Afghanistan:
Are We Losing the Peace?

Chairmen's Report of an Independent Task Force
Cosponsored by the
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Frank G. Wisner II, Nicholas Platt, and Marshall M. Bouton, Co-Chairs
Dennis Kux and Mahnaz Ispahani, Project Executive Directors

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FOREWORD

On midday, September 10, 2001, Americans thought little about Afghanistan. Twenty-four hours later, a band of al-Qaeda terrorists living in that impoverished country had triggered the war on terrorism through their savage attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and Afghanistan suddenly became the focus of attention for U.S. policymakers. Thanks to the success of Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan's brutal Taliban rulers were swiftly defeated and their al-Qaeda terrorist guests dislodged. The interim and then transitional government of President Hamid Karzai assumed office to offer Afghanistan a fresh opportunity for peace, development, and security after more than two decades of war and despair.

Nineteen months later, Afghanistan is once again threatened with disorder and insecurity. The political and economic reconstruction process is in danger of stalling. The attention of U.S. policymakers has shifted elsewhere. Yet the challenge of Afghanistan remains and forms the core of this report by the joint Council on Foreign Relations–Asia Society Independent Task Force on India and South Asia.

Founded in the summer of 2001 by a merger of the Council's earlier Task Force on South Asia and the Asia Society's Roundtable on India, the Task Force's original purpose was to examine ways to deepen and widen U.S. relations with India. But the tragic events of September 11, 2001, transformed the South Asian security context and led the Task Force to explore U.S. policy with the nations of the region in a far broader framework.

The Task Force chairmen, Ambassador Frank Wisner, Ambassador Nicholas Platt, and Dr. Marshall M. Bouton, brought a wealth of firsthand government and private sector experience in the region to their work. Ambassador Dennis Kux and Dr. Mahnaz Ispahani served as excellent executive directors. With more than 60 members, the Task Force is one of the largest and most varied that the Council has ever sponsored. Over the past two years, the group held more than two dozen meetings, which probed in-depth a wide range of political, economic, security, and social issues relating to South Asia. Given the time-sensitive nature of the policy recommendations on Afghanistan, the Task Force has decided to release these findings now. This report is part of the Task Force's

larger work on U.S. policy toward South Asia.

The Task Force concludes that to achieve the U.S. goal of a stable Afghan state that does not serve as a haven for terrorists, the United States should be providing greater support to the transitional government of President Hamid Karzai. More vigorous military, diplomatic, and economic measures are needed to bolster the central government's hand and to prevent further deterioration in the security situation and the dimming of economic reconstruction prospects. Unless the present disturbing trends are arrested, the successes of Operation Enduring Freedom will be in jeopardy. Afghanistan could again slide back into near anarchy and the United States could suffer a serious defeat in the war on terrorism.

This is a compelling report about what the United States should be doing next in Afghanistan. The Task Force warns that the world thinks of Afghanistan as America's war. If the peace is lost there because of inadequate support for the government of Hamid Karzai, America's credibility around the globe will suffer a grave blow. Washington needs to take corrective action before it is too late.

I admire Frank Wisner, Nicholas Platt, and Marshall M. Bouton for the generous contributions of their time and wisdom in leading the Task Force. My thanks also go to Dennis Kux and Mahnaz Ispahani for directing the project and preparing this report. Together, they have produced a timely and incisive analysis of how the U.S. should deal with a critical foreign policy challenge.

Leslie H. Gelb
President
Council on Foreign Relations

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In our challenging deliberations on Afghanistan and, indeed, in all aspects of this Task Force's work, we have been extraordinarily fortunate in having three wise and experienced co-chairs. Frank Wisner, Nicholas Platt, and Marshall M. Bouton have skillfully guided our search for answers to the policy challenges that the United States faces in the region. Frank's unflinching insistence that Task Force products reflect the highest standards and his unflagging encouragement, gifted pen, and sharp policy insights have helped ensure a far better report than would otherwise have been the case. Nick patiently led many of our deliberations and was ever ready to provide wise counsel. Marshall, who conceived the project before he left the Asia Society to become head of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, remained a source of invaluable advice and guidance.

The Task Force has benefited greatly from its more than 60 members, mostly in New York and Washington, D.C., who have provided an unusually broad range of expertise on the region. They have brought wide experience in government, business and finance, law, philanthropy, and academia. Their committed and knowledgeable participation in discussions on Afghanistan and their perceptive comments on drafts of this report have vastly strengthened it. We are especially indebted to Barnett Rubin, a Task Force member who shared his deep knowledge on Afghanistan both as a panelist during Task Force sessions and as an invaluable reviewer during the preparation of this report.

We also received magnificent support from the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society staffs and want to single out the following individuals for special praise and appreciation: Alyssa Ayres, of the Asia Society, who laid the groundwork for the Task Force and directed its initial stages; Sanjeev Sherchan, also of the Asia Society, who mastered an unending chain of administrative challenges over the past two years with great patience, unfailing good cheer, and enormous effectiveness; and Council research associate Faiza Issa and her predecessors in the early life of the Task Force, Chong-lin Lee, Sharon Herbst, and Sameen Gauhar, all of whom were superb in administrative and substantive backstopping and in preparing outstanding summaries of Task Force

meetings. Harpinder Athwal, research associate at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was also a tremendous asset in providing research and other help. There are others to whom we owe much and would like to express our appreciation for their help and support: Asia Society Vice President Robert Radtke, Council Executive Vice President Mike Peters, Council Senior Vice President Janice Murray, Deputy Director of Studies and Director of Strategic Policy Lee Feinstein, Vice President and Director of Communications Lisa Shields, and Vice President of Meetings Anne Luzzatto. We are also grateful for the contributions of Council staff members, Patricia Dorff, Jennifer Anmuth, Marie Strauss, Laura Sylvester, Francesco Barbacci, Lindsay Workman, and Abigail Zoba.

The Task Force is greatly indebted to the leaders of the Council and the Asia Society, Leslie Gelb and Nicholas Platt (also one of our co-chairs), for their unflagging support of our work. Nick's contributions as co-chair strengthened the substance of our report. Les's incisive counsel sharpened the focus and structure of this report. They have made every resource available to us, and we deeply appreciate their commitment to our work.

Finally, the Task Force would not have been possible without the financial support of the Ford Foundation, the Starr Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the BGM Kumar Foundation, Rohit M. Desai of Desai Capital Management Inc., and W. Bowman Cutter of Warburg Pincus. We deeply appreciate their generosity.

Dennis Kux and Mahnaz Ispahani
Project Executive Directors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nineteen months after the defeat of the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies, Afghanistan remains a long way from achieving the U.S. goal of a stable self-governing state that no longer serves as a haven for terrorists. Indeed, failure to stem deteriorating security conditions and to spur economic reconstruction could lead to a reversion to warlord-dominated anarchy and mark a major defeat for the U.S. war on terrorism. To prevent this from happening, the Task Force recommends that the United States strengthen the hand of President Hamid Karzai and intensify support for security, diplomatic, and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Although Karzai is trying to assert his authority outside Kabul, he lacks the means to compel compliance by recalcitrant warlords and regional leaders who control most of the countryside. Current policy for the 9,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan rules out support for Karzai against the regional warlords and also active participation in the planned effort to demobilize the 100,000-strong militias. In the Afghan setting, where the United States has the primary military power, this approach is mistaken and leaves a dangerous security void outside Kabul, where the 4,800-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) maintains the peace. (The United States has been unwilling until now to support deployment of ISAF elsewhere.) The U.S.-sponsored effort to develop the Afghan national army (ANA) is proceeding at a painfully slow pace and the projected strength of 9,000 men a year from now is grossly inadequate to provide the Afghan government a meaningful security capability. This is also true for the training of a national police force for which the Germans have taken lead responsibility.

The United States should be exerting greater pressure on neighboring countries to support Afghanistan's stability and not to undercut the Karzai government through backing of regional warlords or failure to curb pro-Taliban elements. Breaking the well-ingrained habit of external meddling in Afghanistan is difficult but should have a high U.S. policy priority. To create an additional barrier, the Task Force also believes that the United States should undertake a major diplomatic initiative to obtain a high-level international agreement against outside interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs.

Politically, Afghanistan faces major challenges in adhering to the schedule agreed upon during the December 2001 Bonn conference. A new constitution must be approved by the end of this year and national elections held by June 2004 to pave the way for a permanent Afghan government. Although adopting the constitution on schedule seems feasible, there are growing doubts whether the complex arrangements for presidential and parliamentary polls can be completed on time. To avoid elections that lack legitimacy, thought should be given to holding presidential elections on schedule but putting off parliamentary balloting in order to allow additional time for the administratively difficult and politically sensitive tasks of conducting a census and demarcating constituencies.

Inadequate security has also been a major factor in the painfully slow progress in reconstruction. Both the United States and others should be providing more tangible, effective, and timely assistance to allay rising discontent among Afghans about the lack of economic progress. The Karzai government has developed a realistic budget for 2003 ($2.2 billion) as well as an overall development strategy. These have been blessed by the United States, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and other major donors, but verbal praise must be followed by actual financial contributions. Moreover, the United States has combined relief aid with funds for reconstruction in totaling its assistance. Afghanistan, the World Bank says, needs $15 billion over the next five years for reconstruction alone in addition to relief assistance.

One of the major economic weaknesses of the Karzai government has been its lack of control over customs collection. This provides a major source of government revenues, but remains largely in the control of regional leaders and warlords who have been keeping most of the money. Corrective actions need to be taken as part of the process of strengthening the central government.

Unlike in Iraq, the United Nations has the lead in coordinating political and economic assistance in Afghanistan. The United States and others share common goals and objectives. Even though the international effort is not perfect, it has functioned reasonably well. Still, the world thinks of Afghanistan as America's war. To address current problems there, the Task Force urges the United States to take a number of security, diplomatic, and reconstruction measures, all of which are designed to bolster the Kabul government:

Security Measures

- Make peacekeeping part of the mandate of U.S. and coalition troops stationed in Afghanistan, permitting them to intervene if needed to support the Karzai government against defiant warlords. Alternatively, the United States should support an enlargement of ISAF and an expansion of its responsibilities to operate outside the city of Kabul.
- Have U.S. forces participate in implementing the plan to demobilize, demilitarize, and reintegrate the regional militias. Without active U.S. involvement, this program—a vital part of the process of strengthening the Karzai government—is likely to fail.
- Dramatically increase the pace of training the new Afghan national army. Instead of the woefully inadequate 9,000 man force currently envisaged for June 2004, the United States should be targeting a force of 27,000—including integrated militias—to provide a credible peacekeeping capability for the permanent government slated to take power a year from now. The pace of training the national police force should also be drastically increased.
- Support reform of the ministry of defense to make it a more nationally representative organization under full control of the central government.
- Promptly deploy the eight planned provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) and if the concept proves successful, consider additional units. Although the stated purpose of the PRTs is to help in reconstruction, their presence has also improved security in areas where they are located.

Diplomatic Measures

- Press Iran, Russia, and Pakistan to bring their real policy toward Afghanistan fully into line with their stated policy of supporting the Karzai government. Iran and Russia should not undercut Karzai by providing support to regional and factional leaders. Pakistan should do a better job of preventing pro-Taliban elements from using its territory to mount attacks on Afghanistan.
- Undertake a major initiative to bolster the standing of the Afghan government and to buttress the December 2002 effort of the Karzai government against external

interference. The initiative should seek formal international agreement by Afghanistan's neighbors and other concerned powers not to interfere there, to ban the supply of arms and equipment to warlords, to accept Afghanistan's frontiers, and to promote trade, transit, and customs collection arrangements. The signing of the agreement should ideally coincide with the coming to power of the permanent Afghan government.

Reconstruction Measures

- Provide at least $1 billion assistance for reconstruction in each of the coming five years over and above humanitarian aid. This will represent one-third of the $15 billion that is needed.
- Ensure that U.S. assistance priorities are consistent with those established by the Karzai government and that programs are implemented under the aegis of Afghanistan's central government. Karzai's ability to attract and distribute foreign assistance is a major political asset. The United States should be careful not to undercut him by setting its own aid priorities and bypassing Kabul in program implementation.
- Support actions that will give the central government greater control over collection of customs.
- Complete the rebuilding of the Kabul-Kandahar road by the end of 2003 as promised by President Bush and press other donors to finish their portions of the road project expeditiously. Rebuilding Afghanistan's main road arteries would provide visible proof of reconstruction and a major boost to the economy.

TASK FORCE REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Nineteen months after the defeat of the Taliban and their terrorist al-Qaeda allies, Afghanistan is still a long way from the U.S. goal of a stable self-governing state that no longer provides a haven for terrorists. In recent months, the country has become increasingly insecure outside the capital city of Kabul, where the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) maintains order. In much of Afghanistan, political power remains in the hands of semiautonomous regional leaders and warlords. Progress in economic reconstruction has been slow. Public discontent has been rising. The political process calling for a constitution and national elections by June 2004 remains shaky. Unless the situation improves, Afghanistan risks sliding back into the anarchy and warlordism that prevailed in the 1990s and helped give rise to the Taliban. Such a reversion would have disastrous consequences for Afghanistan and would be a profound setback for the U.S. war on terrorism. To prevent this from happening, the United States must provide more effective security, diplomatic, and economic support to the transitional government of President Hamid Karzai.

Current security policy, as articulated by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld during his May 1, 2003, visit to Kabul, does not include peacekeeping responsibilities for U.S. forces. In the Afghan setting, where the United States has the primary military power, this approach fails to address the growing security challenge that the Karzai government faces. Until the authorities in Kabul develop greater capability to maintain the peace, the United States should be prepared to help, especially in dealing with recalcitrant regional leaders and warlords. Specifically, Washington should:

- make peacekeeping outside of Kabul part of the mandate for the 11,000 U.S. and coalition forces or, alternatively, support an enlarged ISAF with an expanded role;
- actively participate in the planned effort to demobilize, demilitarize, and reintegrate (DDR) local militias; and
- dramatically accelerate the training and development of the Afghan national army (ANA). The current target of 9,000 troops for the summer of 2004, when a

permanent Afghan government is slated to assume office, is painfully inadequate. To give the central government a more credible peacekeeping capability, the United States should be targeting a force of approximately 27,000 men, including integrated militias. The ministry of defense also needs to be reformed into a more nationally representative organization.

Given the extent of Afghanistan's physical and human damage, a long-term assistance effort, stretching at least until 2010, will be required before the country can get back on its feet. There should be no illusions on this score. Although successful reconstruction depends on whether Afghanistan can achieve political stability and physical security, an adequate flow of foreign assistance is also vital. Secretary of State Colin Powell was correct when he told the September 2002 donor's conference, "Without it [our sustained assistance], they [the Afghans] will surely fail." As part of the international effort, the United States should:

- provide at least $1 billion a year for reconstruction—over and above relief help—for the next five years (this is a third of the $15 billion that the World Bank says is needed; in 2002, combined U.S. relief and reconstruction aid totaled $928 million);
- make sure that U.S. assistance programs match the priorities that the Karzai government has established and that the programs are implemented through the central government; and
- ensure that the Kabul-Kandahar road is rebuilt by the end of 2003, in line with President Bush's promise, and urge other donors to move expeditiously on their segments of the effort to rebuild major road links.

The United States should also do more diplomatically to bolster the Afghan government by taking stronger steps to deter neighbors from interfering in Afghanistan. In this area, Washington should:

- urge Iran and Russia to avoid undercutting the Karzai government by supporting different Afghan factions and press Pakistan to work harder at preventing pro-Taliban elements from using tribal territory for attacks across the border and
- launch a major diplomatic initiative to obtain a broad international agreement among all of Afghanistan's neighbors and other interested powers not to interfere

in Afghan affairs, to bar arms supplies to warlords, and to recognize Afghanistan's frontiers.

Despite the fact that Secretary Rumsfeld has proclaimed an end to combat operations in Afghanistan, the victory in Operation Enduring Freedom will be jeopardized unless the United States helps provide the transitional government more effective tools to assert its authority and to promote economic reconstruction. The world thinks of Afghanistan as America's war. Losing the peace through inadequate support for the Karzai government would gravely erode U.S. credibility around the globe and make it far more difficult to obtain international support in dealing with similar crises in the future.

THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT IN AFGHANISTAN

Unlike in Iraq, the process of political and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan has involved a broad multinational coalition coordinated by the United Nations and supported by donor agencies and many nations. After the fall of the Taliban, the United States and the international community developed the common goals of helping Afghanistan:

- reestablish a viable self-governing state structure reflecting the will of the Afghan people;
- secure the country's borders, maintain domestic peace, and deprive terrorists of a haven;
- stand on its feet economically and resume its traditional role as an interregional trade corridor;
- protect the rights of women and minorities and eschew religious extremism; and
- control narcotics production.

The rapid defeat of the Taliban during Operation Enduring Freedom caught the world unprepared to tackle the daunting political and economic challenges that Afghanistan posed. Fortunately, at the December 2001 Bonn conference the major Afghan groups reached a broad agreement to establish an interim government led by Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun opponent of the Taliban. The Bonn accords also established a timetable for a political process leading to the formation of a permanent Afghan

government within three years. In June 2002, a major milestone was successfully passed when a loya jirga (grand national assembly) elected Karzai to lead a transitional Afghan government. The Bonn conference also called for a draft constitution and a second loya jirga to consider the basic law by December 2003, and national elections conducted by the transitional administration to select a permanent government under the new constitution by June 2004.

Under the direction of the secretary-general's special representative Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations has been leading the coordination of political and economic assistance. In a division of labor among the major external players in the security area, the United States is principally training the new Afghan army. Germany has assumed responsibility for training the national police force, and Italy, for legal reform. Japan is funding the effort to demobilize, demilitarize, and reintegrate the militias, and the United Kingdom has agreed to head the narcotics control effort. To provide security in the capital city of Kabul, an ISAF has been established. U.S. forces continue the military effort against al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants but do not have a mandate for enhancing security.

How to Deal with Growing Insecurity

A year and a half after the defeat of the Taliban, Afghanistan has become an increasingly insecure country. In recent months, the situation has worsened in the Pashtun-populated areas of the south and east, especially near the borders with Pakistan. Taliban elements and their allies, often operating out of Pakistan's tribal belt, have been responsible for attacks against Karzai supporters, foreign aid officials, and the U.S. military. Elsewhere in the country, an uneasy calm, punctured by sporadic violence, prevails. Strife between rival commanders (for example, in the Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif areas) or just plain banditry and lawlessness are the main sources of trouble, rather than incidents by pro-Taliban elements.

In Kabul itself, ISAF, a 4,800-strong international peacekeeping force, has had a positive impact. Led in turn for six-month periods by the British, the Turks, and currently the Germans and the Dutch, ISAF will come under NATO leadership in August 2003.

The force has been successful in ensuring reasonable security and deterrence in the capital city. During the winter of 2002, there was discussion of expanding ISAF to five cities outside of Kabul and of establishing a "flying brigade" to provide a rapid reaction capability elsewhere in the country. After the United States refused to provide airlift, intelligence, and extraction support, the proposal died. One of ISAF's major weaknesses, rotating leadership every six months, should be solved when NATO assumes permanent charge this summer. The possibility of expanding ISAF's charter to include security enhancement functions outside the capital city should be revisited on an urgent basis, especially if the United States continues to be unwilling to accept these responsibilities. This time around, Washington should be forthcoming in providing necessary support to ISAF.

Reducing the political and military strength of semiautonomous regional leaders and commanders has now become an urgent need. American military cooperation with, and dependence on, local warlords and their militias during Operation Enduring Freedom has made it harder now for the central government to assert its authority. Although the mere presence of U.S. and coalition troops has provided a measure of stability in areas where they are located, the Pentagon has unwisely excluded from their mandate either security enhancement or support for central government efforts to bring unruly warlords under its sway. Over the long term, the presence of large armed militias—estimated at as many as 100,000 fighters—controlled by local leaders, instead of Kabul, is incompatible with a viable national government. Even though Afghanistan has a history of local tribal levees, these were traditionally integrated into the national military. With Japan taking the financial lead, agreement on a DDR program has finally been reached, supposedly with the backing of the major warlords, and is slated in theory to begin this summer.

Under the DDR plan, some fighters would receive financial support to lay down their arms and others would find a place in the new national army. With the right combination of incentives and disincentives many warlords can gradually be integrated into the national system, probably through a lengthy process of negotiation and consensus building. Hard-core spoilers, however, are unlikely to respond positively and will have to be uprooted forcefully. The Kabul government needs sufficient financial resources and security forces to persuade (and, where necessary, to compel) local commanders to

cooperate. The current reluctance of the Pentagon to authorize active participation by the U.S. military in implementing the DDR effort is likely to doom the program. Instead of standing aloof, U.S. forces should be instructed to work in tandem with the Afghan transitional government, the UN, Japan, and others engaged in implementing a project that is vital for the creation of a stable Afghanistan.

U.S. strategy has been to allow regional forces and militias to remain intact while a new Afghan national army and other institutions, especially the national police, take shape and ultimately provide the security underpinning for the Kabul government. Although the concept is laudable, the pace of establishing, training, and equipping the ANA has been painfully slow and the force targets grossly inadequate. To date, just eight battalions have completed their ten-week basic training cycle. At the current rate, the ANA will have only 9,000 soldiers when the new government takes office a year from now. At the present schedule, under which a new battalion begins training every five weeks, only 6,000 troops will be added annually.

The projected ANA force is far too small to deal with the security problems that the post–June 2004 government of Afghanistan will face. A 9,000-man force cannot be widely used around the country and will be too inexperienced to maneuver as a unit against regional militias. The United States should drastically increase the pace of developing the ANA in order to give the post–2004 government a reasonable peacekeeping capability. Instead of 9,000, the United States should be targeting a force of around 27,000, including troops from militias integrated into the ANA. In addition to boosting the numbers of those passing through the basic training, more attention also needs to be paid to the functioning and training of the ANA beyond the initial ten- week cycle. Salaries are too low for the common soldier to live in inflation-ridden Kabul. Inadequate pay has been a factor in the poor quality of recruits, a high dropout rate, and a lack of professionalism.

Another problem concerns Minister of Defense Muhammad Fahim, the one-time deputy to the late Ahmed Shah Masood. Fahim took over military leadership of the Northern Alliance after the assassination of Masood on September 9, 2001, and has continued to operate in a semi-independent manner. Along with his factional supporters, who come largely from the Panjsher Valley, Fahim needs to provide more active backing

to the new Afghan national army. Like other regional leaders, Fahim must also over time permit (or be compelled to have) forces currently loyal to him demobilized or integrated into a broadly representative defense force that takes its orders from the central government. As part of this process, the ministry of defense needs to be reformed in order to remove it from factional control.

On the positive side, initial reports indicate that the ANA battalions have received good support in areas of continued training and done well in their temporary employment in stability operations. There has also been a considerable effort to make sure the soldiers in the ANA battalions represent a reasonable mix of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups. Given Afghanistan's strong ethnic sentiments, it is essential that the ANA be a truly national force. It is similarly important that there be a nationally representative officer corps, not a factional one.

In many respects, the development and training of a national police force is as important as building the ANA. Police functions will include not only usual law-and-order responsibilities but also the control of Afghanistan's borders and the collection of customs duties. The latter is of great importance economically since customs will provide the major source of revenue for the central government. As in the case of the ANA, progress toward training the new national police has been far too slow. Germany and others involved in the process need to accelerate their efforts to provide an adequate, professional force.

Recently, the United States decided to deploy eight provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). The teams include 50–70 U.S. military personnel along with diplomatic and, in principle, economic assistance specialists. To date, PRTs have been established in Kunduz, Bamian, and Gardez. The concept is controversial; aid officials and many nongovernmental organizations worry about blurring the distinction between security and reconstruction and between military and civilian purposes. The PRTs main purpose is to help in reconstruction by "winning hearts and minds through small projects." Secretary Rumsfeld stated on April 26, 2003, that the PRTs "will demonstrate to the people of Afghanistan that supporting the central government is a good thing, it benefits them, and that is the path of the future." Although it is wishful thinking to believe that eight PRTs will have a significant impact on the overall reconstruction effort in a country of 24

million people, their mere presence will be a stabilizing factor in the areas where they are located. The U.S. government should promptly deploy the announced complement of eight PRTs. If the experiment proves successful, establishing additional PRTs should be considered.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In June 2003, the transitional Afghan government remains in the early stages of extending its authority beyond Kabul's city limits. Governance outside the capital is shared between autonomous local leaders—the most prominent of which are Ismail Khan in Herat, Abdurrashid Dostum and his rival Atta Muhammad around Mazar-e-Sharif, and Gul Agha in Kandahar—and functionaries that work for the transitional administration. Some local leaders are responsible, but most are old-fashioned warlords—in many cases the very same warlords whose depredations, including toward women, paved the way for the rise of the Taliban. In the Pashtun areas in southern and eastern Afghanistan, political authority remains highly fractured. Karzai is often viewed as a token Pashtun and front man for Panjsheri and American interests. In the absence of effective security forces of the central government, private armies and militias continue to hold sway over most of the countryside.

The immediate political tasks spelled out by the Bonn agreement are to complete work on a new constitution and to hold national elections. Significant constitutional and legal questions need to be resolved before convening a loya jirga to consider the draft constitution. Modern Afghanistan has a history of centralized governance in near permanent tension with semiautonomous local and regional tribal rule. The challenge for the constitution makers is to find a legal formula that captures this continuing reality. The constitution must also define the role of Islam in the new state. This calls for balancing traditional Islamic legal values with the legal system that the monarchy established in the 1920s. Although religious conservatives continue to have a strong voice, life under the Taliban provided Afghans with a cautionary example that may serve as a brake on the revival of the harshest forms of Islamist rule and of the related persecution of women.

The task of organizing and conducting national elections by June 2004 poses complex challenges. Election and political party laws need to be adopted. Voters have to be registered. Some sort of census must be conducted to ensure the fair allocation of parliamentary seats. This is a daunting task in a country with such poor communications and administrative infrastructures. In determining the representation of different regions and ethnic groups, the census count and subsequent allocation of seats will raise extremely delicate political issues. To date, little if any progress has been made in these tasks. Time is running short.

Although the timetable for drafting the constitution and holding a loya jirga still seems feasible, there are growing doubts that national elections can be organized in an orderly and fair manner before June 2004. One way to address this problem would be to separate presidential and parliamentary polls, holding the voting for the head of state in line with the Bonn timetable but putting off the parliamentary elections until later. This would provide the additional time needed for the complex and highly sensitive task of conducting the census and demarcating electoral districts that accurately reflect the population's distribution. Such a procedure would be far preferable to a disorganized electoral process that fails to gain acceptance as free and fair and impairs the legitimacy of the future Afghan government.

The Afghan people badly want to get on with the job of building a new state structure after two decades of destruction and despair. Despite increased ethnic, regional and sectarian rivalries, Afghans retain a strong sense of nationhood. Although politically weak, President Karzai has gained legitimacy and far greater nationwide popularity than any other Afghan figure. Even if their cooperation is often halfhearted, regional and local leaders are willing, rhetorically at least, to acknowledge Karzai's preeminence and leadership.

EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE

During the past two decades, Afghanistan's neighbors have actively interfered in the country's internal affairs, supporting ethnic and tribal brethren and local favorites. Breaking this habit will be difficult, but the United States must make this a major policy

objective in the effort to bolster the stability of the new Afghan government. The recent upsurge of attacks by Taliban supporters, often mounted from Pakistan's tribal areas, has once more brought this issue to the fore.

The porous frontier and the history of recent years make clear that elements in Pakistan can interfere in Afghanistan anytime they choose to do so. Hence the deep concern caused by the electoral success of pro-Taliban Islamist parties in the October 2002 Pakistani elections. The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) is widely assumed to have maintained operational contacts with Taliban remnants, who have sought refuge in Pakistan's border areas, as well as with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a renegade former mujahideen commander. Whether these links are the result of lower-level rogue operatives or have the tacit support of upper ISI echelons remains an open question. The United States should press Pakistan to do a better job of controlling the border areas and make emphatically clear that any official or unofficial support for interference in Afghanistan would be inconsistent with Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism and with improved U.S.-Pakistan relations.

Iran can also disturb the fragile situation in Afghanistan by intensifying military and political support in certain areas, especially Herat and the Hazarajat. Even though the United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran, the two countries have had ongoing discussions, including Afghan-specific talks. Tehran may also listen to others, in particular, Europe and Russia, concerning Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States has considerable leverage, in terms of both military and financial carrots and sticks, with Herat's governor, Ismail Khan, who has close ties with Iran. Reports of Russia's providing military equipment to warlord Abdurrashid Dostum's forces and maintaining a separate, direct relationship with Marshall Fahim, while keeping cordial relations with the transitional government, are also disturbing and need to be addressed.

In the new strategic environment, Afghanistan's neighbors stand to benefit from its stability. The country's poverty and enormous reconstruction requirements ensure that no government in Kabul will be able to threaten regional stability or peace for the foreseeable future. But Afghanistan's neighbors can aggravate existing instability if they once more actively interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Their governments all say that they are not interfering and in fact desire friendly relations with the Karzai

government. The aim of U.S. diplomacy should be to see that reality corresponds with stated policy.

In trying to deter outside meddling in Afghanistan, the United States should undertake a major diplomatic initiative to follow up the December 2002 effort of the Karzai government that obtained noninterference pledges from Afghanistan's neighbors. This was a useful step but should be buttressed by a far broader and more ambitious international undertaking. The purpose would be to reaffirm and strengthen the pledge of noninterference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, to agree on banning the supply of arms and other military equipment to local Afghan groups, and to accept current Afghan borders, including the Durand Line frontier with Pakistan. The U.S.-sponsored initiative should also promote regional agreements between Afghanistan and its neighbors to improve customs collection, transit trade, and border control.

To be effective, the initiative must involve Afghanistan, all its immediate neighbors—Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China—and other interested powers, including the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, the European Union, and Japan. Although such a major international accord could not realistically end cross-border interference alone, it would create a barrier to this highly destabilizing conduct and strengthen the position of the new Afghan state. It would also provide a politically palatable vehicle to resolve the long-standing and still potentially troublesome frontier dispute with Pakistan. For the agreement to have maximum impact, its signing should coincide with the assumption of power by the new Afghan government a year from now.

RECONSTRUCTING AFGHANISTAN

Two decades of conflict—during which Afghanistan experienced Soviet occupation, jihad, civil war, Taliban rule, and Operation Enduring Freedom—have left the country a wasteland. Never well developed, the country's infrastructure lay in ruins when the Taliban were ousted in November 2001. Roads, electric power plants, hospitals, schools, and irrigation and telecommunications facilities were heavily damaged. The capital city of Kabul was in shambles. Afghanistan's administrative structure had collapsed.

The process of developing a blueprint for rebuilding Afghanistan, deciding upon a division of labor among aid donors, and establishing a coordinating mechanism has required time. The Karzai government started from scratch. In the beginning, there were ministers but no ministries. The assistance effort was at first predictably beset by confusion, differing and often conflicting procedures and priorities among donors, and inadequate donor coordination. Although the aid machinery has begun to function more efficiently, significant problems remain in the areas of donor coordination, high administrative costs, and ensuring the flow of adequate resources for reconstruction.

Understandably, the initial focus of assistance lay on meeting immediate humanitarian needs. The impact of several years of drought and an unexpectedly large inflow of returning refugees (in itself a positive sign) required a massive effort to prevent starvation and provide shelter from the winter's bitter cold. The transitional government has slowly gained capacity, even if it remains a work in progress. One important achievement was the successful introduction of a new currency in the fall of 2002, a symbolically important assertion of sovereignty and authority.

As summer 2003 begins, emphasis is shifting from providing short-term relief and humanitarian assistance to the longer-term task of national reconstruction. To its credit, the Karzai government has developed rational operational and development priorities and incorporated these into a consolidated national budget for 2003. In meetings in Kabul and in Brussels during March 2003, the foreign donor community accepted the Afghan budget as the basis for moving ahead. It agreed in principle to funnel assistance through the central government and to ensure that donor priorities match those that the Afghans themselves have established. It is essential that the United States and other donors implement these undertakings; failure to do so will seriously undercut the credibility of the central government and the reconstruction effort.

The 2003 budget calls for a total expenditure of $2.25 billion—$550 million for salaries and government operations and $1.7 billion for development. Donor pledges cover 88 percent, leaving a gap of $276 million. Of the uncovered amount, $200 million is slated to cover salaries and government operations, a highly sensitive area. The transitional government, at this juncture, collects few taxes or customs revenues and has to rely on the uncertain largesse of foreign aid donors to pay civil servants and meet other

basic administrative expenses. In order to strengthen the central government, it is vital that control of customs collection at the major border crossing points pass from regional leaders to the authorities in Kabul. Reportedly, Ismail Khan in Herat took in $100 million in custom duties last year, a sum larger than the $80 million that the transitional government was able to collect nationwide. He turned over only $10 million to the central government.

During fiscal year 2002, the United States contributed $928 million (the figure combines relief and reconstruction activities) and has said that it intends to meet or exceed this amount in 2003. It is essential that the United States and other donors deliver fully on their aid pledges, that contributions are made in a timely manner, and that they address needs that the transitional authorities have identified. It is also important that foreign donors, including the United States, work through and not bypass the central government in developing and implementing their assistance projects. One of Hamid Karzai's major political strengths has been his ability to secure substantial amounts of foreign assistance. His capability to direct aid activities to different parts of the country, in effect the power of patronage, gives him a potent tool in enlarging the authority of the central government and valuable leverage in the process of incorporating regional leaders into the national administrative structure. A key element of the demobilization process will be Kabul's ability to provide alternative employment for former militia fighters.

Economic development is also vital in stopping the resurgence of poppy production. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has once more become the world's largest producer of opium. In 2002, according to the UN, Afghanistan produced 3,400 tons of the drug—more than eighteen times the amount produced during the last year of Taliban rule. The estimated value of this harvest to producers and traffickers (mostly the latter) was $2.5 billion—twice the total aid Afghanistan received from all donors in 2002. The British have taken lead responsibility in dealing with the narcotics problem but, absent alternative sources of income for the farmers, have made little progress.

AFGHANS FRUSTRATED BY SLOW ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Despite significant achievements since the defeat of the Taliban, Afghans feel frustrated and disappointed by the slow pace of economic reconstruction. Reality has fallen far short of public hopes and expectations. In part to provide more tangible signs of progress, the donor community agreed to rebuild the major roads between Kabul and the other principal Afghan cities: Mazar-e-Sharif in the north, Jalalabad in the east, Kandahar in the south, and Herat in the west. After two decades of conflict and neglect, these transportation links—mostly constructed by the United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War competition—are in terrible condition. Their ruts and potholes represent a serious barrier to the resumption of more normal life and economic recovery.

The United States has assumed responsibility for the stretch of road between Kabul and Kandahar. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Japan, and the Asian Development Bank have agreed to undertake other parts of the project. To bolster the overall credibility of the United States and the international assistance effort, it is essential that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) complete the American portion by the end of 2003, as promised by President Bush, and that other donors move expeditiously in their sectors. The road projects have enormous symbolic value but will also have a great and positive economic impact.

Over the coming five years, the World Bank and the government of Afghanistan believe that $15 billion in development assistance is needed over and above funds for relief and rehabilitation. At a minimum, the United States should be prepared to provide one-third of this total, or $1 billion a year in reconstruction help. This is about the amount that the U.S. Congress authorized for fiscal years 2003 and 2004 in the Afghan Freedom Support Act in November 2002. President Bush has repeatedly promised that the United States will stay the course in Afghanistan, even pledging a long-term commitment modeled on the Marshall Plan. Thus far, the funds that the United States has delivered for reconstruction have fallen short of such promises, especially when one recalls that the United States was already providing $174 million in relief assistance in the last year of Taliban rule.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Success in achieving U.S. goals in Afghanistan depends on several factors, among which the following are key:

- establishment of a new and nationally acceptable political structure;
- restoration of security throughout the country and demobilization and reintegration of local militias;
- noninterference from neighbors in Afghanistan's internal affairs; and
- progress in reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Apart from Afghanistan itself, perhaps no nation has a greater stake than the United States in Afghanistan's achieving these goals and not reverting to civil war and anarchy. To ensure that this does not happen, the United States must take a number of steps to bolster the Karzai government.

In the security area, the United States should:

- maintain adequate military forces until the Afghan state can assume this responsibility;
- task U.S. troops with the mission of peacekeeping outside of Kabul, unless an enlarged and expanded ISAF assumes this responsibility;
- cooperate actively with the UN and the Kabul government in supporting implementation of a DDR program instead of remaining aloof;
- drastically increase the size of the ANA projected for June 2004, increase salaries for ANA soldiers, and provide enhanced unit and combat training;
- support reform of the ministry of defense to make it a more nationally representative organization; and
- deploy the eight planned PRTs promptly and consider additional PRTs if the experiment proves successful.

In the political and diplomatic area, the United States should:

- support holding presidential and parliamentary elections separately if there appears to be inadequate time to prepare properly for both by June 2004;
- press Iran, Russia, and Pakistan to bring their real policy into line with their stated policy of noninterference in Afghanistan's internal affairs; and

- seek high-level international agreement from Afghanistan's neighbors and others to keep their hands off Afghanistan's internal affairs, ban the transfer of arms and equipment to warlords, accept Afghanistan's frontiers, and promote trade, transit, and customs collection arrangements.

In the reconstruction area, the United States should:

- provide at least $1 billion of economic assistance annually over the coming five years, over and above humanitarian help;
- ensure that U.S. economic assistance priorities are consistent with those of Afghanistan and that programs are implemented under the aegis of Afghanistan's central government; and
- complete the Kabul-Kandahar road project by the end of 2003 and press other donors to implement their portions of the road project as quickly as possible.

At the March 17, 2003, meeting of donors in Brussels, Afghanistan's finance minister Ashraf Ghani, starkly sketched two possible futures for his country:

> "With a national vision, wise policy choices, and coordinated and cogent international support, Afghanistan could become a self-sustaining, moderate Islamic, friendly state; a bridge between western and Islam[ic] civilizations. However, with fragmented support, or a loss of international interest, Afghanistan at best will become another development failure, lurching from crisis to crisis, and at worst a narco-mafia state, with a criminal elite and no respect for rule of law or civil and human rights."[1]

If the United States is to win the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, the vision of a self-sustaining moderate Islamic state—not the bleak alternative—must become reality. In support of this vision and of U.S. national interests in a stable Afghanistan, it is essential that Washington sustain high-level attention on Afghanistan and provide more effective security, economic, and diplomatic support to the central government there.

[1] Summary, Afghan High-Level Strategic Forum, Brussels, March 17, 2003.

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FRANK G. WISNER II is Vice Chairman of External Affairs at American International Group, Inc. He was Ambassador to India from 1994 to 1997 and has also served in a number of senior positions in the U.S. government, including Undersecretary of Defense for Policy from 1993 to 1994 and Undersecretary of State for International Security Affairs from 1992 to 1993. He is a member of the Board of the U.S.-India Business Council.

NICHOLAS PLATT became President of the Asia Society after a 34-year Foreign Service career. He served in China and Japan and as U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines (1987–91) and Pakistan (1991–92). Educated at Harvard College and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, he is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a director of Fiduciary Trust Company International.

MARSHALL M. BOUTON is President of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Formerly, he enjoyed twenty years with the Asia Society, most recently as executive vice president and chief operating officer. An expert on South Asia, Dr. Bouton has worked for the Departments of Defense and State and spent eight years studying and working in India. He earned his B.A. cum laude from Harvard College, his M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

DENNIS KUX, a retired Foreign Service South Asia specialist, is currently Senior Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. While with the State Department, he spent fifteen years dealing with South Asia in Washington, D.C., and in the region and served as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. He first visited Afghanistan in 1958. He has written histories of U.S.-India and U.S.-Pakistan relations as well as numerous articles and book chapters on U.S.–South Asia relations.

MAHNAZ ISPAHANI is Senior Fellow for South and West Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations. She served for a decade at the Ford Foundation, most recently as Deputy Director for global programs in human rights and international cooperation. Dr. Ispahani has directed democracy programs in Russia and in Pakistan for the National Democratic Institute. A Fellow and Research Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Harvard University's Center for Science and International Affairs (now the Belfer Center), and the International Institute of Strategic Studies, she has published widely on South Asian security, politics, and culture.

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