in Afghanistan has been significant. While the coalition effort to patrol the remote Afghan mountain hollows and valleys was appreciated by many, it provoked indignant protests when coalition troops searched peaceful villages without consideration for local culture, or detained inhabitants who had no known connection with hostile armed groups. Some local chiefs also directed U.S. military actions against their rivals. This often caused civilian casualties and hostile feelings among the population. But the main cause of an anti-American backlash was American bombings of the civilian population. In several cases, the bombing was carried out on peaceful areas as a result of incorrect intelligence. One of the worst cases was the June 30 bombing of a wedding party in a village in Dehrawod District, Oruzgan Province, that killed at least 48 people including women and children.[25] In other cases, hunting teams offended villagers by searching their women, desecrating their cemetery by exhuming their dead, and sometimes refusing to let the people help the victims of air strikes.[26]

The Outlook

At the end of 2002, Afghanistan was faced with the Herculean task of rebuilding its political institutions and economic infrastructure. In the next 18 months of transition, Afghanistan will have to lay the foundation of a new political and economic system that will help the country achieve long-term peace and prosperity. This involves the transfer of power from armed factions and warlords to the popularly elected legitimate government, creation of a national army and police force, demobilization of illegal armed groups, and the development of civil society. To achieve these goals Afghanistan will continue to need extensive foreign aid. Strong international commitment to provide security throughout the country and bolstering the economic development of Afghanistan are the prerequisites for stabilizing the war-torn nation. Domestically the rebuilding process is expected to be influenced by an intense political, doctrinal, and cultural battle between different groups and camps, the outcome of which will have a decisive effect on the country's future.

Long-term stability in Afghanistan requires that efforts be directed toward changing the divisive situation rather than adopting solutions solely to accommodate the existing fragmentation. Accommodation of different ethnic groups has to be sought through the development of civil society and a private sector that buffers the negative impact of group interests. Currently,

25. "'Cruel' Americans Stormed Homes, Filmed Naked Women: Villages," Agence France Presse, July 7, 2002.

26. Colin Soloway, "I Yelled at Them to Stop," *Newsweek*, October 7, 2002.

group interests are based on different orientations: ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious, etc. But there is no way to resolve the current crisis solely on the basis of such affiliations. The main integrating factor in the country might prove to be of a national-democratic nature defining nationality by citizenship and not ethnicity. However, this can be achieved only through an extensive economic reconstruction, where different groups do not have to compete for limited state-controlled opportunities and government handouts. As long as the state continues to control vital resources, the ethnic conflicts will play themselves out in the public arena.