

EUROPEAN SECURITY FORUM

A JOINT INITIATIVE OF CEPS, IISS AND DCAF

AFGHANISTAN: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

ESF WORKING PAPER NO. 25

APRIL 2007

PETER BERGEN

JULIAN LINDLEY-FRENCH

HEKMAT KARZAI

ISMAIL KHAN

ANDREI ZAGORSKI

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ISBN-13: 978-92-9079-717-3



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**GENEVA CENTRE
FOR THE
DEMOCRATIC CONTROL
OF ARMED FORCES**

Place du Congrès 1, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2.229.39.11 Fax: +32 (0)2.219.41.51
www.ceps.be E-mail: info@ceps.be

Arundel House, 13-15 Arundel Street, Temple Place
London WC2R 3DX, United Kingdom
Tel. +44(0)20.7379.7676 Fax: +44(0)20.7836.3108
www.iiss.org E-mail: iiss@iiss.org

Rue de Chantepoulet 11, P.O. Box 1360
1211 Geneva I, Switzerland
Tel. +41(22)741.77.00 Fax: +41(22)741.77.05
www.dcaf.ch E-mail: info@dcaf.ch

Afghanistan: Mission Impossible?

Working Paper No. 25
of the
European Security Forum

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Chairman's Summing-up

François Heisbourg*

To address a most difficult question, we benefited from presentations by Julian Lindley-French (Centre for Applied Policy, University of Munich and Defence Academy of the UK), Andrei Zagorski (MGIMO-University, Moscow) and Peter Berger (New America Foundation and John Hopkins University). These were complemented by written and oral contributions from Hekmat Karzai (CASE National Security Institute, Kabul) and Ismail Khan (The Dawn Group of Newspapers, Peshawar).

Before the experts delivered their oral presentations, the chairman put three questions to them:

- Can a NATO-led operation (even one in which the European Union would be doing the 'civilian' work) succeed or is internationalisation ('de-Westernisation') a prerequisite for success and if so, under what entities?
- Can a form of stability be established without the incorporation of Pashtun concerns (an issue much discussed in Julian Lindley-French's paper)?
- Is the status quo (as opposed to either a successful outcome or outright failure) anyone's preferred option?

After a severe critique of European policy (characterised by the failure of strategic imagination) and American attitudes (notably the 'not invented here' syndrome), Julian Lindley-French made several points:

- The West as a group has the resources to succeed but wider and deeper engagement is necessary, and this entails de-Westernisation. All 25 provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) need to be multilateralised. There must be no "hiding places".
- The West has to remind all and sundry that it is not in Afghanistan out of altruism – its vital security interests are at stake. There would be major consequences regionally and globally if the Afghanistan venture were to end in division and failure. This outcome would spell the end of NATO and of the EU as a defence organisation. The potential is high for estrangement between the United States and the United Kingdom (and a handful of other countries) on one hand and most of the continental powers on the other. Furthermore, Euro-isolationism is a real risk. He reminded us *inter alia* that vision without a strategy is delusion and a strategy without commitment is deceit.

Andrei Zagorski had been asked to focus on the lessons from the long period of Soviet presence (from 1975 onwards) and military intervention (from the end of 1979 to 1989) in Afghanistan. The first lesson he drew was "If you don't believe in a mission, don't get into it". The Soviets had few illusions about their ability to transform Afghan society and yet that is what they tried to do. The second lesson is to avoid saying, "You can't afford to fail". This idea can lead to overcommitment in trying to implement an impossible mission.

Lesson number three is that the amount of material and human assistance counts, but less so than its quality: indeed, the greater the assistance, the less its quality and the more the people, the less their average quality. Lesson number four is to not set "perfect" goals such as transforming a society – learn instead how to work with imperfect partners in developing broad ownership of the mission.

Peter Berger noted some of the basic differences between the West's involvement and that of the former Soviet Union ("We didn't kill 1.5 million people and drive out 5 million Afghans"). He

*François Heisbourg is a Senior Adviser at the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique in Paris and Chairman of the European Security Forum.

remarked that the West has the ability to “surge” but that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are back. There is widespread perception of the weakness (and the ongoing weakening) of the Karzai presidency, notwithstanding his initial 55% electoral success, partly across ethnic lines. Without the drug economy, there would not be much left: there is an absolute need to subsidise other produce. Above and beyond initial US mistakes (under-resourced operations, not allowing the International Security Assistance Force out of Kabul and letting the drug economy develop), current aid policies are largely failing in the face of local absorption limits and the recycling of much of the aid back into Western pockets.

There has been a successful amnesty programme, however, with a low recidivism rate. Conversely, in the tribal areas of Pakistan, neither militarisation nor appeasement has worked. Much could be gained by focusing on specific mosques and clerics.

In his response, Hekmat Karzai stressed that aid should have been greater than it has been (after all, 80% of Afghan infrastructure has been destroyed) and more directly handled by the Afghan government. He considered that most Afghans still support the Western intervention. The Taliban campaign has been largely aimed against education, with 160 schools destroyed by them in 2006. In reacting to the paper by Julian Lindley-French, he expressed broad agreement, but with the significant reservation that the Taliban resurgence is not a consequence of Pashtun grievances. *Vis-à-vis* Andrei Zagorski’s lessons from the former Soviet Union, he noted that the Soviets simply did not understand the local scene and that the same situation is being repeated now – yet the population is the centre of gravity. He concurred with the lesson that there is no success in trying to create a society in one’s image. One of the lessons of the Soviet presence is that it placed too much emphasis on the capital and the major towns; the Soviets never secured the rural areas. The same mistake is being made by many of the PRTs.

In his response, Ismail Khan made clear that both the Pashtun and Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency are major factors and that not too much should be made of the absence of an explicit discussion thereof in his paper. He dwelled on the pendulum swings between militarisation and engagement in both North and South Waziristan, noting that the local tribes, in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, tend to side with the group that is seen as winning. He argued that the approach taken in the case of the Musa Qala agreement is necessary, because no development could occur without a degree of stability and security; notably, the Taliban were not happy with the Musa Qala agreement between the UK forces and the local leaders. He made the point that peace in Afghanistan could mean trouble in Pakistan, because their militants from the tribal areas could turn their guns on Pakistan rather than become involved in Afghanistan. (This important contention provoked, in the subsequent discussion, a remark about the dangers of beggar-thy-neighbour policies.) In his view there hardly exists a Pakistani strategy; furthermore, the recent spate of suicide bombings in Pakistan sends a message to Islamabad that it should not try to stop cross-border infiltration ahead of the spring offensive. Overall, as an institution, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency is now targeting the Taliban. He argued that the presence of 80,000 Pakistani troops in 167 border posts should be enough to patrol the boundary but a blind eye is sometimes turned out of fear of reprisals against isolated posts.

In the opening round of discussions, the question of Iran’s policy was posed, while an EU official noted that Afghan drugs are now having a corrupting and damaging effect in the fragile states and populations of Central Asia. Given that some 10,000 tonnes of chemical precursors are being imported into Afghanistan for drug processing, such substances should be tracked. On the question of capabilities, Julian Lindley-French was queried by a military analyst about the possibility of squaring the admonition that the West needs to increase its effort with the observation that we already face a capabilities crunch.

In response, Hekmat Karzai remarked on Iran’s great activity on all fronts (commerce, aid and intelligence), noting that the Iranians are now waiting for the West’s next move. On drugs, he reminded us that if we do not deal with drugs, drugs will deal with us. Physical eradication is largely a

waste of time; the real issue is the generation of alternate resources. On capabilities, he assumed that NATO's attention span could hardly be expected to last more than a decade.

Julian Lindley-French suggested that it should be possible to engage the Iranians on a specific track concerning Afghanistan. Moving to India's involvement (Hekmat Karzai having observed that India is still seen as exercising a major positive influence), he considered that it is playing a game that could be called "What happens after the West is gone?", in other words, thinking in terms of future relations with Islamabad. On drugs, he reiterated the view that alternate crops have to be subsidised. He also suggested that there should be some form of *de facto* autonomy for the Pashtun on both sides of the border, while respecting the Durand line, holding that the Pashtun are key to the security situation. On capabilities, he stressed that conflict and reconstruction must be viewed not as sequential but as simultaneous; this requires a doctrinal shift and a harmonisation of civil–military capabilities among NATO, the EU, the UN and the regional players. Finally, he indicated that US–UK relations concerning Afghanistan have suffered as a result of US action against the Musa Qala agreement.

Ismail Khan held that for the Taliban, religious motivation is of the essence rather than a sense of Pashtun identity.

Peter Berger remarked that Iran has done nothing basically wrong in Afghanistan; moreover, Iran is on the receiving end of the drug problem. He agreed that poppy eradication would not help, as it will send more people into the arms of the Taliban. Substitutes and subsidies are the answer, whereas at present we are spending more money on eradication than paying farmers to stop growing drugs.

Andrei Zagorski stressed that although Tehran has no reason to bring the Taliban back, it will be tempting for Iran to hurt the West in Afghanistan. Concerning the penetration of rural regions, he argued that it is neither necessary nor desirable, since it is a source of trouble; instead, what you need is a strong interface.

In a second round of questions, an Indian official disagreed with the proposition that Delhi is playing a waiting game and highlighted the \$750 million of Indian assistance. A German analyst raised the issue of those Western allies who do not want to go south; he indicated that the Afghan government wants the Germans to stay in the north. A Dutch analyst wondered how one could channel more aid through the Afghan government given its weak structure. An EU official underscored the fact that the EU alone had made a seven-year commitment in Afghanistan. He noted that there were many calls for "Afghanisation", but like the previous participant, he too wondered how one could do that outside of Kabul. He noted the great difficulty of building up the rule of law on the basis of three legal systems (traditional rules, Sharia law and Western norms).

A Pakistani official pointed out that Pakistan deserves gratitude, since it had made possible the overthrow of the Taliban after having hosted over 4 million refugees. More than 700 Pakistani soldiers had been killed in the Waziristan operation. Some 35,000 Afghans are crossing the Afghan border legally on a daily basis.

A NATO official remarked that the process is actually worse than the content: we have great trouble in going beyond a piecemeal *ad hoc* approach.

A defence analyst expressed interest in the effectiveness of actual and potential measures aimed at controlling the Afghan border and the chairman asked our guests for their views on a contact group format for dealing with Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a question was put by the CEPS representative concerning 'Greater Afghanistan': Who wants it and is it serious?

Ismail Khan noted that 74% of the population of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan speak Pashtun while the 3.5 million inhabitants of the seven tribal areas are mostly Pashtun (of which 700,000 live outside of the government unit in South Waziristan). Nevertheless, "Pashtunistan" is a nationalism that has been diluted with economic improvement in Pakistan (the North-West Frontier Province comes immediately after the Punjab in terms of economic prosperity).

Hekmat Karzai remarked that there is a massive brain drain in Afghanistan from the government to the aid agencies, a process that weakens the government. While expressing gratitude for the support Pakistan's people provided while he was a refugee, he noted that Afghan-Pakistani relations tend to mimic Indo-Pakistani relations, despite the fact that both Pakistan and Afghanistan are Muslim countries. He viewed the revival of the grand *loya jirga* for the Pashtun on both sides of the border as a positive step.

Peter Berger raised the issue of the legalisation of growing poppies for medicinal purposes. He agreed that Pakistan had been instrumental in the fall of the Taliban – but that it had also contributed to their rise.

Andrei Zagorski did not take kindly to the notion of mining the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan (to prevent militants from crossing); setting aside other considerations this has never worked. On the overall situation, he considered that we needed to define what would be a satisfactory outcome.

Julian Lindley-French stressed that if we fail in Afghanistan, the strategic situation for India and Pakistan would worsen, particularly for Pakistan. He repeated the serious effect German reticence was having on UK-German relations. And in conclusion, he supported the idea of creating a contact group.

‘Afghanistan-lite’: The Crunch

Julian Lindley-French*

Introduction

Afghanistan is at a crunch point. Put simply, either the 37 countries currently engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan through the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) recognise and stand up to the enormity of the challenge (and the opportunity) or the West’s signature mission will fail at the start of the new strategic age. Those are the stakes. In other words, Afghanistan is about so much more than Afghanistan. Today, there are not enough resources, in spite of the \$10 billion pledged by donors. And, even at 35,000 strong, there are not enough forces (helicopters or troops). The Afghan people, who have a tradition of backing those most likely to prevail, have lost or are losing faith in the West. It is a set of failing circumstances that must be changed and changed rapidly if the defeatism that is beginning to predominate in the West is not to spread.

Such defeatism is in fact a paradox because given cohesion and political will the West could actually generate the power and effect so required. Indeed, the West today is the richest, most powerful grouping the world has ever known but for reasons best known to its leaders, it is attempting to change the very nature of security governance with at least one metaphorical arm tied behind its collective back. Ultimately, it is not the Taliban, al-Qaeda or the Pashtun who are threatening the West with failure, complex though the situation in Afghanistan may be. Rather, it is the refusal of political leaders in the West to recognise the importance of success, the full implications of failure and invest accordingly. Moreover, it is failure that is leading inexorably to the coalescence of Taliban, al-Qaeda and Pashtun interests, something that would have been unthinkable when Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began on 7 October 2001.

The core message of this analysis is therefore simple: now is the time to re-double the effort, not reduce it. If the West is not to lose Afghanistan, and with it much of its strategic leadership credibility, then the petty infighting and double-speak of the past three years must end. This is an age of strategic change in desperate need of grand stability. Furthermore, the successful governance of such change must necessarily be founded on security architecture with the enlightened West as its cornerstone. Consequently, Afghanistan will help to define not just the age, but also the role of the West therein. Therefore, the short-sighted and self-defeating factional game playing in the West that places marginal advantage before strategic effect must end. It is doing incalculable damage, not just to the future of Afghanistan, but also to the future of Europeans and North Americans alike in a world more dangerous by the day. Make no mistake, if the West is forced out of Afghanistan and the Karzai regime in Kabul evaporates, like that of the Najibullah regime before it, then the message to friends and foe alike will be clear – given time, given effort and given resolve, the West will always be forced out. No one said it would be easy, but mission impossible? Only if the West chooses to make it so.

This analysis looks at the situation in Afghanistan on four levels – the grand strategic, the regional–strategic, the Afghan national and the military–operational. It then concludes with a brief agenda for the future. History has been hard on Afghanistan but the West today is neither the America of 1970s Vietnam nor the Soviet Union of 1980s Afghanistan. It is time the West got on with the job of doing what it takes to make Afghanistan work. There can be no ‘Afghanistan-lite’.

* Julian Lindley-French is a Senior Scholar, Centre for Applied Policy, Munich and a Senior Associate Fellow, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

The new great game – The grand strategic crunch

Afghanistan-lite represents a collective failure of strategic imagination in the West. In addition, Afghanistan has become the place where the over-militarised American war on terror has come face to face with the overcivilianised and locally focused anachronism of contemporary European peacekeeping. Consequently, both elements are forced to apply what they have, in pursuit of what they must do in a place notoriously unforgiving on those who fail to comprehend the relationship between strategic impact and the dark side of globalisation.

This failure of strategic imagination is founded upon several factors: first, an American oversimplification of what is required to generate effect in a place where the borders drawn by 19th century Europeans have little or no meaning to the people on the ground. Second, there is a collective psychosis about the influence of history, particularly in Europe, that makes its re-living all the more likely. Third, there is a lack of consensus over the role of Afghanistan in the sense of grand stability. This is partly because of poor American strategic leadership since 2001, and partly because too many Europeans put doing the least possible there before doing what must be done to render the place stable. Fourth, it is a consequence of the inversion of the natural order through a profound confusion over values and interests, which has placed democracy before stability and conflated the two. Fifth, there is a simple lack of cash to outbid the Taliban for the support of the Pashtun.

As a result, nothing like the resources have been invested in Afghanistan that its grand strategic importance demands and nothing like the political cohesion is being generated that is vital to success. Current operations in Afghanistan take place in a region that is not only becoming the centre of gravity of world security but also where many of the actors thereabouts are themselves emerging as grand strategic players. They are all watching and waiting to understand the extent or otherwise of Western resolve and will draw conclusions accordingly as to whether the West is to be supported or not. Iran, flanked on either border by Western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, is gauging not only the collective resolve of the West but also whether such an entity retains any wider meaning, given Tehran's own regional ambitions. Russia, still smarting over its 'defeat' in the cold war, still obsessed by NATO and still conscious of the support the West gave to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s, seems willing to do little to pave the way for success. China, emerging on the world stage, notes with interest the inner-game of Western politics and concludes that when push comes to shove European support for American strategic leadership is to say the very least lukewarm as far as matters Asian are concerned. India, conscious of China's growing influence and all too aware of the implications of Western failure in the North-West Frontier for disputed Jammu and Kashmir waits and watches to see if the new strategic partnership with the West will be one worth having. The West today may be more idea than place, but is it one that new powers still see as credible in a new world? Like it or not, Afghanistan will do much to answer that question. Thus, the utility, *bona fides* and credibility of the West must be demonstrated to states, people and those of faith alike and it will take much time and great effort to do so. That begs two questions: Has the West got the stomach for it? Is the West up to it?

Equally, those in Europe who think that the West in any case no longer exists and propose simply withdrawing from Afghanistan need to think long and hard. The British went into Afghanistan in the late 19th century partly to obstruct Russian ambitions for a warm sea port, but also because of the instability of the North-West Frontier and the pressure it was placing on British India. The Soviets went into Afghanistan in 1979 mainly because of concerns over the growing influence of radical Islam in its southern republics. In other words, Afghanistan has long been a crossroads of influence and a theatre for strategic and regional change. Indeed, that is part of Afghanistan's tragedy. Today, the very nature of globalisation means that 'black holes' of security are not simply lost to civilised order. Connectivity and disorder are strange bedfellows but in this world, illegal activity can rapidly make them so. As a consequence, such places very quickly become the epicentres of strategic crime, where business in illegal commodities are at their most intense, be it hard drugs, small arms or weapons of mass destruction.

Therefore, contemporary security policy is more often than not about hard choices in hard places like Afghanistan. Withdrawal is not an option because unmolested strategic crime and systemic terrorism will chase the West back to its own back streets. Again, like it or not, pulling out of Afghanistan will greatly exacerbate ‘blowback’, not least because in this age the democratisation of mass destruction, which is the dark side of globalisation, means that anyone can get anything given time, determination and freedom from the pressure of positive power. Thus, the only ‘option’ is to stay and make the benefits of legality outweigh what is by Western standards the benefits of illegality across the broad spectrum of criminal effect.

That is a message that resonates across the great belt of instability, which has its buckle in Afghanistan. For the broader Middle East, the regimes there and those who seek to overturn them, the loss of Afghanistan will have a strategic eloquence that will resonate far and wide. Why? Because unlike Iraq the West is engaged in Afghanistan as the legitimate West and if it loses there then the whole concept of the West as the cornerstone security power in the new grand strategic architecture will be dealt the most searing of blows. What price Europe’s and North America’s vital resources then?

And yet, the sheer economic power of the West means it is doomed to retain the leadership mantle. The East might be emerging, but the West is not declining. It is another paradox of this strange strategic age that there is as yet no Newtonian balance between growth and decline. China and India may collectively represent 30% of global gross domestic product by 2020 but today North America and Western Europe together represent some 70% of it. Even the most pessimistic of economic assumptions suggest that by 2020 North America and Western Europe will still be the dominant economic, political and strategic grouping in the world. This view makes the West’s half-hearted attempts in Afghanistan at first glance so puzzling. The West has invested nothing like the resources in pursuit of success that it could. The reason for this is far more than the lingering discord over Iraq, which continues to pollute the mission in Afghanistan. It is more than the collective weakness or absence of European strategic vision. It is rather to do with the very uncertainty back home in the West that the likes of al-Qaeda seek to create. The West is profoundly split about the balance to be struck between projection and protection. Thus, what passes for ‘strategy’ has become focused on the delusion of millions (particularly in Europe) that they are not engaged in a war. It is also about the maintenance of that delusion by breaking the link between the provision of security and its cost. It is about governments having to end the strategic vacation and telling people that taxes will have to be increased. It is about the defeat of the long term by the short term. It is about the absence of leadership.

Tragically, the popular security delusion has broken the essential link between much of Western society and the young men and women who act on their behalf in places like Afghanistan. That is why one sees the emergence of military ghettos across the West full of soldiers and their families under the most intense pressure, detached from a society that understands little of what they do and cares even less.

Afghanistan is a grand strategic crunch. It is time to face up to that reality and act, organise and invest accordingly.

Rescuing the state – The regional strategic crunch

Afghanistan is not so much a state as a space in which the interest of players is played out. There are many players – states and non-states alike. Indeed, the end-state of the West’s involvement has much to do with rescuing the state in Central and South Asia. Afghanistan is thus the pith of the regional–strategic game over order and hierarchy in the region. Sadly, for many of the actors engaged there the game is increasingly about what happens after the West has gone. In its most pressing form, this regional–strategic game concerns the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan as states. Without doubt, there can be no solution to Afghanistan without a permanent settlement in Pakistan and herein lies the

essential dilemma. Islamabad is in an invidious position, trapped between its external relations with the West and others, such as India and China, and its internal cocktail of secularism, fundamentalism and tribalism.

Therefore, if the West is to prove itself a credible, long-term, strategic security stabiliser it must be equally credible in its commitments to both Kabul and Islamabad. Much of the credibility of the West in the region and the wider Islamic world will be founded on the role it plays in resolving the Pakistan–Afghanistan–Pashtun triangle. Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was right during a visit to NATO on 30 January 2007 when he said, “Pakistan is committed to a strong, stable Afghanistan. The one country that will benefit most, after Afghanistan itself, will be Pakistan.” At the very least the West must convince those senior Pakistanis equivocal about the West’s role in Afghanistan that Pakistan’s best hope for such an outcome is full support for the OEF and ISAF and the wider, comprehensive security approach the West is trying to foster. Moreover, winning Pakistan could over time help to persuade many in the Islamic world, wherever they may be, that latter-day grand stability missions led by the West are not the latest iteration of some crusading/imperialist impulse. At the very least, there needs to be a stronger Islamic flavour to current operations in Afghanistan in spite of the presence of Albanians, Azeris and Turks in the ISAF.

Equally, significant parts of the Islamic world are in some form of devotional civil war and this conflict undermines the very states, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, which by definition of being states owe their origins to the organisation of power and society by the West. Thus, there is a continuum between geo-politics, state security and stability, and human security, which finds its centre of gravity and its crisis point in that region. Certainly, the strategic continuum should be central to the strategic narrative that the West has proved so poor at telling be it to those at home or to those whom it seeks to assist. The message is a simple one: while the West is committed to a stable state structure, it does not and will not seek to influence the creed of any state. At the same time, the West will confront all forms of extremism that threaten order. That is why a regional–strategic solution is so pressing. The possibility of the Pakistani nuclear programme falling into extremist Islamist hands with a jihadist agenda cannot be discounted. Such a possibility is clearly linked to the ability of such elements to operate and organise almost with impunity in Waziristan and across the northern areas, and thus the strengthening of the Pakistani state is as much an essential interest of the West as the strengthening of the Afghan state.

While the West must help strengthen both the Pakistani and Afghan states, it must also grasp the pivotal importance of a Pashtun settlement. Finding a solution to the Pashtun dilemma on both sides of the border is in many ways the crux of the entire mission. The easing of the dilemma will require sacrifices. It will entail the ending of efforts by those in Kabul who dream of a ‘Greater Afghanistan’ and the neutering of those elements in Pakistani intelligence who believe that the ambitions of India (rightly or wrongly) in Afghanistan and the north-west territories must be countered, even if that means implicitly or explicitly supporting the Taliban in its struggle against ‘foreigners’. Changing that dynamic will only be achieved if the West demonstrates once and for all that the ‘after the West has gone’ game is not an option.

Indeed, only through the easing of the Pashtun dilemma will the re-separation of Taliban, al-Qaeda and Pashtun interests likely be achieved, which is crucial. A not insignificant part of the dilemma stems from the Durand line, which separates south-east Afghanistan from north-west Pakistan. Drawn by a British imperial official in 1893, it denies the Pashtun an effective homeland. But that was then and this is now. An ideal approach would be to carve out a new homeland from the areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan for the Pashtun. Yet such a ‘solution’ would clearly offend both Islamabad and Kabul to the point of rupture in their relations with the West. At the same time, both capitals must understand that there is a price for the continued support of both capitals by the West and surely the offer of *de facto* autonomy for a Pashtun homeland could be one such instrument. This approach would shift the interests of Pashtun leaders back to supporting both states and the West and thus break the link with

the Taliban and al-Qaeda, who still operate across the 'border' with impunity and apparently total alacrity, especially since the Waziristan Accords of 5 September 2006.

Radical though such a solution may be, it is necessary that this kind of lateral thinking be at least put on the table, because a regional–strategic solution is essential to success and that will only take place if the old imperial band-aid is replaced with something more reflective of the reality on the ground. The first step is thus to generate solidarity through a common appreciation of the problem, particularly among the all-important intelligence communities (which are so much more and in some cases can be players in their own right). Albeit modest, such hopes received a significant boost with the creation of the Afghan, ISAF, Pakistan Intelligence Centre in Kabul. It is a start. The rescuing of the state will require a re-arranging of relationships over time that will need to be smoothed, of course, by the expeditious use of large amounts of Western aid and support. With a new spring offensive by the Taliban in the offing this kind of lateral thinking is an imperative.

Making Afghanistan work – The national crunch

The Afghan people, especially those in the south and east, have suffered long and hard. It is not surprising that they are suspicious of the promises of foreigners. They have heard and seen it all before and it can be expected that have little trust for outsiders. Creating an Afghanistan that can and will improve the lot of its people is no easy task. That has traditionally been the role of the clan or tribe rather than the state, although there have been periods when the state has functioned to more or less effect. The model so chosen has been to try to embrace those with power by bringing them within the framework of legitimate government. The complexities of that approach have been evident since the establishment of the *loya jirga* [grand council] in 2003 and through national and regional elections. Nevertheless, some success has been realised. In what the British would recognise as a classically colonial method of governance, this has meant buying off warlords and tribal chiefs and attempting to bring them into government. Strangely, the West has failed to buy the people as well, which in the overall scheme of things would represent a modest investment.

Still, such an approach has its weaknesses and it can only be justified if there is a parallel strengthening of regional government and governance. The paradox is that while it is critical that such controversial figures as General Rashid Dostum, General Atta Mohammed and either Gul Agha Sherzai or Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf (or both) are brought into government their bitter rivalry and past warlordism has prevented the establishment of a better balance in central government. Thus, the complexity faced by the West in Afghanistan is compounded by the very solution sought. That is Afghanistan. Its complexity is reinforced in the crucial south and east by the role of the mainly Uzbek and Tajik Northern Alliance, which aided the American-led coalition back in 2001. So many of the Afghan people have become disillusioned by so many 'familiar' and unwelcome faces re-appearing in and around the government – elections or no elections. This disillusionment will take time to dissipate.

There is no easy solution. It will of course take time to change the dynamic of leadership in Afghanistan and there are certain power realities that cannot be avoided. Frankly, for the foreseeable future the price – and there will be a price – of buying stability will be high. Far greater efforts will be needed to improve the behaviour of those with tainted pasts, render transparent their current dealings and provide confidence, as well as alternative sources of income to poppy production. According to the UN, Afghanistan produced 92% of the world's opium in 2006, some 30% more than the market can bear and which is up some 500% since 2002. Only 6 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces are now drug-free. However one looks at it, the ISAF has overseen the re-emergence of the world's largest narco-economy. The very real question is whether the West has the will to make the investment that could wean farmers and tribes off such produce and the will to stand firm against those in government and beyond with connections to it. That is a big question.

Clearly, any 'solution' to this conundrum is not going to happen now or next year but requires an enormous security investment over many years, 90% of which will need to be civilian in nature. At the very least five parallel tracks must be pursued. First is the further strengthening in the short to medium

term of the institutions of state, with specific reference to re-building the judicial system, police and the Afghan National Army. Second is the progressive involvement of regional partners also keen on a stable Afghanistan in a practical reconstruction role that creates a new, legitimate 'single' market in the region. Third is the progressive civilianisation of the West's presence in Afghanistan linked to an economic plan for the further restructuring of the Afghan economy. Then over time, one objective must be the de-Westernisation of both the mission and the presence. Fourth, justice must be seen to be done. It is important that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is apprehended as soon as possible and brought to justice for the range of attacks he has instigated. It is even more important that the rampant corruption is weeded out and seen to be so. Fifth, Afghanistan's capacity to absorb aid must be markedly improved.

Ultimately, central to the Afghan conundrum is the reconstitution of viable local administration. As indicated above it is requisite to the long-term stability of Afghanistan and at least as important as a strong government in Kabul. There will be setbacks but the British and the UN are right to see initiatives to strengthen regional and local government and governance as crucial. Washington needs to support such efforts and avoid the 'not invented here' attitude that too often undermines the efforts of coalition partners, particularly as it relates to the Musa Qala agreement (and its like) with the Pashtun. Ethnically dominant in the south and east of the country, they represent a deeply tribal society that is split into many different clan-based groupings. They are long used to arguing over everything: the distribution of money, drugs, guns, access to education, water and business (legal and illegal). Nonetheless, a form of order does assert itself with the right incentives. The Pashtun by and large feel that the 2005 elections to the National Assembly did not further their interests (and it is tribal interests that matter) and have regrettably thus returned to more traditional tactics such as violence and intimidation. This basic dynamic has enabled the Taliban to reconstitute and given al-Qaeda the space and protection to begin to restore some form of command structure. There will always be a complex mix of tribe, religion and money that dictates relationships but history suggests that such a reality should not prevent efforts to do business with dominant groupings, such as the Alozia tribe. It might also help if more effort was put into curbing demand for heroin in the West.

The bottom line is this: one cannot ultimately be effective in a place such as Afghanistan without also being legitimate. That works two ways. First, the transfer of authority for the construction of civil society must be handed over to the UN as soon as possible. Second, the ongoing building of trust with tribal elders and moderate mullahs must continue. It must be in their interests to change. If that means buying such influence for a time then so be it. However one cuts it the key to this is an awful lot of Western money. Hopefully, such a project in time can involve the money of the newly rich, such as China and India, and the classically rich such as Japan. The 'Afghanistan/London Compact' was a beginning but much more is needed, because while Afghanistan is a test for the West, it is also a test for the whole system of institutionalised security governance that all the big powers claim to support.

If such a global approach and effort is not adopted, then for all the Stage 4 expansion of the ISAF and the work of the 25 provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), NATO's mission and by extension that of the West will come down to the open-ended protection of a little-loved and unrepresentative government in and around Kabul. If that is the case then Afghanistan is not working.

Filling the security space – The capability–capacity crunch

NATO forces are doing an admirable job in many parts of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Western forces in Afghanistan face a capability–capacity crunch. Indeed, armed forces designed to create the security space are rarely capable of filling it over time, intensity and distance. Without wishing to underestimate the difficulty of their role in such a place, the search-and-destroy forces attached to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have a reasonably clear mandate and mission. Unfortunately, Afghanistan, as so often in the past, is exposing the weaknesses and contradictions of Western military planning over the last 15 years. It may well be the case now that respective missions of counter-terrorism, stabilisation and reconstruction are becoming mutually counterproductive. Re-building one

day then ‘unbuilding’ or even ‘non-building’ when the military have created the security space the next hardly demonstrates the shared sense of mission that is demanded by such complex places and a comprehensive approach to a strategic and security impact. The plain fact is that the forces in Afghanistan are organised to mask weakness, not to generate effect.

The European concept of peacekeeping, encapsulated in the 1992 Petersberg tasks of rescue and humanitarian missions, and the role of combat troops in peacemaking belong to a different time and a different place. Within the context of Afghanistan, they are hopelessly anachronistic as is the mindset that underpins them. The refusal of many European allies to support their British, Dutch and Canadian partners in robust counter-insurgency operations in the Helmand and Uruzgan provinces is only partly owing to political weakness. Afghanistan has exposed the sham of force planning in a host of European states that possess neither the numbers nor the quality to sustain operations in such a place if organised in such a shambolic way. Consequently, NATO faces the most profound crisis of capacity given the forces needed for adequate stabilisation and reconstruction missions. Although 35,000 might sound like a formidable force the ratios required to undertake effective operations in a place like Afghanistan demands a far greater force. Moreover, the differences in the quality of the equipment, training and doctrine of the personnel available to NATO commanders are striking; together these differences compound the capability–capacity crunch markedly.

The capacity crunch has also been compounded by capability-led force transformation. Under American leadership, NATO forces have been invited to become more professional, to be more effective, more mobile and more lethal. For most NATO nations, however, that has led to a hard choice having to be made between such capabilities and the capacity needed to sustain stabilisation and reconstruction missions. Some states are trying to find a way to resolve this dilemma through a comprehensive approach to security, or what NATO calls Comprehensive Planning and Action (CPA). Much of it is predicated on the belief that reconstruction comes after conflict and stabilisation. Yet as Afghanistan is so clearly demonstrating, one reconstructs during conflict and stabilisation, not after it. Reconstruction is in many ways the essential process that bridges conflict and stabilisation.

These tensions have led to a virtual breakdown of alliance solidarity, which could have profound implications for both NATO and European Union security and defence. Indeed, those Europeans who talk about Afghanistan presaging the demise of NATO had better clear their woolly minds, for such a failure would also put an end to any hope of effective and relevant European defence. Put simply, trust among allies is being lost day by day and will take a long time to recover. In the context of Afghanistan it is evident that while states such as the US and UK will continue to endeavour to energise chains of command within the OEF and ISAF they will also look for non-European partners who over time can be better trusted and perhaps have a better grasp of the significance of current change than many Europeans. Make no mistake, relations between the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands on one hand, and France, Germany and Italy et al. on the other are being sorely tested by Afghanistan. Given the lessons learned, a country such as the UK now has little or no choice BUT to look for alternative partners the world over who will likely be more willing to support British forces in dangerous places at dangerous moments.

The situation comes down to this: those Europeans who refuse military support to their allies at crunch points had better understand that they have crossed an important threshold and they are no longer seen as indispensable allies by the Americans and British.

Nor is this simply an exclusively European problem. For all its many faults the Musa Qala agreement with tribal elders led to a ceasefire with local Taliban forces commanded by the late Mullah Ghaffour, which held for some four months. What is more, it opened up a possible similar agreement for the northern Helmand town of Nawzad as part of a process of a UN- and British-led counter-radicalisation that the US either does not understand or does not want to understand. These are important early steps towards trying to change the political dynamics on the ground. The US was wrong to brief so heavily against it. What this situation demonstrates again is that too much of the energy being expended in Afghanistan is lost trying to forge an effective strategy between the overmilitarised (stick) Americans

and the overcivilianised (carrot) Europeans, with the British, Dutch and Canadians too often forced to be the meat in the sandwich. Hence a further 800 British troops were dispatched to southern Afghanistan. At the very least, any state that sends its troops to Afghanistan must make an unequivocal commitment to do whatever is needed, wherever it is so required to achieve the necessary effect.

Above all there is an urgent need for a lessons-learned debate within the West about the role of coercion, stabilisation and reconstruction in places where the West seems neither welcomed or wanted yet which are vital to Western interests. Given the prevailing environment the alternative is that the West, or at least the US, simply retreats into a punishment strategy. Certainly, the very real danger exists that those who misunderstand Afghanistan and its importance will permit what is a crucial debate over the nature of engagement to be hijacked by those who have no strategic concept at all. If the danger of ‘losing’ the West’s armed forces down a black hole of Afghan stabilisation and reconstruction efforts is deemed greater than the need to establish a stabilisation and reconstruction ‘shop window’, then the crunch will grind this operation down. If that really is the case then the West should stop its own strategic pretence. It should also stop pretending to the Afghan people that the West is in for the long haul and committed to the improvement of their lives. If that is the case then the West should get out now. Then, at least, the Afghans can sort it out in a traditionally Afghan way, and the Taliban and al-Qaeda can return to their core business.

Nothing dramatic will happen in the short term but the damage is being done. Undoubtedly, a continued lack of support or endless disingenuous quibbling over rules of engagement will ultimately result in the re-nationalisation of security and defence in Europe and the forming of new partnerships. This is what is at stake...and this is a tipping point.

Afghanistan-lite: The crunch

To reiterate, Afghanistan is at crunch point. Afghanistan-lite is not working. Decisions taken over the next few months will decide whether the West is serious about giving Afghanistan a stability that has only ever been known fleetingly or whether it begins the process of disengagement. Over the next year, NATO and OEF forces will face repeated attacks by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Moreover, after a series of crushing losses at the hands of NATO forces the Taliban will doubtless resort to terrorism and other forms of asymmetric warfare. If things go horribly wrong, the Pashtun elders could throw their lot in with NATO’s adversaries. Together these circumstances are truly going to be a pivotal point in the struggle for Afghanistan.

At the very least, the West’s Afghanistan agenda should be informed by the issues that are at stake and what is needed to widen and deepen its impact in this crucible of strategic effort, as set out below.

The grand strategic agenda. It is imperative that a new great game is avoided. A contact group comprising the West, China, India, Pakistan, Russia and, if possible Iran, would expand ownership of the solution and the legitimacy of the engagement. The UN has a key role to play in legitimising such a group but the West under American leadership must widen the partnership.

The regional strategic agenda. Afghanistan’s future is not simply to be found within its borders. The whole region needs a new economic grouping underpinned by the West, Russia, India and China, which includes the likes of Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran to help develop a model for regional economic interaction. Such group interaction will help to introduce the benefits of regional dynamism and in time turn Afghanistan from being a victim of change into a beneficiary.

The national agenda. In solving the problem of the Pashtun, at the very least the challenge of Afghanistan will be eased, if not that of the wider region. It is evident that trying to create a strong central government in Kabul and then extending its writ to places such as Kandahar is not working. Rather, much greater consideration needs to be given to an autonomous, self-administered Pashtun region that is overseen by a joint Afghan–Pakistani commission. It is essential that a new relationship

be established on both sides of the border between the 28 million Pashtun in Pakistan and the 12.5 million Pashtun in Afghanistan, Islamabad and Kabul.

The military–operational agenda. The new US commander of the ISAF, General Dan McNeill, needs

- a) a strategic reserve that he can deploy to any part of the country at any time should the situation so require it. The Taliban (and al-Qaeda) must understand that they will be struck and struck hard when they make incursions or break agreements such as that forged in Musa Qala;
- b) a unity of command covering all the forces in Afghanistan. That includes merging the ISAF and OEF; and
- c) the organisation of all forces and commands on a multinational basis so that the PRTs cannot become an excuse for national contingents to 'hide'.

Finally, General McNeill will also have to curb his erstwhile lust for air power (earning him the nickname 'bomber') and prove adept at the balance between the comprehensive approach and counter-insurgency operations. Above all, he must be given the people and the tools to do the job. A good start would be the creation of one force, committed to one end with all the allies willing and able to share the burden of effect.

At this crunch point for Afghanistan, only time will tell if the West has the vision, the commitment and the will to invest the resources that only it can. If not, then the crunch will doom not only the Afghan people to servitude and misery, but any pretence the West has for the governance of peaceful change on this troubled planet. Some places forgive mediocrity; Afghanistan is no such place. No one said it would be easy but those are the stakes.

Lessons from Soviet Experiences of Socialist Modernisation in Afghanistan (1978–89)

Andrei Zagorski*

The Soviet Afghanistan policy in 1978–89 (from the April 1978 coup organised by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan or PDPA to the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989) went through several phases. At each stage, a comprehensive set of policy tools was applied by Moscow in order to assist the PDPA in a socialist kind of modernisation by political, military, economic, social and ideological means. The emphasis in applying those tools was ever-changing, depending on the objectives and the lessons learned by the Soviet leadership during this period.

The coup took Moscow by surprise, but it quickly embraced the ‘April revolution’ and engaged in a large-scale Sovietisation experiment. This experiment failed, leaving behind significant fallout. Although one could argue that the attempt to implant Soviet practices forcibly in Afghanistan was doomed to fail, the experience gathered during those years has broader relevance. While Soviet or socialist in nature, it reveals features in common with many other attempts at the accelerated modernisation of a poor country with a traditional society.

At the start of the 1978 coup, the Soviet leadership did not believe in the feasibility of a socialist experiment in what it described as a backward feudal country with incapable leadership. Afghanistan was not considered ripe for a socialist transformation as it found itself among the poorest countries in the world dominated by a rural population engaged in an agrarian economy. Nevertheless, acting within the context of the cold war, once the PDPA took over Kabul, Moscow signalled its readiness to support the new regime, underpinned by the belief that the Soviet Union could not afford to lose Afghanistan to the ‘enemy’. Once this doctrine took hold, it triggered a chain of fatal decisions that eventually led the Soviet Union to invade the country in December 1979.

The focus on preserving a weak, unpopular regime and the identification of the Afghan army as the single most important institution for keeping the government in power implied the pre-eminence of military means in Moscow’s policy. All the governments in Afghanistan between 1978 and 1992 were comfortable with this policy as they did not rely on domestic support and sought a powerful external actor to compensate for their weakness. Nevertheless, Soviet policy was not restricted to just providing military assistance to Kabul. It applied a complex mix of policy instruments, such as financial and technical assistance, economic development and institution- and capacity-building, including the training of personnel within the country and abroad.

This paper focuses on the non-military aspects of Moscow’s reconstruction and modernisation policy against the background of developments in Afghanistan in 1978–89. After a brief summary of Soviet assistance to Afghanistan prior to the 1978 coup, it discusses Moscow’s agenda for Afghanistan in 1978–79, before the invasion. During this phase, the Soviet Union concentrated on capacity-building and technical assistance in the expectation that this would help to avoid direct intervention. The third section summarises Soviet policy between 1980 and 1986, after its invasion of Afghanistan. This period is characterised by the heavy reliance of the Karmal government on Moscow and by the regime’s failure to ensure domestic political support, particularly in rural areas. The fourth section looks at the Soviet exit strategy in 1986–89, which went hand-in-hand with the attempt to achieve a

* Andrei Zagorski is a Leading Researcher at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University).

domestic and international political settlement to allow a face-saving pullout of Soviet troops. The concluding section presents some generalisations about Soviet experiences with Afghanistan.

1. Soviet assistance to Afghanistan prior to the 1978 coup

Afghanistan had been a Soviet client state since 1919 but was increasingly so after World War II. Moscow regularly provided the country with financial assistance, supplied it with arms and trained its officers. It helped to develop the country's infrastructure, which included telegraph and radio communications, the construction of roads and pipelines and the modernisation of airports. These projects were concentrated in the north of the country, which helped to connect Afghanistan with the Soviet Union. Especially after World War II, Moscow engaged in economic development in Afghanistan, assisting with the building of electric plants and irrigation systems, raw materials extraction (oil, gas and copper), as well as the development of the social infrastructure, such as educational facilities. By 1955, the Soviet Union was the leading country providing foreign assistance to Afghanistan.

Special importance was given to equipping the Afghan army with Soviet (Warsaw Pact) weapons systems and to training the officer corps in both the Soviet Union and in the country itself. In 1977, the Soviet Union had 350 technical and military advisers in Afghanistan. In the period 1956–78, 3,000 Afghan officers (air force, air defence, artillery, medical personnel and others) were trained in the Soviet Union. An even larger number of them were trained in different Warsaw Pact countries. As a result, the Soviet Union was not just providing assistance but also directly training the new armed forces of Afghanistan. The programme was ambitious and foresaw the introduction of new weapons systems and new types of forces, namely special forces. Many officers were indoctrinated during their education in the Soviet Union and were considered important Soviet resources in the country, although the authorities in Kabul did not trust them and hesitated in promoting them to senior positions. For this reason among others the PDPA and notably its radical wing developed strong roots in the army. By 1978, its 5,000 officer members represented roughly one-third of the entire membership of the party.

Afghanistan did not appear to Soviet officials as a *terra incognita*. Moscow had gathered long experience in assisting the country, although no single attempt at modernisation, from the 1920s onwards, had succeeded. Both Islamic and leftist opposition to the regularly changing governments in Kabul had grown considerably in the country before the 1978 coup. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani, two prominent leaders of the armed resistance to the PDPA regime, had both recruited their supporters from the Muslim youth movement that had been established in the late 1960s, which had grown almost in parallel to the national democratic youth movement led by Nur Mohammed Taraki, the official leader of the 1978 coup.

2. Technical assistance and capacity-building for the Taraki regime

After taking over in Kabul in April 1978, the PDPA regime declared a policy of 'socialist' transformation of the country. It sought to win political and social support through the quick implementation of a series of reforms not entirely new to Afghanistan. These included, *inter alia*, the accelerated pursuit of land reform by distributing confiscated land among peasants. It put an emphasis on providing education to the predominantly illiterate population. The government intended to expand the state sector in the economy by developing industries. It also promoted the idea of women's emancipation and particularly that of increasing women's literacy. The government promised to ensure the equality of all peoples residing in the country. Mr Taraki (who served as President from May 1978 to September 1979) verbally committed himself to Islam and the neutral status of the country.

At the same time, the regime developed ambitious plans for building state institutions. Given that local specialists had left the state administration en masse after the coup, the PDPA sought to compensate their exodus by importing expertise and know-how from the Soviet Union. This move resulted in the large-scale experiment of Sovietisation.

2.1 The toolbox of the Soviet policy

Following the request from Kabul, the Soviet Union launched a massive effort to provide technical assistance by seconding hundreds of **advisers** to the government in Kabul. A group of senior advisers from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) consulted the PDPA leadership on all relevant policy issues and specifically on the build-up of the PDPA party itself. Soviet advisers were seconded to all ministries. Each minister was provided with at least two advisers who worked on decisions to be taken and consulted with the ministers. Soviet advisers were tasked with building the security service, intelligence, social organisations and mass media. Particular importance was attached to restructuring the Afghan armed forces along the lines of the Soviet model. Priority was also given to modernisation and increased mobility. Advisers were seconded down to the regiment level. Political officers were introduced in the army in order to ensure its loyalty.

By the end of 1979, 1,500 Soviet advisers had been seconded to the civil agencies of Afghanistan, with 3,500 to 4,000 military personnel and technical experts working in the armed forces of the country. Their general assignment was to transfer Soviet know-how in their respective areas by assisting the administration in decision-making and in the organisation of practical work. The more specific mandate of the advisers' teams included four main objectives, to

- consolidate and broaden political and social support for the PDPA;
- increase the influence of the PDPA in the army;
- create social organisations with broad membership (youth, women's and labour organisations); and
- set up the structures of the central government.

In the government domain, the emphasis was put on seconding Soviet staff to central government. There were almost no advisers seconded to provincial administrations, which were left on their own.

The Soviet Union took over the burden of **economic assistance** to Afghanistan, which steadily grew with demands from Kabul. It included, among other things:

- the supply of energy sources, especially petroleum products. Moscow compensated the interrupted supply from Iran and covered 62% of Afghanistan's annual consumption;
- the provision of long-term credit on beneficial conditions;
- coverage of 80% of the costs of agreed projects worth some \$450 million annually, totalling almost \$2.3 billion appropriated over a period of five years;
- the costs of Afghanistan's imports of consumption goods worth \$250 million a year;
- food supplies; and
- training in the Soviet Union for students and military personnel.

Moscow also massively increased the amount of **military assistance** (arms transfers) to the Kabul government.

2.2 The effect

While the Soviet Union was providing intensive technical and material assistance to the Taraki government, *the political ownership of the process largely remained with Kabul*. The Taraki regime revealed little competence or comprehension of the developments in the provinces. Most importantly, the government displayed little ability or willingness to learn from those developments and improve its performance. All appointments were made on the basis of the political, tribal or clan affiliations of the candidates. Competence was not an issue at all. The inner strife between the two factions (Khalq and Parcham) of the PDPA paralysed the government, which had never managed to reach out to the provinces and had further isolated itself. At the same time, the majority of the Soviet advisers not only

proved to have little knowledge themselves but also failed to appreciate the real situation in Afghanistan. Their advice was predominantly dogmatic and often exacerbated the failures of the government in Kabul.

As a result, the top-down reforms did not increase the popularity of the government. Instead, they triggered a flow of refugees and opposition. It is characteristic, however, that it was not specifically the introduction of Soviet practices but largely *changes towards social modernisation that alienated the initially rather indifferent population*. Notably land reform provoked strong resistance in the rural areas. Peasants, en masse, refused to take land from the landlords whom they had traditionally seen as a buffer and a source of protection from the central government. The majority of provinces did not even think of introducing the reform. In July 1979, Kabul was forced to stop its implementation programme. Previously, the first major crisis that had shaken the Kabul government and alarmed Moscow concerned another issue, being the upheaval in Herat in March 1979 that had begun with a protest against women's education.

In addition, Kabul messed up its relations with the Muslim clerics who led the protest and resistance. It failed to deliver on the promise to ensure the equality of peoples. On the contrary, Hafizullah Amin, the mastermind behind the 1978 coup and Kabul's policies in 1978 and 1979 (serving as Prime Minister in the Taraki government before succeeding as President), pursued the policy of further 'Pashtunisation' of the country.

The government in Kabul responded to the political strife within the party, the resistance to reforms and the mounting opposition by increasing the repressive nature of the regime. It not only sought to force through top-down reforms but also began to use military force intensively against the opposition. These tactics increased the isolation of the government and weakened support for it, which led to its loss of the army as an instrument of its policy. The number of deserters grew sharply. By the end of 1979, the army had shrunk from 90,000 to 40,000 and had lost half of the officers. The government units often changed sides and joined the opposition. Units loyal to different factions in the PDPA repeatedly fought each other. The regime no longer trusted the army and sought to escape the collapse by Soviet military intervention.

2.3 Moscow's response

The Soviet leadership was aware of the danger of military intervention as it saw the Kabul regime increasingly being isolated and realised that intervention would result in fighting against the population. Therefore, Moscow's response was threefold. It urged President Taraki to change his policies. Moscow was also prepared to increase the support given to the regime significantly and considered assistance to raise the combat readiness of Afghanistan's armed forces dramatically.

Kabul was urged in particular to

- broaden its social and political support by establishing a united front that brought together different strata of Afghan society. Such a front was viewed as a tool for political education and engaging the population;
- restore the unity of the PDPA and reintegrate the Parcham faction into the government. Moscow went as far as to advise Kabul to include the moderate Islamic opposition in the political consultations and even in the government;
- stop repression and torture, and abide by the legal norms;
- consolidate and strengthen the army;
- end the practice of government appointments based on loyalty to the Taraki (Khalq) faction;
- establish control along the borders with Pakistan and Iran in order to prevent insurgency;
- seek an arrangement with Pakistan; and
- combat the armed resistance on its own.

Moscow was prepared to increase significantly its financial, economic, military, ideological and technical assistance to help Kabul meet those ends. In April 1979, in a memorandum to the Politburo, the KGB Chief Yuri Andropov, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defence Minister Dimitri Ustinov and the head of the CPSU Central Committee for the International Department Boris Ponomarev laid out what was to become the Soviet policy:

- continued political support for Kabul;
- increased arms supplies, financial and economic assistance;
- the training of personnel;
- support for establishing a system of political education;
- the intensification of visits and exchanges at various levels;
- political and diplomatic measures to curb external interference; and
- briefings to other socialist countries about the measures to be taken.

Yet few believed that this policy would work. In another memorandum of late June 1979, the same senior group on Afghanistan questioned the effectiveness of providing further support to Kabul. It described **the army as the single most important instrument that could alleviate the situation**. Hence, the emphasis was put on increasing the capacity of the armed forces to combat the insurgency. A large group of senior Soviet military staff inspected Kabul's army in August 1979 in order to assess its needs and recommend policies to improve its performance substantially.

3. The invasion

Moscow's strategy to increase the capacity of the Afghan armed forces was never properly tested, although there were signs that it was unlikely to work. From September 1979 onwards, any larger operation of the army was conducted only with the approval of the Soviet military advisers. The latter worked on raising the army's readiness and took over the planning of operations. Although the Soviet military registered some improvements in autumn 1979, this effect began vanishing by the end of the year.

The strategy was not given time to be tested because of the coup in Kabul in September, which resulted in the murder of President Taraki and the takeover by Mr Amin (who served as President from September to December 1979). Few in Moscow would have expected President Amin to follow the political advice given and be able to consolidate the regime. Particularly the KGB was convinced that no arrangement with Mr Amin would help and that only his replacement could save the regime. The Soviet Union was prepared to intervene militarily in order to remove President Amin and install a more cooperative leader, doing so in December 1979.

3.1 Moscow's objectives and tools

The political agenda for Afghanistan was set in Moscow only after the invasion, in January 1980, and was similar to what the Kremlin had wanted from the late President Taraki. In succeeding Mr Amin as President, Babrak Karmal (the leader of the PDPA's Parcham faction), was expected to

- consistently pursue the policy of restoring the overall unity of the PDPA;
- form a broad alliance of 'leftist and democratic' organisations under the leadership of the PDPA and reach out to young persons, especially students;
- negotiate with key tribes the terms necessary for ceasing the resistance;
- collaborate with moderate Islamic clerics in order to isolate 'reactionary' ones; and
- develop cooperative relations with the Shiites.

The Soviet contingent dispatched to the country included 50,000 military personnel, 2,000 civil personnel and 1,000 KGB officers. This contingent was not only supposed to take control of important facilities and communications, but also to cultivate **civil services**, such as medical assistance to the population, and build schools, hospitals and repair roads. It was further tasked with establishing a system of political education around the PDPA in order to raise a new political elite in the country that would be committed to the socialist option.

The strengthening of political education and propaganda was given high priority. Moscow provided additional staff for the Kabul bureau of the press agency Novosti, who were to help their Afghan counterparts prepare materials for printed media and disseminate printed matter and films. The Soviet measures included support for Afghan journalists. The focus was on the younger generation. Ideological cadres of the PDPA were trained at the Academy of Social Sciences under the PDPA Central Committee. Moscow finally shipped to Kabul the radio station that had been promised to the late President Taraki.

3.2 The effect

President Karmal was more responsive to the advice given, yet at the same time he was perceived as a very weak leader. He began by promising a radical change in policy. A new constitution was adopted. The red banner of the rival Khalq faction was replaced by a green, black and red one. Some 15,000 political prisoners were released. Decrees were issued to reverse the property confiscations that had taken place under the late President Amin. Wages and officers' salaries were raised. Peasants were provided with seeds, fertilisers and credit. Prices for agricultural products were increased. The intentions to admit other 'progressive patriotic parties' and to hold free elections were declared.

Kabul signalled a policy of reconciliation with Islam by readmitting religious symbols, although steps in that direction largely reproduced the rigid Soviet model. A department for religious affairs was established under the Council of Ministers and then transformed into a ministry at a later stage. In Kabul, 20 new mosques were constructed and 800 were repaired. The institute of field mullahs was introduced in the army, which partially helped to improve the morale of the troops. State funding was given to newly established religious institutions for the purposes of 'explaining the goals of the April revolution'. State funding was also available for pilgrims.

The key project President Karmal was supposed to work on was the establishment of a united national front to increase acceptance of the regime. A conference of Afghan 'national and patriotic forces' was established in 1980, which later became a national front in 1981 and included the PDPA, trade unions, the PDPA youth organisation, the Women's Union, and the Union of Writers and Journalists. Those organisations represented 2% of the Afghan population. By 1983, President Karmal had succeeded in increasing the membership of the PDPA from 80,000 to 100,000.

Despite some changes, the regime largely failed to meet the benchmarks set by the Soviet Union. The national front failed to find anchorage in the provinces. President Karmal sought to substitute it by reviving the traditional institution of the *loya jirga* – a grand council of the seniors of the local tribes. Kabul never risked holding 'free elections'. And in 1981, it publicly admitted the failure of the land reform.

The record on consolidating the army was ambiguous. By 1981, the number of servicemen had further dropped to some 25,000. Following pressure from Soviet advisers, Kabul reduced the age of the draft from 22 to 20, drafted reservists under the age of 35 for a second term and extended the length of military service to three years. These steps enabled the army to grow to 130,000 but did not help to improve its morale. The army continuously avoided engaging in fighting.

Meanwhile, inner strife within the party continued. The PDPA and particularly its leadership remained isolated from society. The perpetual practice of politically biased appointments resulted in a further deterioration of the administration's competence at all levels. The initiation of negotiations with Pakistan and Iran failed, as Islamabad insisted on the formation of a government with free elections.

The more President Karmal failed to meet the benchmarks, the more repressive his regime became. Furthermore, Mr Karmal consistently pursued the policy of *transferring burdens and responsibilities* to the Soviet representatives. He largely succeeded in doing so. As a result, it was particularly the Soviet troops who were not only directly involved in warfare but who also took over the main burden of it from the summer of 1980.

3.3 Moscow's response

The Soviet Union grew increasingly disappointed with developments in Afghanistan and especially the performance of the leadership of the PDPA. Tension developed between Moscow and Kabul. As dangerous developments became more apparent, the Soviet leadership sought to respond by **increasing weapons and food supplies**, and by **accelerating the training of Afghan officers**. Yet it also became clear to Moscow that this strategy was not working out. The more resources were invested, the less was the effect of Moscow's policy.

The Kremlin gradually came to realise that continuing the war was not a viable option. In 1985, the commander of the 40th army, the operative group of the Defence Ministry and the General Staff assessed the situation as hopeless and urged pulling out of Afghanistan. The option of improving the capacity of the PDPA regime to the extent that it would be able to master the problems on its own was no longer considered realistic. Previously, in 1982, Yuri Andropov, by then General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, had sought to explore the possibility of a political solution that was to be negotiated with Pakistan, but he had not been prepared to negotiate a regime change in Kabul. Even this limited attempt to change Soviet policy expired at the moment when Mr Andropov passed away in 1984. A thorough review of Soviet policy in Afghanistan was not initiated until 1985, under President Mikhail Gorbachev.

4. The policy of national reconciliation

The Gorbachev years are less instructive for the purposes of this paper. At this juncture, Soviet policy was no longer about the modernisation or reconstruction of the country but rather about identifying the best possible exit strategy. As President Karmal vehemently opposed the idea of a Soviet pullout, Moscow embarked on another change of leadership in Kabul, replacing Mr Karmal with Mohammed Najibullah, who took over as President in November 1986.

Moscow pushed a policy of 'national reconciliation', which abandoned the concept of political monopoly on the part of the PDPA and admitted the possibility of transforming the regime by embracing the idea of a coalition government that included the opposition. This shift was the beginning of a gradual dismantling of the socialist experiment in Afghanistan.

Despite some positive steps from that policy during 1987, not a single relevant resistance group engaged with Kabul. The opposition prepared for a decisive power struggle after the pullout of Soviet troops. In January 1989, it announced the creation of its own interim government in Rawalpindi in Pakistan. The United States insisted on the resignation of the PDPA. Pakistan insisted on the introduction of an Islamic regime and demanded the creation of an interim government in which the opposition was to comprise the majority. The Peshawar alliance would only agree to the establishment of an interim government for the purpose of monitoring the withdrawal of Soviet troops, provided it was led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masood. President Najibullah was not ready to give in to the Peshawar alliance's demand for a majority. Moscow began to explore the possibility of inviting the former king, Zahir Shah, to return from abroad and lead national reconciliation efforts.

Meanwhile, the single most important question was how long President Najibullah would be able to remain in Kabul after the Soviet pullout. Experts in neither the West nor the Soviet Union gave him more than three to four months.

Therefore, Moscow's exit strategy was focused on the means to extend the lifespan of the Kabul regime. The main component of this policy was establishing excessive reserves of weapons,

ammunition and food prior to the Soviet withdrawal and sustaining these supplies thereafter. Moscow agreed to transfer weapons systems that were more sophisticated to Afghanistan. It continued to supply Kabul heavily with weapons and food throughout 1989 and 1990. Moscow intensified the training of Afghan officers, maintained a group of senior military advisers to the government and agreed to retain Soviet technicians in Afghanistan to assist in repairing military equipment. It also pledged to assist Kabul in establishing contacts with the opposition residing in Pakistan, Iran and Western Europe.

Because of the massive economic and military support, the regime kept going longer than expected. Nevertheless, in September 1991, the Soviet Union and the US reached an agreement to cease weapons supplies to Afghanistan from 1 January 1992. From that point, the Najibullah regime survived only four more months.

Conclusions

The Soviet leadership became hostage to the idea first set out in 1979 that by no means could it afford to lose Afghanistan. That view triggered a fatal dynamic of conflict escalation, leaving little room for reconsidering and amending Moscow's policy objectives to enable them to become more realistic.

The Soviet knowledge of Afghanistan was rather superficial and the reality on the ground could not be comprehended through a pre-set template. The readiness of the Afghan population to embrace social change was not to the extent that Soviet leaders had assumed. And the assumptions made about the ability to mobilise wider political support for social change in the country's Islamic society proved wrong as well. So too did the assumption that land reform could induce such support.

The rejection of policy emanating from the Kabul government grew as a consequence of the heavy external presence – of both advisers and troops. The long record of friendly relations between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union was unable to alleviate the friction.

Moscow saw technical assistance and military intervention merely as technical tools to strengthen the government in Kabul and stabilise the situation. Despite a dramatic increase in the amount of assistance provided, the situation did not improve – indeed, it worsened. The gap between the amount of assistance given and the effect achieved constantly rose. The dramatic growth in the number of Soviet advisers dispatched to the country did not make a difference. The advisers did not register any significant progress in achieving the benchmarks set by Moscow.

The majority of Soviet advisers had little knowledge of the country. They proved rather incompetent and failed to provide Moscow with appropriate feedback. Yet Soviet discourse remained highly indoctrinated, thus preventing both Moscow and Kabul from sharing ownership of the process with the different political and social forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, there was little or no coordination of activities among the groups of advisers. Representatives of various agencies developed different, even diverging views of the objectives to be achieved.

The PDPA proved to be a weak and incompetent partner. At the same time, either Moscow had limited leverage over Kabul (during 1978–79) or Kabul demonstrated responsiveness (after 1980) but was unable or unwilling to follow the direction Moscow recommended. The regime remained isolated and failed to reach out to the provinces.

The Soviet Union largely failed in capacity-building as regards both central and local government. As a result, Moscow allowed Kabul largely to transfer the burden and the responsibility for the unpopular policy onto Soviet advisers and troops.

Afghanistan 2007

Problems, Opportunities and Possible Solutions

Peter Bergen*

The year 2007 will likely be a ‘make or break’ year for Afghanistan, for the international efforts there, and conversely, for the efforts of the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies to turn the country back into a failed state.

Afghanistan today looks something like Iraq did in the summer of 2003 with a growing insurgency in terms of the exponentially rising use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the deployment of suicide bombers, the decline of reconstruction efforts because of security concerns and a descent into chaotic violence in substantial portions of the country. Add to this the sad fact that the United States-led occupation of Afghanistan has coincided with the country becoming the world’s premier source of heroin.

There are, however, some key differences between Afghanistan and Iraq: Afghans have already suffered through more than 20 years of war and they are tired of conflict; in addition, the Taliban remain deeply unpopular and the American and NATO military presence is welcomed by the vast majority of Afghans.

And so, 2007 represents a real opportunity to put the country back on course. Afghanistan will, of course, never become Belgium, but it does have a chance to succeed, as long as success is defined realistically: Afghanistan is likely to be a fragile, poor, weak state for the foreseeable future, but one where security can be significantly improved, allowing for the emergence of a more open society and a more vibrant economy.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first part analyses Afghanistan’s problems. The second section of the paper addresses potential opportunities that exist for the country and the third section examines some possible solutions to Afghanistan’s problems.

1. The problems

1.1 The return of the Taliban

NATO and the US military are now battling the Taliban on a scale not witnessed since 2001 when the war against the Taliban began. When this author travelled in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, the Taliban threat had receded into little more than a nuisance. But now the movement has regrouped and rearmed. Mullah Dadullah, a key Taliban commander, gave an interview to al-Jazeera in the past year in which he made an illuminating observation about the scale of the insurgency. Mr Dadullah put Taliban forces at some 12,000 fighters – larger than the estimate informally conveyed by a US military official of between 7,000 and 10,000, yet a number that could have some validity given the numerous part-time Taliban farmer/fighters. Bolstered by a compliant Pakistani government, hefty cash inflows from the drug trade and a population disillusioned by battered infrastructure and lacklustre reconstruction efforts, the Taliban are back.

In the past year, this author travelled to Afghanistan four times, meeting with government officials and ordinary Afghans. On two occasions, the journeys involved embedding with American soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division fighting the Taliban in the east and south of the country and on one travelling with a NATO delegation and interviewing key American military officers to get a sense of the

* Peter Bergen is a Schwartz Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation and an Adjunct Professor in the South Asia department of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

seriousness of the renewed Taliban insurgency. The impression gathered was that while the Taliban may not yet constitute a major strategic threat to the Karzai government, it has become a serious tactical challenge for both US troops and NATO soldiers.

A hundred miles to the south of Kabul, for instance, the Taliban have appeared in force in nearly half the districts of the Ghazni province, which sits astride the most important road in the country, between Kabul and the southern city of Kandahar. It is today considered suicidal for non-Afghans to drive along that road without security. In southern Afghanistan, reconstruction has ground to halt and foreigners can only move around safely if they are embedded with the military or have substantial private security. Around Kandahar itself this past summer, fierce battles raged between the Taliban and NATO forces, with the latter encountering much stiffer resistance than they had anticipated. As put by a former senior Afghan cabinet member in September 2006, “If international forces leave, the Taliban will take over in one hour”.

Why did the Taliban come back?

First, key mistakes were made by the Bush administration in the first years of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan, owing to a variety of ideological *idée fixes* that included a dislike of ‘nation building’, an aversion to reliance on international forces and a preoccupation with Iraq as a supposed centre of world terrorism. That meant that Afghanistan was short-changed on a number of levels. The initial deployment of international troops was the lowest per capita commitment of peacekeepers to any post-conflict environment since World War II. The Pentagon also initially blocked efforts by soldiers of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to patrol outside Kabul and to extend a security umbrella to other parts of the country until August 2003. These early errors helped pave the way for the resurgence of the Taliban.

Second, Afghanistan’s ballooning drug trade has succeeded in expanding the Taliban ranks. It is no coincidence that opium and heroin production, which now is equivalent to one-third (36%) of Afghanistan’s licit economy spiked at the same time that the Taliban staged a comeback. A US military official remarked that charities and individual donations from the Middle East are also boosting the Taliban’s coffers. These twin revenue streams – drug money and Middle East contributions – allow the Taliban to pay their fighters \$100 or more a month, which compares favourably to the \$70 salary of an Afghan police officer. Whatever the source, the Taliban can draw upon significant resources, at least by Afghan standards. One US military raid on a Taliban safe house in 2006 recovered \$900,000 in cash.

A third key to the resurgence of the Taliban can be summarised in one word: Pakistan. The Pakistani government has proven unwilling or incapable (or both) of clamping down on the religious militia, despite the fact that the headquarters of the Taliban and its key allies are located in Pakistan. According to a senior US military official, not a single senior Taliban leader has been arrested or killed in Pakistan since 2001 – nor have any of the top leaders of the militias headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, who are fighting US forces alongside the Taliban. For example, Amir Haqqani, the leader of the Taliban in the central province of Zabul, “never comes across the border” from Pakistan into Afghanistan, as noted by a US military official based in Zabul.

US military officials hold that the Taliban’s most important leadership council, the Quetta Shura, is based in the capital of Pakistan’s Balochistan Province; the important Peshawar Shura is headquartered in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province. In addition, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar operates in the tribal areas of Dir and Bajur. Jalaluddin Haqqani is based in Waziristan and al-Qaeda has a presence in both Waziristan and Chitral – all Pakistani regions that border Afghanistan. A senior US military official observed that the Pakistanis have taken “no decisive action on their border” to deal with the Taliban. In view of Pakistan’s upcoming 2007 presidential election, it can be inferred that the Pakistani government is doing even less than in the past because the Musharraf government is aware of how unpopular military action against the Taliban is in their border regions with Afghanistan.

It should be noted, however, that the Taliban has released videotapes over the past year in which they attack the Musharraf government as an ‘infidel’ government because of its cooperation with the US in the war on terrorism. Moreover, the Taliban has attacked Pakistani government posts on the Afghan–Pakistani border. One such attack killed six soldiers of the Tochi Scouts in January 2006, an attack that the Taliban’s new propaganda arm, Ummat studios, recorded on video and distributed to jihadist websites. The Pakistani government also denies it is providing a safe haven for the Taliban leadership.

An explanation for the seeming dichotomy between the fact that US intelligence and military officials universally share the view that the Taliban is headquartered in Pakistan and the Pakistani government’s denial of this is that the Musharraf government does not completely control its own territory or security agencies. Under this line of thinking the Inter-Services Intelligence, the Pakistani military intelligence agency, at some levels continues to tolerate or maintain links with Taliban leaders. Many members of the Taliban grew up in refugee camps in Pakistan and they are very familiar with the country. In addition, an alliance of Pakistani religious political parties broadly sympathetic to the Taliban, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (or MMA), controls both the North-West Frontier Province and, to some degree, Balochistan, the regions where the Taliban are presently headquartered.

A fourth reason for the Taliban’s recent resurgence is that it has increasingly morphed tactically and ideologically with al-Qaeda, which itself is experiencing a comeback along the Afghan–Pakistani border. The story of al-Qaeda’s renaissance begins with its eviction from Afghanistan in late 2001. Unfortunately, the group did not disintegrate – it merely moved across the border to the tribal regions of western Pakistan, where today it operates a network of training camps. A former American intelligence official stationed in Pakistan held that there are currently more than 2,000 “foreign fighters” in the region. The camps are relatively modest in size. “People want to see barracks. [In fact,] the camps use dry riverbeds for shooting and are housed in compounds for 20 people, where they are taught callisthenics and bomb-making”, explained a senior American military intelligence official. Taliban and al-Qaeda videotapes released in 2006 on jihadist websites also demonstrate that the camps in Pakistan’s tribal areas are training new recruits.

Al-Qaeda’s resurgence in Pakistan was noted by Dame Eliza Mannigham-Buller, the head of the UK’s domestic intelligence service MI5, who in a rare public statement in November said, “We are aware of numerous plots to kill people and damage our economy...thirty that we know of. These plots often have linked back to al-Qaeda in Pakistan and through these links al-Qaeda gives guidance and training to its largely British foot soldiers here on an extensive and growing scale.” Similarly, the plot by a group of British citizens to blow up as many as 10 American passenger jets with liquid explosives, uncovered in the UK last August, was “directed by al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan”, according to the Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency, Lieut. General Michael D. Maples in his recent testimony to the US Senate Intelligence Committee.

The Taliban’s strengthening influence

The Taliban were a provincial bunch when they held power in Afghanistan, but in the past couple of years, they have increasingly identified themselves as part of the global jihadist movement, their rhetoric full of references to Iraq and Palestine in a manner that mirrors Osama bin Laden’s public statements. Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban commander, gave an interview to CBS News in December 2006 in which he outlined how the Taliban and al-Qaeda cooperate: “Osama bin Laden, thank God, is alive and in good health. We are in contact with his top aides and sharing plans and operations with each other.” Indeed, a senior American military intelligence official observed, “trying to separate Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan serves no purpose. It’s like picking grey hairs out of your head.”

Suicide attacks, IEDs and the beheadings of hostages – all techniques al-Qaeda perfected in Iraq – are being employed by the Taliban to strengthen their influence in the southern and eastern parts of

Afghanistan. Hekmat Karzai, an Afghan national security expert, points out that suicide bombings were virtually unknown in Afghanistan until 2005, when there were 21 such attacks.¹ According to the US military, there were 139 suicide attacks in 2006. This exponentially rising number of suicide attacks is mirrored by other grim statistics – IED attacks in Afghanistan more than doubled from 783 in 2005 to 1,677 in 2006, and the number of ‘direct’ attacks by insurgents using weapons against international forces tripled from 1,558 to 4,542 during the same period. The year 2006 also saw a record number of 98 US military and 93 NATO deaths. At least 1,000 Afghan civilians died last year in clashes between the Taliban and the coalition; 100 of those deaths were the result of US or NATO actions, as reported by Human Rights Watch.

Just as suicide bombings in Iraq have had an enormous strategic impact – from pushing the UN out of the country to helping spark a civil war – such attacks might also plunge Afghanistan into chaos. Already, suicide attacks and the Taliban resurgence have made much of southern Afghanistan a ‘no-go’ area for both foreigners and any reconstruction efforts. Luckily, for the moment the suicide attackers in Afghanistan have not been nearly as deadly their counterparts in Iraq. As one US military official commented, almost all of the Taliban’s suicide bombers are “Pashtun country guys from Pakistan”, with little effective training.

1.2 The drug economy

That Afghanistan has a large drug economy is well known. Poppy cultivation for opium in Afghanistan grew by 60% last year and it is widely acknowledged that the Taliban resurgence is being fuelled by the profits of this opium trade. Afghanistan is the source of an astonishing 92% of the world’s heroin supply.

Nevertheless, four fundamental propositions must be understood about the drug economy in Afghanistan: first, abruptly ending it would put millions of people out of work and impoverish millions more, as the only really functional part of the economy is poppy and opium production. Second, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and many rural Afghans have very few options to make money other than to engage in poppy-growing. Third, Afghan support for poppy cultivation is on the upswing – 40% now call it acceptable if there is no other way to earn a living, with two out of three Afghans living in the south-west saying it is acceptable, the region where much of the poppy is grown. And so ending the drug economy is simply not going to happen anytime in the foreseeable future. Fourth, and most importantly from an American and NATO national security perspective, drug policy in Afghanistan as it is presently constructed is helping the Taliban to thrive as they benefit from the trade. Bizarrely, our drug policy helps to fund our enemies. (Possible solutions to this problem can be found below.)

1.3 Weakness of the Afghan state – A result of the lacklustre reconstruction efforts, corruption, weakness of the police and failures of Afghan governance

The outgoing commander of US troops in Afghanistan, Lieut. General Karl Eikenberry, has drawn a clear link between reconstruction and violence: “Wherever the roads end, that’s where the Taliban starts”. Certainly, Afghanistan needs much more reconstruction. The key road from Kabul to Kandahar – a nightmarish 17-hour slalom course when taken under the Taliban regime and now a smoother 7-hour drive – remains the only large-scale reconstruction project completed in the country since the US-led invasion. Kabul residents have access to electricity only four to six hours a day, if they have electricity at all. Along with endemic corruption and the common perception that the billions of dollars of promised aid has mostly lined the pockets of non-governmental organisations, the

¹ This finding is reported in Hekmat Karzai’s analysis in this ESF Working Paper.

infrastructure gap feeds resentment among ordinary Afghans, some of whom may be tempted to throw in their lot with the Taliban.

Some of the failures in Afghanistan are, of course, the responsibility of Afghans. Warlords such as Gul Agha Sherzai in Kandahar were given high political office. President Hamid Karzai's staff is widely viewed as weak and inexperienced, although Mr Karzai has recently replaced his chief of staff. Highly competent ministers such as Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah and the finance minister Ashraf Ghani have been forced out of the government for no discernible good reason. There is little true representation of Pashtun political interests in parliament because President Karzai appears to distrust political parties.

2. Opportunities

There have been successes since the fall of the Taliban – as many as 5 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. Refugees do not return to places they do not see as having a future. Presidential and parliamentary elections have occurred with a high degree of participation by Afghan voters. Millions of boys and girls are back in school and the Afghan army has developed into a somewhat functional organisation. Afghanistan has also developed something of an independent press, with private television stations such as Tolo TV springing up.

An ABC News/BBC poll released in December 2006 shows that despite the disappointments that Afghans have felt about inadequate reconstruction and declining security on a wide range of key issues, they have positive attitudes. It is classic counter-insurgency doctrine that the centre of gravity in a conflict is the people. And the Afghan people, unlike the Iraqis, have positive feelings about the US-led occupation, their own government and their lives. The conclusions of the ABC/BBC poll are worth quoting in some detail:

Sixty-eight percent approve of [President] Karzai's work – down from 83 percent last year, but still a level most national leaders would envy. Fifty-nine percent think the parliament is working for the benefit of the Afghan people – down from 77 percent, but still far better than Americans' ratings of the U.S. Congress...Big majorities continue to call the U.S.-led invasion a good thing for their country (88 percent), to express a favourable opinion of the United States (74 percent) and to prefer the current Afghan government to Taliban rule (88 percent). Indeed eight in 10 Afghans support the presence of U.S., British and other international forces on their soil; that compares with five percent support for Taliban fighters...Fifty-five percent of Afghans still say the country's going in the right direction, but that's down sharply from 77 percent last year. Whatever the problems, 74 percent say their living conditions today are better now than they were under the Taliban. That rating, however, is 11 points lower now than it was a year ago.²

These poll results, which are very similar to another poll taken in December 2006 by World Public Opinion.org through their Program on International Policy Attitudes, demonstrate that there remains strong support for the Afghan central government and US/NATO efforts in Afghanistan. Two other interesting points to note: according to both the ABC/BBC poll and that of World Public Opinion.org, no other Muslim nation appears to have a more negative view of Osama bin Laden. Both polls found that nine out of ten Afghans had a negative view of al-Qaeda's leader. Similarly, nine out of ten Afghans say there is no justification for suicide bombings.

3. Solutions

3.1 On the drug trade

The current counter-narcotics strategy that favours poppy eradication is by all accounts a failure. This is the conclusion of a range of sources, from Afghan experts to narco-terrorism specialists to the

² Derived from a nationwide ABC News/BBC World Service survey conducted by Charney Research of New York with fieldwork by the Afghan Centre for Social and Opinion Research in Kabul.

reports by the US Government Accountability Office and the United Nations Office of Drug Control (both of which were published recently).

Vanda Felbab-Brown, a Research Fellow at the Kennedy School at Harvard, has researched counter-narcotics strategies in Columbia, Peru, Lebanon, Turkey and Afghanistan and found that terrorists and insurgents do not simply use the drug trade as a financial resource, but also draw substantial political gains and legitimacy from drug-trafficking. Consequently, an ‘eradication first’ policy is not only bound to fail – the crops will simply shift and appear elsewhere – but it will also foment a backlash among that segment of the local population that has developed ties to the belligerents through the narco-economy. For instance, local populations could withhold human intelligence that could be critical to the campaign against the reinvigorated Taliban insurgency. Instead, the US should focus on defeating the insurgents and concentrate their anti-narcotics efforts on interdiction and money laundering.

The administration’s new plan to begin chemical ground spraying – a plan the US has pressured the Afghan government into accepting and which is supposed to begin in the spring (although it may have already begun), is in fact nothing new at all. It is simply another version of the eradication first policy, which will only solidify alliances between farmers and the Taliban. A new strategy is called for.

Instead of eradication, we need to begin splitting the fragile links between farmers/local populations and the Taliban by concentrating our efforts on building up viable alternative livelihoods in both farming and other sectors. This approach means providing seeds for crop substitution and a build-up of roadways to transport those crops to market. In the short term, while that infrastructure is being established crop substitution will only really work if Afghans can obtain roughly the same income that they receive from poppy production for whatever crops are substituted. This point suggests that the international community should consider subsidies for Afghan crops such as cotton, fruits and nuts similar to the subsidies that the US and the European Union pay for the products of many of their farmers. This plan would not come cheap, but if it could substantially reduce the drug economy, it would weaken the Taliban and make the country much more secure – which is a trade-off worth the costs involved.

While the narco-economy is valued at around \$3 billion, most of that flows out of Afghanistan and farmers only receive about \$600 million of it. Meanwhile, in FY2005, the US allocated almost \$800 million for the counter-narcotics effort in Afghanistan, yet no more than 20% of that was targeted towards alternative livelihoods, and even that share was not spent in a coordinated fashion for national economic build-up. The US is clearly spending more money per year than the farmers make from opium and that money could be redirected towards subsidies for crop substitution.

Another additional approach is to allow Afghanistan to enter into the legalised opiate trade for morphine used for pain relief, a trade that is presently dominated by countries such as India and Turkey. Despite some legitimate criticisms of this idea – principally how one would make sure that Afghan opium was only going into the legitimate market – one low-risk strategy would be to allow the legalised opiate trade to debut as a pilot project on a small scale in a province with reasonable security and smaller-scale opium production, thus allowing greater regulatory control. If this strategy worked in one province, it could then be implemented in other provinces. And the crop-substitution approach and the legalised opiate-trade approach are not ‘either/or’ solutions. Both could be implemented at the same time in different Afghan provinces.

Congress could then amend the ‘80–20 law’ requiring US opiate manufacturers to purchase 80% of their opiate from India and Turkey (affording them a guaranteed market) to include Afghanistan. The latter is by far the most fragile democracy and economy of the three and the one in which the US has vital national security interests at stake, as the Taliban and al-Qaeda are substantially regrouping along the Afghan–Pakistani border. It is also worth noting that according to the UN, about 80% of the world’s population living in developing countries consumes only 6% of the morphine distributed worldwide, which suggests that there is a large untapped market for legal opiates.

3.2 Rolling back the Taliban – More troops, better troops, fewer NATO caveats, a successful amnesty programme, more reconstruction, transforming the tribal belt in Pakistan and building up the Afghan police

By all accounts, the spring of 2007 will be a bloody one. The present NATO strength of 33,250 is judged by NATO commanders to be insufficient by around 4,500 soldiers. The calls by Defence Secretary Robert Gates in January 2007 for additional American troops to be sent to Afghanistan are to be welcomed as not only will those forces help fight the Taliban, they will also send a signal to regional players such as Pakistan that the US is in Afghanistan for the long haul. Around two years ago the then Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld announced that the US was planning to draw down its forces in Afghanistan. That sent precisely the wrong signal to the region. (For the moment, 3,200 US troops have had their tours extended by four months to cover the NATO shortfall.)

One caveat about the call by Secretary Gates for more American troops is that it depends on which troops are eventually sent. According to Afghan officials, US Special Forces working with the Afghan National Army are the most effective soldiers to attack the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Similarly, NATO member states must increase their troop strength and reduce the number of ‘national caveats’ that prevent, say, the Germans from flying at night and other such caveats that hamper the effectiveness of NATO forces on the ground in Afghanistan. In December 2005, one senior NATO commander said he had 14 pages of national caveats with which to contend. While the British, Canadians and Dutch fought bravely over the summer in southern Afghanistan, other NATO member states that are part of the coalition must do more to match their efforts. NATO is also severely hampered by the lack of air assets it is able to draw upon.

An amnesty programme formally launched in 2005 by the Karzai government offers one promising approach to containing the Taliban threat. In Qalat, the provincial capital of Zabul, in the spring of 2006 this author witnessed US forces release Mullah Abdul Ali Akundzada, who was accused of sheltering Taliban members and had been arrested near the site of an IED detonation. In a deal brokered by the Karzai government and the US military, Mr Akundzada was handed over to a group of about 30 religious and tribal leaders, who publicly pledged that the released mullah would support the government. In an honour-based society such as Afghanistan, this programme is working well. According to both Afghan and US officials, only a handful of the more than 1,000 Taliban fighters taking advantage of the amnesty have gone back to fighting the government and coalition forces.

Transforming Pakistan’s tribal belt is a critical national security interest of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US and NATO countries, as that is where the Taliban has a safe haven and al-Qaeda is regrouping. Pakistan deployed at least 70,000 troops to the area in 2002, but they suffered hundreds of casualties and heavy-handed Pakistani tactics further alienated the population of the tribal areas. Over the past two years Pakistan has abandoned its ‘military first’ policy and started concluding peace agreements with militants in both South Waziristan and North Waziristan. Unfortunately, after the conclusion of the peace agreement in North Waziristan in early September 2006, there was a 300% rise in attacks from that region into Afghanistan according to the US military. And militants in Waziristan have since set up a parallel judicial system lynching and torturing civilians for infringements such as drinking, and documenting this on videotapes distributed by Ummat video, the Taliban’s propaganda arm. Much of what is going on in the tribal areas is opaque as the Pakistani government has prevented international journalists from travelling anywhere near these areas, and Pakistani journalists have been detained or even killed when they report on the tribal regions.

This analysis is not the place to rehash the history of British and Pakistani rule in the tribal regions, which has certainly contributed to their problems, but the present Pakistani policy that has wavered between the fist and appeasement has not worked well either. Pakistan has promised an aid package to the region of \$150 million while the US may also be prepared to grant substantial aid. A quid pro quo for this American aid is that the Pakistani government should allow international journalists and other neutral observers to visit the tribal areas (and not only for dog-and-pony shows organised by the

Pakistani military). A further quid pro quo is that the Pakistani government should arrest Taliban leaders living in Pakistan, a policy that should be strongly endorsed by NATO countries such as Canada, the UK and the Netherlands, countries that bore the brunt of Taliban attacks in the summer of 2006.

The US should also pressure Afghanistan to recognise the Durand line drawn by the British in 1893 as the border between Afghanistan and the Raj. The fact that Afghanistan does not recognise this border aggravates tensions with Pakistan and helps the militants to move back and forth across the border. (Suggestions by Pakistan that they will mine the 1,500-mile border to prevent militants crossing are both impractical and strongly opposed by Afghanistan, which has suffered thousands of civilian deaths and injuries from mines left over from the Soviet conflict and subsequent Afghan civil war.)

Thus far, the US government has appropriated \$27 billion for Iraqi reconstruction, but only \$7 billion for Afghanistan – a country that is roughly the same size in population, a third larger geographically and utterly destroyed by two decades of war. Of the money appropriated, a State Department official has conveyed that only \$2.5 billion has actually been spent, despite Afghanistan's larger land mass and greater infrastructural needs. That works out to a paltry \$20 per year per Afghan over the past five years. Without greater investments in roads, power and water resources throughout Afghanistan, the Taliban will surely prosper and continue to gain adherents.

For that reason, the Bush administration calls for up to \$10 billion in aid to Afghanistan, of which the \$2 billion for reconstruction and \$8 billion for building up the Afghan police and army are to be welcomed. One important caveat on the reconstruction aid is that much of that aid should be funnelled through the Afghan government rather than recycled to US contractors. According to Ann Jones, a writer who has worked in Afghanistan as an aid worker, unlike countries such as Sweden (typically incurring only 4% of its aid costs from "technical assistance", which goes back home to Sweden), "eighty-six cents of every dollar of American aid is phantom aid", ultimately lining American pockets rather than going directly to Afghans.³ For their part, Afghan government ministries must be more efficient at spending reconstruction money. Last year these ministries only spent 44% of the aid they were given. This year they are likely to spend 60%.

It is also time for the US to institute a long-term mini-Marshall Plan for Afghanistan. In early 2006, the Afghan government published the Afghanistan development strategy, which estimated that \$4 billion a year in aid for the next five years was needed to reconstruct the country. For this reason, the US should contribute at least half that sum every year for many years to come. Give the fact that the 9/11 attacks emerged from Afghanistan and cost the American economy at least \$500 billion, aid for Afghanistan so that it does not return to a failed state is a good investment. The US should commit itself to long-term reconstruction efforts in part to counter the Taliban, which is likely to be a threat for several years to come, but also because having overthrown the Taliban the US has responsibilities to Afghanistan. And a functioning, democratic Afghanistan will have a powerful demonstration effect on countries that surround Afghanistan such as Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics, none of which are truly democratic states.

American aid should be tied to an Afghan public employment scheme similar to the Works Progress Administration programme implemented in the US following the Great Depression. Afghanistan has a chronic unemployment problem with a 40% unemployment rate and a desperate need for roads, dams and the clearing of agricultural aqueducts destroyed by years of war. Much of the labour required for these projects does not require great skill and millions of Afghans should be set to work rebuilding their country as a quid pro quo for a real American Marshall Plan for the country.

In short, there should be a military, diplomatic and reconstruction 'surge' to Afghanistan, a country where such efforts have a fighting chance of real success.

³ See A. Jones, *Kabul in Winter: Life without peace in Afghanistan*, New York, NY: Metropolitan Books (2006), p. 267.

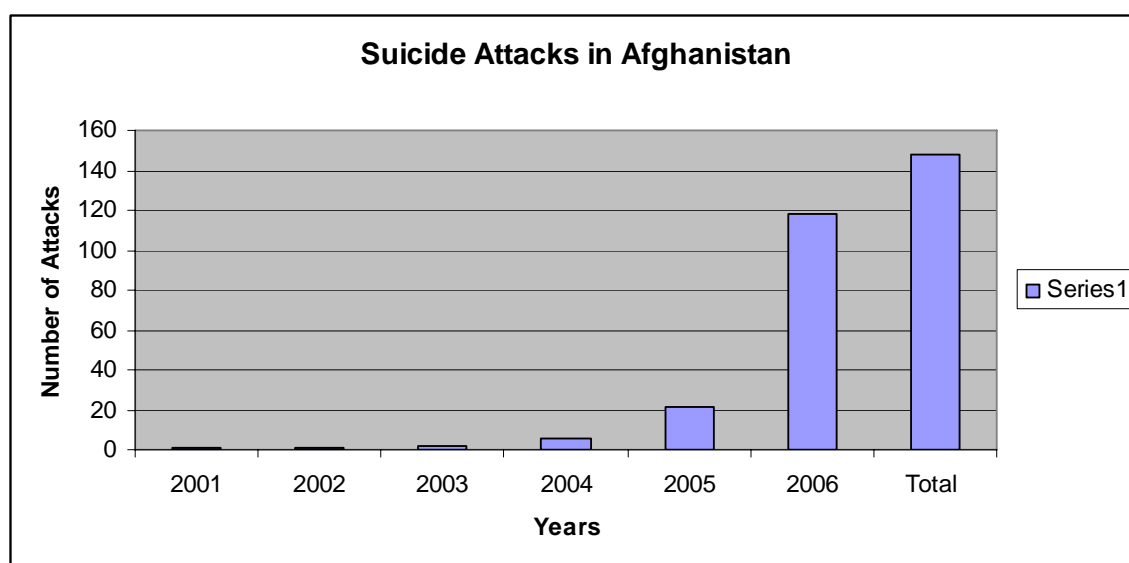
Strategic and Operational Measures to Curb the Growing Threat of Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

Hekmat Karzai*

Conflict has been a constant factor during the last three decades of Afghan history, but there was no record of suicide attacks until 9 September 2001, when two al-Qaeda members assassinated Commander Ahmad Shah Masood, the leader of the Northern Alliance.

After the coalition forces came to Afghanistan, the trend of suicide attacks started to emerge very slowly, with one attack in 2002, two in 2003 and six in 2004 (Figure 1). From this point onwards, however, the pace changed. Learning from the effectiveness of the insurgents in Iraq and other places, the groups carried out 21 attacks in 2005, with the southern city of Kandahar and the capital Kabul being the primary targets (Figure 2). In 2006, there were 118 suicide attacks (Figure 3), with the latest ones targeting political and religious figures including the former President and current Senate leader, Professor Sibghatullah Mujaddedi and the late Governor of Paktia, Hakim Taniwal.

Figure 1. Suicide attacks since 2001

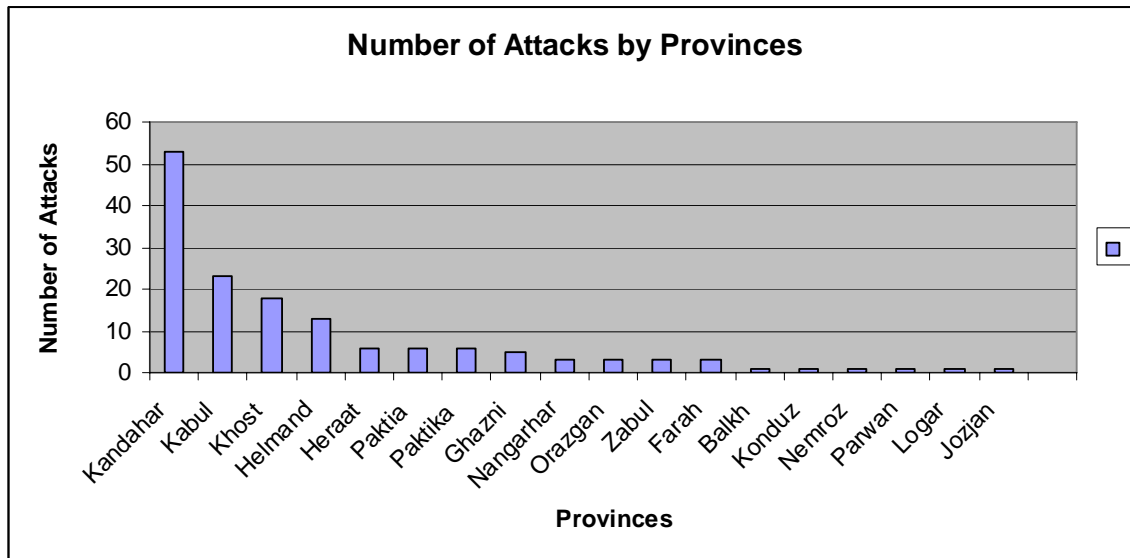


Source: Data from the CAPS Violent Actors Project, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul.

As noted earlier, there are no records of suicide attacks taking place in Afghanistan prior to 9 September 2001. It is also true that the Afghan Mujahideen (freedom fighters) have no history of employing this tactic against the Russians; nor was it used by the Taliban or Northern Alliance against each other. Thus, a crucial question arises: Why did the Taliban, al-Qaeda and others shift towards this tactic?

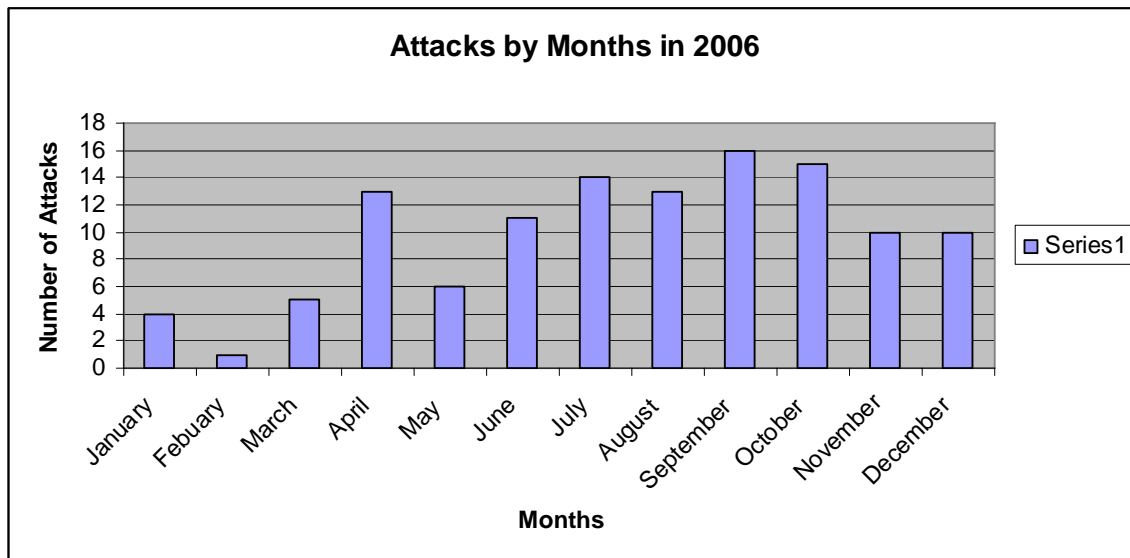
* Hekmat Karzai is Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Kabul.

Figure 2. Suicide attacks by province



Source: Data from the CAPS Violent Actors Project, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul.

Figure 3. Suicide attacks carried out during 2006



Source: Data from the CAPS Violent Actors Project, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul.

There are several specific reasons why the Taliban and the foreign elements have decided that suicide terrorism is a useful tactic for Afghanistan.

First, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have concluded that suicide bombing is more effective than other tactics in killing Afghan and coalition forces. This conclusion is a direct result of the success of such groups as Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and various groups operating in Iraq. Suicide attacks allow insurgents to achieve maximum impact with minimal resources. Data show that when the insurgents fight US and coalition forces directly in Afghanistan, there is only a 5% probability of inflicting casualties. With suicide attacks, however, the chance of killing people increases several fold.

Second, the Taliban and al-Qaeda believe that devastating suicide attacks instil fear in people's hearts, leading people to believe that the government cannot protect them and thus further destabilising the authority of local government institutions. Consequently, the gap between the government and the population is slowly expanding.

Third, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have successfully tapped into the expertise and training of the broader jihadist community. Militants have imparted knowledge on suicide tactics to Afghan groups through the internet and face-to-face exchanges, and these militants – with al-Qaeda's assistance and recruitment from *madrasahs* in Pakistan – have supplied a steady stream of suicide bombers.

Fourth, suicide attacks are extremely effective as an assassination tactic, particularly when there is substantial security around the target. Since 2006 the Taliban and al-Qaeda have begun to use suicide attackers as assassins targeting important personalities, including the late Governor of Paktia, Hakim Taniwal, the former Governor of Helmand, Mohammed Daoud and Pacha Khan Zadran, a member of the Afghan parliament.

Finally yet importantly, suicide attacks have provided renewed visibility for the Taliban and their allies, which the guerrilla attacks were failing to generate. Given their high casualty rates and high profile nature, every suicide attack conducted is reported in the regional and international media, providing greater exposure for the cause.

The origin of the attackers

At the outset, there was a major debate about the identity of the attackers. Afghans especially were under the assumption that the majority of the suicide bombers were foreigners and such a tactic was an imported product. Yet the data implicates two groups of individuals who are involved in the attacks.

The first group of attackers who are indeed responsible for a significant number of attacks consists of men of foreign origins, who are influenced by the global ideological jihad against the West, most notably the US. They see Afghanistan as the second front of that jihad (the first being Iraq), which provides them an opportunity to face the enemy in battle. These individuals are profoundly inspired by the various radical clerics and even the Taliban, who are constantly preaching around the world and on the thousands of jihadist websites, with statements like "Afghanistan has been occupied by the crusaders and it is a personal obligation of the Muslims to fight against them".¹ Thus encouraged and motivated they come to Afghanistan with the ultimate goal of attaining the esteemed status of martyrdom and setting an example for the rest of the Muslim *ummah*. Many of them are from countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Chechnya.

A second, small group of attackers carrying out suicide attacks comprises Afghans.² While Afghans believe it is neither culturally acceptable nor a characteristic tactic of the Afghan people, they ignore the fact that Afghan culture is no longer as isolated as it may have been in the past. At one point, a quarter of Afghanistan's population of 25 million became refugees and a certain segment of that population attended *madrasahs* in Pakistan, where they were radicalised and immersed in extremist ideologies. The training continues today and there is no shortage of recruits from these *madrasahs*.

Additionally, the relatively easy to access DVDs, VCDs and other forms of technology allows ideas to spread rapidly.³ Underlying all of this is the exposure of Afghans to al-Qaeda, which has spread its

¹ This quote by Mullah Dadullah is derived from his interview with Al Jazeera on 14 February 2006.

² This assessment recognises that many of the bombers may originate from training camps in Pakistan. But the fact that they may come over the border does not necessarily make them Pakistani. An Afghan war orphan, having been educated and trained in a *madrasah* in Pakistan and perhaps having lived there for 15 years, who then returns to Afghanistan as a suicide bomber is still an Afghan irrespective of whether he still has any relatives or roots in Afghanistan.

³ During the course of this research, the author found many DVDs and VCDs that depict suicide operations, the wills of martyrs and ideological sermons. The objective of most of them is straightforward – to inspire and

extremist global ideology to various groups. During their reign, from June 1996 to November 2001, al-Qaeda and the Taliban established a very close ‘marriage of convenience’ wherein al-Qaeda supported and trained many Taliban cadres. Following the post-9/11 transformation of the Taliban from a conventional military force to an insurgent one, the effects of this training and indoctrination have become clear.

Recommendations

Afghanistan is not the first nation to face the threat of suicide attacks and is unlikely to be the last. Although dealing with the threat may be difficult for any state, it is not impossible, especially if operational and strategic measures are implemented.

Operational measures

- Most importantly, the Afghan government must enhance the capacity of its intelligence in order to disrupt the network that organises and supports such activities. Intelligence is the initial link in the chain of thwarting any terror attack, but is crucial for thwarting suicide attacks before these occur. As many researchers note, suicide attackers hardly ever work alone. There is always an underground infrastructure that provides the essential financial and material resources and arranges everything else, including target identification and the time and date of the attack. Thus, the “crucial requirement in this struggle is ‘intelligence, intelligence, intelligence’”.⁴
- Police training in particular should be enhanced to better deal with tactics and strategies. Currently, the Afghan National Police is given a couple of weeks of general training and nothing specific on threat assessment or analysis. The police should be taught two sets of skills: a) methods for engaging the local community in a friendly and professional manner, which can lead to information about anything unusual witnessed in the area; and b) advanced counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency techniques, so they are better able to deal with violent groups. Police should also be provided with the necessary resources to handle the threat efficiently.
- The military, including both the coalition forces and the Afghans, have to stop using a heavy-handed approach, most notably the kind that results in the killing of innocent civilians. Instead, they must work with the communities and develop trust among one another. On countless occasions, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have exploited the behaviour of the coalition forces to expand their pool of recruitment for suicide attacks. Similarly, the force used in operations should be controlled because if one innocent civilian is killed, it takes a way the goodwill of an entire family, community and tribe.
- The Afghan military has to familiarise itself with the Taliban’s modus operandi and analyse their pattern of attacks. Analysing the data, it is quite clear that the two main targets of suicide attacks are the southern city of Kandahar and the capital; accordingly, the security for both of these ‘hot spots’ must be increased with due diligence. Only by knowing the environment and protecting it will the military be able to anticipate future attacks.
- The Afghan coalition force must improve human intelligence in certain areas, whether in Afghanistan or Pakistan, where the majority of the Taliban and al-Qaeda recruit. There are several *madrasahs* in Waziristan, located in the North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan, which have been known for spreading a radical ideology of hate and instigating jihad in

motivate the particular segment of the population that is disillusioned with the coalition forces and the Afghan government to become involved in the jihad.

⁴ Quote derived from an interview with Dr Rohan Gunaratna, Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 21 April 2006.

Afghanistan. Gathering information about them and monitoring their activities can lead to further success.

- The coalition forces and the Afghan security sector must share whatever operational intelligence or information they collect on specific threats with their partners for regional cooperation. Only with the support and cooperation of the regional partners can those attacks that might have been planned from the outside be successfully prevented.

Strategic measures

- The Afghan ulema [panel of religious authorities] must continue to oppose suicide bombing and issue fatwas to that effect. They should clearly explain that suicide bombing does not lead to an eternal life in paradise, nor the permission to see the face of Allah or the loving-kindness of 72 *houris* [beautiful maidens] who will serve the suicide bomber in heaven. The ulema should not allow fatwas to be manipulated by the extremists for negative effects in either Afghanistan or the Muslim world.
- The moderate religious leadership throughout Afghanistan should be empowered and given opportunities to spread their message of peace and tolerance on the centre stage. Importantly, counter-ideological measures should be used such that religious clerics are engaged in initiating dialogue first with the population and second with the militants as well as their sympathisers in order to dispel ideologically the notions of suicide being compatible with Islamic jurisprudence.
- The international community must remain active in Afghanistan until it has developed its own institutions that can deal with matters of state security. Without continued assistance, Afghanistan's fragile security institutions would crumble, repeating the history of the early 1990s when the country was a hub of international terrorism and drug production. Moreover, it is vital that the organic capacity of the state security agencies is developed, so it does not appear to citizens as the mouthpiece of the West.
- Afghanistan's relations with its neighbours are critical to its long-term stability and as such the country must establish strong regional ties, whether in commerce and trade or in the transfer of knowledge. Because of its landlocked status, Afghanistan must explore ways to develop its relations with its neighbours beyond basic diplomacy. The two most important neighbours are clearly Pakistan and Iran, and their support and assistance are essential in curbing the flow of terrorists from either the Middle East or Pakistan itself. In order to carry out attacks, terrorists must cross either of these two countries to enter Afghanistan.
- It is imperative that strong but informal ties be forged with village communities that live along the Afghan–Pakistani border, as some of these have been known to be safe havens for the Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives. The government must have an 'overall plan' to deal with these communities and provide them with necessary services such as education and health care. It is crucial that the plan includes goals that improve the living standards of the average villagers. Concepts such as 'winning hearts and minds' must be employed. The majority of the population resent the Taliban; they do not wish to go back to the draconian rule that was forced upon them when the Taliban were in power.

Conclusions

Looking at the experiences of other states such as the US, the UK and many others – it does not really matter how strong or capable the government and security sector is – no government has been able to fully immunise itself from suicide attacks carried out by a group or an insurgency movement. For sure, Afghanistan will mirror this pattern. Yet by drawing from best practice, while incorporating issues of cultural and religious sensitivity, a rational middle way towards preventing them may be achieved.

Afghanistan: Mission Impossible? The Pakistani Perspective

Ismail Khan*

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, the Americans were caught off-guard and did not initially respond to it. So for a year and a half, interest in Afghanistan on the part of the United States remained limited, looking at the country as an extension or satellite of the Soviet Union.

Towards the mid-1980s, however, the influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation drew the US into the conflict. The US soon realised that it had no other option than to operate through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence to support and finance the Afghan resistance. All the funding came through Pakistan and was in turn distributed among the various resistance groups. In a way, by using Pakistan as a surrogate, the Americans did not know which group was receiving how much of the money being pumped in to shore up the Afghan resistance to the Soviets.

There was recognition that while it was clear that the war was winnable, such an outcome was possible only with Pakistan's help.

But by the time the Soviets were beginning to leave Afghanistan, Pakistan had developed in-depth knowledge and experience in organising a guerrilla war to defeat one of the best and well-trained armies in the world. The Pakistanis came to understand that in order to make the guerrilla war a success it was imperative to bring the most powerful or most influential man on board. This tactic spawned what came to be known as warlordism in Afghanistan, which meant that whatever semblance of governance there had been, it fell apart and was replaced by anarchy.

Anarchy spawned something worse: jihad for Islam, which became an overriding factor. The Arabs came over, led by the fiery Palestinian ideologue Sheik Abdullah Azzam, to use Afghanistan as a base and springboard for jihad. At the time, Pakistan and the so-called 'free world' led by the US were not very discerning about who came to help as long as they aided the cause – even Israel helped by supplying arms to the Mujahideen.

The result was that the old system crumbled and no new system was put in place, which gave rise to the creation of small fiefdoms. There was total anarchy. The Arabs, who had come mostly from countries with dictatorial regimes, became outspoken and started to challenge their own governments. They had a stake in the anarchy, the power vacuum and the absence of centralised governance.

The Taliban appeared on the horizon, initially supported by everyone among the war-weary Afghans. Pakistan had tired of supporting one group against the other and saw in the Taliban an opportunity to bring a friendly centralised government to its western borders. By promising to restore order, the Taliban did not have to use force. Wherever they went, they negotiated to seize control of districts, cities and eventually provinces as a way of gaining control of almost the entire country. And they succeeded in doing so without firing a single bullet, with the exception of the Shomali plain where they met stiff resistance from forces loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood.

While the Taliban, who had come from religious seminaries with their own interpretations of puritanical Islam, decided to implement Islamic laws as they interpreted them, the West also made the diplomatic and political blunder of ostracising them instead of engaging them. This approach served to

* Ismail Khan is an Editor of *Dawn* (North-West Frontier Province) for the Dawn Group of Newspapers, and a Stringer for the *New York Times* in Peshawar.

strengthen the Taliban – when the Taliban needed and looked for support it came from Osama bin Laden, who offered them a hand of friendship and cooperation.

Al-Qaeda made Afghanistan its base, not because they loved the country but because they needed a launch pad to plan and execute attacks like those of 9/11. When the Americans decided to invade Afghanistan, they decided to do so yet again on their own, enlisting Pakistan's support but without involving it, apparently owing to a lack of trust. Washington tried to prop up an English-speaking Afghan commander and former Police Chief of Kabul, Abdul Haq, known among his Afghan colleagues as 'Hollywood Haq' for his theatrics in leading the resistance to rout the Taliban. He was caught and executed by the Taliban while attempting to sneak into Afghanistan, by co-opting some Taliban commanders who had formerly been Mujahideen commanders and were up for sale. The plan fell through.

His execution and tragic exit created a big void, soon filled by another English-speaking Pashtun, Hamid Karzai. The Americans established direct contact with former Mujahideen commanders, unleashing the Northern Alliance on the Taliban and supporting their forces with targeted bombings. The Taliban dissipated into the countryside. The US had electronic intelligence but no human intelligence on the ground. Its effort to gather good human intelligence was further impeded by not involving Pakistan.

The Northern Alliance, helped by American B-52 bombers, walked triumphantly into Kabul and set up a transitional government. The Taliban were cowed and the people genuinely believed they would see the advent of a new era of development and security.

That did not happen, however; money was too short and too slow to come and security was on a back burner. The US-led coalition repeated the same error that the Soviets had made when they had invaded Afghanistan, by fortifying important cities and towns but overlooking key security arrangements to secure the eastern and southern Pashtun belt, largely inhabiting the Pakistani–Afghan border. Other initial mistakes by US-led coalition forces – such as targeting civilians on wrong information provided by commanders to settle personal scores together with the inability to move into the countryside and carry out development work – created an environment ripe for the resurgence of the Taliban.

The winds began to change. For ordinary Afghans the myth of American invincibility and technological superiority dissolved when six years after the invasion the US had been unable to catch any of the so-called 'high-value targets' such as Mullah Omar, Osama bin Laden or his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Afghan Pashtun began to doubt the effectiveness and professionalism of the American forces, through the forces' failure to

- 1) carry out widespread development;
- 2) catch any of the high-value targets;
- 3) provide security and introduce some semblance of governance;
- 4) reduce corruption;
- 5) deter President Hamid Karzai's appointment of and reliance upon former Mujahideen commanders, who were viewed as warlords by the common Afghans;
- 6) take steps to alleviate the perception that the Pashtun were under-represented in a government dominated by the Northern Alliance; and
- 7) stem the fear of reprisal attacks from Taliban insurgents (especially around Kabul) and to provide security to prevent them.

Because of these and other factors, according to some analysts, the common man gravitated back to the Taliban, who were there on the ground – unlike the Americans and other forces who were largely confined or restricted to their camps. The Taliban were not the Mujahideen of 1979; they were better trained in guerrilla warfare and better motivated to oust 'occupation forces'. Indeed, the Taliban

seemed to the people to be a winning side because of their presence on the ground, unlike the American and allied forces.

The fact that most of the former Mujahideen or the Taliban had been living in Pakistan as refugees for decades made it a lot easier for them to move in and out of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They knew and understood the system as well as how to circumvent or bypass it without being caught. For decades, the Mujahideen and later the Taliban used Pakistan's tribal region straddling along the Afghan border as a base from which to organise and launch attacks, recruit soldiers to their cause, find finances and return to as a fallback position. A careful study and analysis of the Mujahideen incursions into Afghanistan during the Soviet era would show that the Taliban continued to use more or less the same bases and routes to hit out at places in Afghanistan.

Interestingly though, while Afghanistan blames Pakistan for all its troubles, many Pakistanis believe that extremism in Pakistan is fuelled from Afghanistan and not vice versa. The success of the Taliban in challenging the American-backed government in Kabul and the international forces has encouraged Pakistan's own tribal militants (who had hitherto been subservient to Pakistani laws) to challenge the writ of the Pakistani government. The Pakistani tribal militants are beholden to the Taliban for finance and direction and look to them for leadership rather than the other way around, although the Taliban do obtain many of their recruits from Pakistan.

A case in point is the situation in North and South Waziristan and the Bajaur tribal regions along with the Tank, Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu districts of the North-West Frontier Province, which are affected by what is generally called 'Talibanisation'. Pakistani militants draw their strength and inspiration from the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Pakistani militants have wanted to emulate the sort of system the Taliban introduced in Afghanistan and some analysts hold that this has stemmed from their own weariness of the colonial system that Pakistan has followed since the British ruled the Indian subcontinent. For them, the Taliban system was based on locally accepted norms and values on both sides of the border. Therefore, it has been the inability of Pakistan, the US, NATO and the Afghan government to give them an efficient system of governance that has moved them to the Taliban camp.

The tribes on both sides of the Pakistani–Afghan border have always obeyed the mandate of the strongest force – in this case, the Taliban and the militants – which in turn has raised the spectre of vigilantism. They are doing what the government should have been doing for them, providing security and dispensing justice.

Pakistan's tribal conundrum

Pakistan sent thousands of soldiers, for the first time since its inception in 1947, to its tribal borders with Afghanistan in order to stop the al-Qaeda operatives fleeing American bombings in Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan from entering Pakistan.

Although Islamabad had been able to control its borders in the Khyber and Kurram tribal regions effectively and as a result managed to round up over a 150 al-Qaeda operatives in a single haul, it is not clear why similar action was not taken in the restive North and South Waziristan tribal region. At the time, the regional military commander (now the Governor of the North-West Frontier Province), Lieut. General (retired) Ali Muhammad Jan Aurakzai denied that there were foreign militants in the tribal region, an argument vehemently rebutted by Pakistan's premier intelligence bureau, Inter-Services Intelligence. Initially reluctant, when the army finally did move to act on good sound intelligence in June 2002 in Azam Warsak in South Waziristan, the bloody gun battle that left ten soldiers including two officers dead made abundantly clear the challenges that lay ahead.

More troops were rushed in and in March 2004, an operation was launched to flush out foreign militants in Kaloosha, South Waziristan. The security forces suffered massive casualties. The operation led to a series of attacks involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ambushes and rocket attacks on government and security installations.

The situation was pretty grim, with security forces almost confined to their military barracks and garrison. The government entered into an agreement with tribal militant commanders known to have been harbouring foreign militants. The military commander at that time, Lieut. General Safdar Hussain, flew into Shakai in South Waziristan in April 2004 to sign the controversial agreement with top militant commander Nek Mohammad and four others.

Predictably, the agreement soon collapsed after the militants refused to agree to the registration of foreign militants with the government, a key element of the agreement. The collapse led to more attacks and Nek Mohammad was killed in a precision missile attack a few months later.

Violence escalated and spread to the more difficult tribal region of South Waziristan, dominated by the Mehsud tribe, where military convoys came under ambush and IED attacks. A tribal militant and a former Guantanamo Bay prisoner, Abdullah Mehsud, plotted and kidnapped two Chinese engineers working on an irrigation project. One of the engineers was killed in a rescue operation.

The attacks continued throughout 2004–05 and 160 pro-government tribal elders were eliminated by militants in targeting killing. Journalists also came under fire: two were killed, one was kidnapped and others were forced to flee the region.

The government once again reached out to militants, this time signing a peace agreement with top militant commander Baitullah Mehsud in February 2005. The agreement has brought relative peace although in the process the government writ in South Waziristan has been utterly lost. Militants, both local and foreign, hold complete sway over the entire tribal region, operating a virtually parallel administration. The government writ is confined to the front walls of the Scouts Camp in Wana, the regional headquarters of South Waziristan.

By 2006, the situation had also begun to deteriorate in neighbouring North Waziristan, where militants had started challenging the writ of the government by attacking government and security installations. The government soon entered into another peace agreement, this time with the militants in Miramshah in North Waziristan. The 5 September 2006 peace agreement with the militants stipulated that the government would not carry out air or ground offensives, and in return, the militants agreed not to attack government or security installations. The agreement was seen by critics as a major concession to the militants, having failed to address two key demands: a) cross-border infiltration and b) the presence of foreign militants.

At the same time, the government was also striving to strike a similar peace deal with the militants in the Bajaur tribal region. The American air strike in Damadola, apparently targeting al-Qaeda's 'no. 2', also killed women and children, prompting public uproar. The air strike was followed by another in the same area; this time Pakistan owned up to the strike much against local belief that it was carried out by the Americans, effectively sealing the fate of any government–militants' deal in Bajaur.

The two attacks in Bajaur and the January 2006 attack on a cluster of compounds in South Waziristan led to a spate of suicide bombings aimed at military and police officials, leaving more than 50 dead. These incidents were demonstrative of how the government swung like a pendulum from one extreme to the other, from using force to what appeared total appeasement and capitulation to the militants and in so doing effectively ceding the writ of the state to the militants.

Arguably, the Waziristan tribal region is now more difficult to administer than it was say, three years ago. As is evident, the agreements have failed to address key issues of cross-border infiltration and the presence of foreign militants in Pakistan's tribal region, where militants continue to operate and recruit more freely than ever.

Islamabad, which has continued to scoff at international criticism that Pakistan is not doing enough to stop cross-border infiltration, has pointed to the deployment of around 80,000 troops and 187 border posts. But at a press conference in Islamabad on 2 February, President Pervez Musharraf candidly admitted that there had been incidents in which some border guards had turned a blind eye to cross-border infiltration: "So similarly I imagine that others may be doing the same", he said.

Pakistan, as it appears, is facing its own dilemmas. It has been finding it hard to explain and persuade its own tribespeople of what has largely been seen at home as a policy U-turn by Islamabad, in rejecting the Taliban and allying itself with the US in the post-9/11 war on terror.

The tribespeople, predominantly illiterate, poor and conservative, are finding it hard to understand the difference between the Soviet ‘occupying forces’ and the US ‘liberating forces’ and just how the Mujahideen, who had earlier been hailed by the West as heroes, turned into villains overnight. This seemingly quick shift in policy and transition is too complicated a business for the tribespeople, who are now flocking to the Taliban to ‘liberate’ Afghanistan from ‘foreign invaders’. So while President Musharraf has taken the stance of allying himself with the US, there are many in Pakistan’s tribal regions who do not share his view.

Pakistan’s other predicament is that if it tries to control and rein in tribal militants from crossing the border to fight in Afghanistan, the militants level their guns at Pakistani forces and target government and security installations through ambushes, IED and suicide attacks.

Thus, the situation in the tribal regions has a direct bearing on internal security. There are also political implications. Military operations and air strikes have resulted in a political backlash and outcry, particularly from the religious–political alliance that is ruling Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province and sharing power with the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League in the province of Balochistan. While there have been some discussions and debates in the Pakistani parliament about the situation in the tribal regions as well as the violence and subsequent military operations, the government has not been able to formulate a consensus or achieve across-the-board political or public support for its policies there.

With national elections only a few months away it also remains to be seen whether General Musharraf, so close to his bid to seek re-election as President, will want to take the political risk of launching yet another military operation in Waziristan to wrestle control from the militants. Such a move is especially questionable given the absence of broader political support for his pro-US policies and his reluctance to reach out to more secular political parties, such as the Pakistan Peoples’ Party of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Pashtun nationalist parties like the Awami National Party.

After exercising different options, from the use of military force to deal with militancy to engaging the militants directly, the government does not appear to be in the mood to go for a massive military operation. If statements by President Musharraf are any indication, the government intends to give the political process a chance, with the military approach taking a backseat.

The political process means engaging tribespeople as well as tribal militants in an effort to restore peace in the region, buy time to carry out development, foster tribal stakes in the system and extend the state’s authority and writ. It is a long and time-consuming process and it is not clear whether Afghanistan and its international backers, chiefly the US, will have the patience to let Pakistan try out the option amid growing violence across the border.

This proposition is a difficult one and something that has crumbled in the past after air attacks by either the US or Pakistan under pressure from Washington, reigniting the flames of violence in the restive tribal region. But government officials are hopeful that if allowed, with patience and perseverance, they can turn the tide against militancy in the region. They argue that by cutting deals with tribespeople and militants, the government could buy enough time to carry out massive development and create job opportunities to wean unemployed, poor youth away from militancy.

Peace is essential for development and requires concerted effort by Pakistan and the international community to inject funds to build up what are clearly the most underdeveloped regions in the country. There are already some signs that the tribespeople who had wholeheartedly welcomed their foreign ‘guests’ are growing weary of them in the face of the rising killings, kidnappings and robberies

that have hit the region, leading to a stand-off between foreign and local militants. It is another matter that a much weaker administration there could not exploit such public sentiments and turn the tide against the foreign militants.

A strategy to deal with the situation

What then could work in the tribal region? The answer may lie somewhere half-way between a military and a political process: an intelligent combination of the two could create an atmosphere of peace and development, which in turn requires a well thought-out strategy to deal with the situation.

What is needed therefore is a good and efficient system that brings development, security and job opportunities to a population with the lowest socio-economic indicators in the entire region. It is a protracted process but a recipe for lasting peace devoid of any militancy.

There is also a need to change the overall strategy from a colonial approach to a neo-colonial one, which entails the necessary development along with more cash and better security. Again, the solution is not going to be further militarisation of the conflict but a considered combination of the political as well as the military approaches.

The government, in consultation with local tribes and taking into account their sensitivities needs to re-establish the network of checkpoints that it abandoned after the peace agreements with the militants, as well as disperse the militants and deny them territory in which to operate and train.

Some analysts believe that tribespeople on both sides of the border can settle political matters among themselves and with the Taliban and militants, if allowed to do so freely without attaching any pre-conditions or strings. The worst of them, the former Mujahideen commanders who have always had their daggers drawn, would also continue to negotiate with each other through intermediaries. There is a sense in some circles in Pakistan that this could still be achieved. And in so doing, while the Taliban would not be immediately removed from the political scene, they could become important power brokers who could later be neutralised over a period of time.

In addition, the forces would have to go and occupy the area, spreading out and preventing the Taliban the freedom to move. They would have to operate or initiate massive development and reconstruction projects involving the local tribespeople, buy-off the influential tribal elders by granting them contracts for road construction, hospitals, schools, irrigation systems, etc., and thus enable the tribes to have a stake in the new order.

About the European Security Forum

STEERING GROUP

FRANÇOIS HEISBOURG
FONDATION POUR LA
RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE
PARIS

DANA H. ALLIN
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
LONDON

IVO DAALDER
THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

DMITRI DANILOV
INSTITUTE OF EUROPE
MOSCOW

MICHAEL EMERSON
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN
POLICY STUDIES
BRUSSELS

WALTER SLOCOMBE
FORMER US
UNDERSECRETARY OF
DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ROB DE WIJK
CLINGENDAEL INSTITUTE
THE HAGUE

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) joined forces late in the year 2000, to launch a new forum on European security policy in Brussels. The objective of this *European Security Forum* is to bring together senior officials and experts from EU and Euro-Atlantic Partnership countries, including the United States and Russia, to discuss security issues of strategic importance to Europe. The Forum is jointly directed by CEPS and the IISS and is hosted by CEPS in Brussels.

The Forum brings together a select group of personalities from the Brussels institutions (EU, NATO and diplomatic missions), national governments, parliaments, business, media and independent experts. The informal and confidential character of the Forum enables participants to exchange ideas freely.

The aim of the initiative is to think ahead about the strategic security agenda for Europe, treating both its European and transatlantic implications. The topics to be addressed are selected from an open list that includes crisis management, defence capabilities, security concepts, defence industries and institutional developments (including enlargement) of the EU and NATO.

The Forum has about 100 members, who are invited to all meetings and receive current information on the activities of the Forum. This group meets every other month in a closed session to discuss a pre-arranged topic under Chatham House rules. The Forum meetings are presided over by François Heisbourg, Chairman of the Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris. As a general rule, three short issue papers are commissioned from independent experts for each session presenting EU, US and Russian viewpoints on the topic.

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is an independent policy research institute founded in Brussels in 1983, with the aim of producing sound policy research leading to constructive solutions to the challenges facing Europe.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), founded in London in 1958, is the leading international and independent organisation for the study of military strategy, arms control, regional security and conflict resolution.

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) promotes good governance and reform of the security sector. The Centre conducts research on good practices, encourages the development of appropriate norms at the national and international levels, makes policy recommendations and provides in-country advice and assistance programmes.



Place du Congrès 1, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2.229.39.11 Fax: +32 (0)2.219.41.51
www.ceps.be E-mail: info@ceps.be



Arundel House, 13-15 Arundel Street, Temple Place
London WC2R 3DX, United Kingdom
Tel. +44(0)20.7379.7676 Fax: +44(0)20.7836.3108
www.iiiss.org E-mail: iiiss@iiiss.org



Rue de Chantepoulet 11, P.O. Box 1360
1211 Geneva 1, Switzerland
Tel. +41(22)741.77.00 Fax: +41(22)741.77.05
www.dcaf.ch E-mail: info@dcaf.ch