

Salvaging Afghanistan

Testimony before the United States Senate Armed Services Committee

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March 1, 2007

The United States missed an opportunity to stabilize Afghanistan and isolate al-Qaida and the Taliban after the tactical military victory in 2001-2002. The failure to invest adequately in either security or reconstruction and the diversion of US political, intelligence, military, and financial resources to Iraq left the Afghan government unable to satisfy popular expectations for security and development. This neglect led neighboring countries to conclude that the US was not serious about success in Afghanistan but gave priority to other objectives. Hence they hedged their bets by continuing to support their clients in Afghanistan.

The administration's fixation on Iraq and Iran led it to neglect the development of greater threats to the US and the world within Pakistan, which the administration is addressing only belatedly and with half-measures. As a result, the US and NATO now have more military forces in Afghanistan than ever before, expenditure on assistance to Afghanistan is higher than ever before, and yet both the Afghan government and the international forces supporting it are in a less advantageous position than at any time since the overthrow of the Taliban.

As former NDI John Negroponte testified to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on January 11, the most serious threat to the United States is the reconstitution of the al-Qaida leadership and headquarters in a joint Taliban-al-Qaida safe haven in Pakistan. The result is a burgeoning insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan that threatens the joint effort of the US, UN, and the entire international community there. Pakistan, not Iran, has been the source of rogue nuclear proliferation and aid to terrorism that is directly targeting US and allied troops as well as Afghan troops and civilians with IEDs, rockets, and suicide bombers. Pakistan needs to do much more, but its leaders are correct when they observe that they are now being pressured to deal with the consequences of negligent policies of the United States.

In the coming months we can expect to see the insurgency launch attacks on both military and civilian targets in Afghanistan. The insurgency's leadership and logistical bases are largely in Pakistan, but it can operate freely in large parts of Afghanistan. As US and NATO spokesmen say, the Taliban and other insurgents do not constitute a conventional military threat to NATO or to the Afghan government. They do not need to constitute such a threat in order to achieve their objective, which is to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the Afghan government to the point that the international presence in support of that government becomes untenable. The recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as well as other public opinion surveys, support the conclusion I had drawn from my own observations during four visits to Afghanistan last year,

the latest of 28 total visits since 1989, when I first entered the country with mujahidin resistance fighters. All indicators show that support for and confidence in the government and the international presence has rapidly deteriorated in the past year as they have proven unable to protect the security of Afghans from the insurgency or to curb the safe haven the insurgents enjoy in Pakistan. Failure to do the latter, in particular, seriously undermines the credibility of the United States.

Many other factors, such as a perceived increase in crime, abuse and corruption by the police and judiciary, poorly conceived and incompetently executed counter-narcotics policies, and extensive waste and mismanagement in the underfunded reconstruction program also contributed to this deterioration. This loss of confidence does not translate directly into support for the Taliban, whose disastrous policies, especially their alliance with al-Qaida, Afghans do not want to return. But the loss of confidence does translate into reluctance to defend the government and to comply with its directives, as in counter-narcotics.

US policy discussion focuses excessively on military questions such as the number of troops and the need to end national caveats of NATO troop contributors. The original and most damaging national caveats were those imposed on our own forces by the Bush administration at the start of the operation: no peacekeeping and no nation building. As a result criminalized armed groups gained a hold on power in much of the country, and Afghans have not see the expected improvements in security or their own well being. The Afghanistan Compact, which constitutes the internationally agreed framework for assistance to Afghanistan, places equal emphasis on security, governance, and development. From the highest government officials to the most humble illiterate laborer Afghans emphasize that the most urgently needed measures are ending the Taliban's external sanctuary, reforming the police and judiciary to curb corruption and abuse, and investing in the economy to create licit employment.

Two major issues further threaten success in Afghanistan: conflict with Iran and counter-productive counter-narcotics policies. Any confrontation between the US and Iran could have disastrous consequences for Afghanistan. The US and Iran cooperated closely both on the ground and diplomatically in order to remove the Taliban and support the UN-led process. Iran has contributed to the reconstruction and stability of the country. Afghanistan enjoys very favorable trade and transit relations with Iran, which are vital for the country's economy. Iran has lost more soldiers and police than any country in battling drug traffickers coming from Afghanistan. Iranian officials with whom I met in Kabul last November expressed alarm at the resurgence of al-Qaida and the Taliban and argued that the leaderships in both Tehran and Washington were damaging their national interests by failing to cooperate against this common foe. They had intelligence data they wished to share but were unable to do so because of the policies of both countries.

Finally, counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan has the potential to drive strategic parts of the population into the arms of the Taliban. Let us be clear on what the purpose of counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan is: it is to reduce and ultimately destroy the flow of illegal funds to corrupt officials, insurgents, and terrorists. It is not to end the production and consumption of illegal drugs in the US or Europe. It is the height of self-

deluded folly to suppose that if the richest and most powerful countries in the world cannot end drug trafficking at home with all of the resources they have directed against socially marginal criminal groups, they can instead solve it in Afghanistan, one of the world's six poorest countries with one of the world's weakest states, where drug traffickers control many of the levers of power.

The eradication of the peasants' crops drives villagers into the arms of the Taliban and warlords, while actually enriching the traffickers. The traffickers benefit from increased prices and use their oligopsonistic control of the market to shift cultivation around the country and increase the volume planted to compensate for eradication. Crop eradication also provokes armed resistance that makes it impossible to deliver aid for alternative livelihoods where it is most needed. The expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is thus far the main result of our counter-narcotics policy.

Meanwhile, major traffickers and their political protectors, many of whom received millions of dollars in cash from the CIA in 2001 and 2002, continue to enjoy nearly complete impunity. To Afghans our counter-narcotics policy looks like a policy of rewarding rich traffickers and punishing poor farmers. A counter-narcotics policy that served the national interests of the US as well as Afghanistan would consist of interdiction, including destruction of heroin laboratories; dismissal from office and, where possible, criminal prosecution and extradition of key traffickers and their political protectors; and massive aid and employment creation in rural areas both to reward those farmers who have not cultivated opium poppy and to assist those who are willing to shift away from it. Carefully monitored purchase of opium for medical use from provinces that reduce their production could also play a role.

In amplification of these remarks I append an article I published in Foreign Affairs.

Saving Afghanistan

By Barnett R. Rubin

From *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2007

Summary: With the Taliban resurgent, reconstruction faltering, and opium poppy cultivation at an all-time high, Afghanistan is at risk of collapsing into chaos. If Washington wants to save the international effort there, it must increase its commitment to the area and rethink its strategy -- especially its approach to Pakistan, which continues to give sanctuary to insurgents on its tribal frontier.

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TALIBAN RESURGENT

Afghanistan has stepped back from a tipping point. At the cost of taking and inflicting more casualties than in any year since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 (and four times as many as in 2005), NATO troops turned back a frontal offensive by the Taliban last summer. The insurgents aimed to capture a district west of Kandahar, hoping to take that key city and precipitate a crisis in Kabul, the capital. Despite this setback, however, the Taliban-led insurgency is still active on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, and the frontier region has once again become a refuge for what President George W. Bush once called the main threat to the United States -- "terrorist groups of global reach." Insurgents in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have imported suicide bombing, improvised explosive technology, and global communications strategies from Iraq; in the south, attacks have closed 35 percent of the schools. Even with opium production at record levels, slowing economic growth is failing to satisfy the population's most basic needs, and many community leaders accuse the government itself of being the main source of abuse and insecurity. Unless the shaky Afghan government receives both the resources and the leadership required to deliver tangible benefits in areas cleared of insurgents, the international presence in Afghanistan will come to resemble a foreign occupation -- an occupation that Afghans will ultimately reject.

For decades -- not only since 2001 -- U.S. policymakers have underestimated the stakes in Afghanistan. They continue to do so today. A mere course correction will not be enough to prevent the country from sliding into chaos. Washington and its international partners must rethink their strategy and significantly increase both the resources they devote to Afghanistan and the effectiveness of those resources' use. Only dramatic action can reverse the perception, common among both Afghans and their neighbors, that Afghanistan is not a high priority for the United States -- and that the Taliban are winning as a result. Washington's appeasement of Pakistan, diversion of resources to Iraq, and

perpetual underinvestment in Afghanistan -- which gets less aid per capita than any other state with a recent postconflict rebuilding effort -- have fueled that suspicion.

Contrary to the claims of the Bush administration, whose attention after the September 11 attacks quickly wandered off to Iraq and grand visions of transforming the Middle East, the main center of terrorism "of global reach" is in Pakistan. Al Qaeda has succeeded in reestablishing its base by skillfully exploiting the weakness of the state in the Pashtun tribal belt, along the Afghan-Pakistani frontier. In the words of one Western military commander in Afghanistan, "Until we transform the tribal belt, the U.S. is at risk."

Far from achieving that objective in the 2001 Afghan war, the U.S.-led coalition merely pushed the core leadership of al Qaeda and the Taliban out of Afghanistan and into Pakistan, with no strategy for consolidating this apparent tactical advance. The Bush administration failed to provide those Taliban fighters who did not want to defend al Qaeda with a way to return to Afghanistan peacefully, and its policy of illegal detention at Guantánamo Bay and Bagram Air Base, in Afghanistan, made refuge in Pakistan, often with al Qaeda, a more attractive option.

The Taliban, meanwhile, have drawn on fugitives from Afghanistan, newly minted recruits from undisrupted training camps and militant madrasahs, and tribesmen alienated by civilian casualties and government and coalition abuse to reconstitute their command structure, recruitment and funding networks, and logistical bases in Pakistan. On September 19, 2001, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf told his nation that he had to cooperate with Washington in order to "save Afghanistan and Taliban from being harmed"; accordingly, he has been all too happy to follow the Bush administration's instructions to focus on al Qaeda's top leadership while ignoring the Taliban. Intelligence collected during Western military offensives in mid-2006 confirmed that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was continuing to actively support the Taliban leadership, which is now working out of Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan Province, in western Pakistan. As a result, a cross-border insurgency has effectively exploited Afghanistan's impoverished society and feeble government.

In May of 2006, Amrullah Saleh, the director of Afghanistan's national intelligence agency, completed an assessment of the threat posed by the insurgency. Saleh, who acted as the Northern Alliance's liaison with the CIA during Operation Enduring Freedom, concluded that political progress in Afghanistan had not been matched by an effective strategy of consolidation. "The pyramid of Afghanistan government's legitimacy," he wrote, "should not be brought down due to our inefficiency in knowing the enemy, knowing ourselves and applying resources effectively." U.S. commanders and intelligence officials circulated Saleh's warning to their field commanders and agents in Afghanistan and their superiors in Washington. Sustaining the achievements of the past five years depends on how well they heed that warning.

"STILL OURS TO LOSE"

In the past year, a number of events have raised the stakes in Afghanistan and highlighted the threat to the international effort there. The future of NATO depends on its success in this first deployment outside of Europe. Although it suffered a setback in the south, the Pakistan-based, Taliban-led insurgency has become ever more daring and deadly in the southern and eastern parts of the country, while extending its presence all the way to the outskirts of Kabul. NATO deployed to areas neglected by the coalition, most notably to the southern province of Helmand -- and the Taliban responded with increased strength and maneuverability. On September 8, a particularly bold attack on a coalition convoy in the city killed 16 people, including two U.S. soldiers, near the U.S. embassy -- the most heavily fortified section of Kabul. Even as NATO has deployed its forces across the country -- particularly in the province of Helmand, a Taliban stronghold that produces some 40 percent of the world's opium -- the Taliban have shown increasing power and agility.

Meanwhile, the effectiveness of the Taliban's limited institutions and the ruthlessness of their retribution against "collaborators" neutralized much of the Afghan population; only the successful political consolidation of NATO and coalition military victories can start to build confidence that it is safe to support the government. In some areas, there is now a parallel Taliban state, and locals are increasingly turning to Taliban-run courts, which are seen as more effective and fair than the corrupt official system. Suicide bombings, unknown in Afghanistan before their successful use by insurgents in Iraq, have recently sown terror in Kabul and other areas. They have also spread to Pakistan.

On the four trips I made to Afghanistan in 2006 (in January, March-April, July-August, and November), the growing frustration was palpable. In July, one Western diplomat who had been in Afghanistan for three years opened our meeting with an outburst. "I have never been so depressed," he said. "The insurgency is triumphant." An elder from Kunar Province, in eastern Afghanistan, said that government efforts against the insurgency were weak because "the people don't trust any of the people in government offices." An elder from the northern province of Baghlan echoed that sentiment: "The people have no hope for this government now." A UN official added, "So many people have left the country recently that the government has run out of passports."

"The conditions in Afghanistan are ripe for fundamentalism," a former minister who is now a prominent member of parliament told me. "Our situation was not resolved before Iraq started. Iraq has not been resolved, and now there is fighting in Palestine and Lebanon. Then maybe Iran. ... We pay the price for all of it." An elder who sheltered President Hamid Karzai when Karzai was working underground against the Taliban described to me how he was arrested by U.S. soldiers: they placed a hood on his head, whisked him away, and then released him with no explanation. "What we have realized," he concluded, "is that the foreigners are not really helping us. We think that the foreigners do not want Afghanistan to be rebuilt."

Yet no one I spoke to advocated giving up. One of the same elders who expressed frustration with the corruption of the government and its distance from the people also said, "We have been with the Taliban and have seen their cruelty. People don't want them

back." A fruit trader from Kandahar complained: "The Taliban beat us and ask for food, and then the government beats us for helping the Taliban." But he and his colleagues still called Karzai the country's best leader in 30 years -- a modest endorsement, given the competition, but significant nonetheless. "My working assumption," said one Western military leader, "is that the international community needs to double its resources. We can't do it on the margins. We have no hedge against domestic and regional counterforces." After all, he noted, the battle for Afghanistan "is still ours to lose."

THE 30-YEAR WAR

The recent upsurge in violence is only the latest chapter in Afghanistan's 30-year war. That war started as a Cold War ideological battle, morphed into a regional clash of ethnic factionalism, and then became the center of the broader conflict between the West and a transnational Islamist terrorist network.

It is no surprise that a terrorist network found a base in Afghanistan: just as Lenin might have predicted, it picked the weakest link in the modern state system's rusty chain. Today's Afghanistan formed as a buffer state within the sphere of influence of British India. Because the government, then as now, was unable to extract enough revenue from this barren territory to rule it, its function had more to do with enabling an elite subsidized by aid to control the territory as part of the defense of foreign empires than with providing security and governance to the people of Afghanistan. Hence, the oft-noted paradox of modern Afghanistan: a country that needs decentralized governance to provide services to its scattered and ethnically diverse population has one of the world's most centralized governments. That paradox has left the basic needs of Afghanistan's citizens largely unfulfilled -- and thus left them vulnerable to the foreign forces that have long brought their own struggles to the Afghan battleground.

In the eighteenth century, as neighboring empires collapsed, Afghan tribal leaders seized opportunities to build states by conquering richer areas in the region. In 1715, Mirwais Khan Hotak (of the same Kandahari Pashtun tribe as the Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar), overthrew the Shiite governor of Kandahar, then a province of the Iranian Safavid empire; seven years later, his son sacked Isfahan, the Iranian capital at the time. Subsequently, a Turkmen leader, Nader Shah, captured Isfahan and went on to conquer Kabul and Delhi. When Nader Shah was assassinated in 1747, the commander of his bodyguard, Ahmad Khan Abdali (a member of the same Kandahari Pashtun tribe as President Karzai), retreated back to Kandahar, where, according to official histories, he was made king of the Afghans at a tribal jirga. He led the tribes who constituted his army on raids and in the conquest of Kashmir and Punjab.

The expansion of the British and Russian empires cut off the opportunity for conquest and external predation -- undermining the fiscal base of the ruler's power and throwing Afghanistan into turmoil for much of the nineteenth century. As the British Empire expanded northwest from the Indian subcontinent toward Central Asia, it first tried to conquer Afghanistan and then, after two Anglo-Afghan wars, settled for making it a buffer against the Russian empire to the north.

The British established a three-tiered border to separate their empire from Russia through a series of treaties with Kabul and Moscow. The first frontier separated the areas of the Indian subcontinent under direct British administration from those areas under Pashtun tribal control (today this line divides those areas administered by the Pakistani state from the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies). The second frontier, the Durand Line, divided the Pashtun tribal areas from the territories under the administration of the emir of Afghanistan (Pakistan and the rest of the international community consider this line to be the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, although Afghanistan has never accepted it). The outer frontier, the borders of Afghanistan with Russia, Iran, and China, demarcated the British sphere of influence; the British enabled the emir to subdue and control Afghanistan with subsidies of money and weapons.

In the twentieth century, however, the dissolution of these empires eroded this security arrangement. The Third Anglo-Afghan War, in 1919, concluded with the recognition of Afghanistan's full sovereignty. The country's first sovereign, King Amanullah, tried to build a strong nationalist state. His use of scarce resources for development rather than an army left him vulnerable to revolt, and his effort collapsed after a decade. The British helped another contender, Nader Shah, consolidate a weaker form of rule. Then, in the late 1940s, came the independence and partition of India, which even more dramatically altered the strategic stakes in the region.

Immediately tensions flared between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan claimed that Pakistan was a new state, not a successor to British India, and that all past border treaties had lapsed. A loya jirga in Kabul denied that the Durand Line was an international border and called for self-determination of the tribal territories as Pashtunistan. Skirmishes across the Durand Line began with the covert support of both governments. At the same time, Islamabad was aligning itself with the United States in order to balance India -- which led Afghanistan, in turn, to rely on aid from Moscow to train and supply its army. Pakistan, as a result, came to regard Afghanistan as part of a New Delhi-Kabul-Moscow axis that fundamentally challenged its security. With U.S. assistance, Pakistan developed a capacity for covert asymmetric jihadi warfare, which it eventually used in both Afghanistan and Kashmir.

For the first decades of the Cold War, Afghanistan pursued a policy of nonalignment. The two superpowers developed informal rules of coexistence, each supporting different institutions and parts of the country; one Afghan leader famously claimed to light his American cigarettes with Soviet matches. But this arrangement ultimately proved hazardous to Afghanistan's health. An April 1978 coup by communist military officers brought to power a radical faction whose harsh policies provoked an insurgency. In December 1979, the Soviet Union sent in its military to bring an alternative communist faction to power, turning an insurgency into a jihad against the invaders. The United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others began spending billions of dollars to back the anticommunist Afghan mujahideen and their Arab auxiliaries -- laying the foundations for an infrastructure of regional and global jihad.

The civil war seemed to come to an end with the 1988 Geneva accords, which provided for the withdrawal of Soviet troops (while allowing continued Soviet aid to the communist government in Kabul) and the end of foreign military assistance to the mujahideen. But the United States and Pakistan, intent on wiping out Soviet influence in Afghanistan entirely, ignored the stipulation that they stop arming the resistance. The result was a continuation of the conflict and, eventually, state failure.

In the early 1990s, as the Soviet Union dissolved and the United States disengaged, ethnic militias went to war. Drug trafficking boomed, and Arab and other non-Afghan Islamist radicals strengthened their bases. Pakistan, still heavily involved in Afghanistan's internal battles, backed the Taliban, a radical group of mostly Pashtun clerics (the name means "students"). With Islamabad's help, the Taliban established control over most of Afghanistan by 1998, and the anti-Taliban resistance -- organized in a "Northern Alliance" of feuding former mujahideen and Soviet-backed militias, most of them from non-Pashtun ethnic groups -- was pushed back to a few pockets of territory in the northeast. As their grip over Afghanistan tightened, the Taliban instituted harsh Islamic law and increasingly allied themselves with Osama bin Laden, who came to Afghanistan after being expelled from Sudan in 1996.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Washington assumed that the collapse of Afghanistan into warring chiefdoms -- many of them allied with neighboring states or other external forces -- was not worth worrying much about. The Clinton administration began to recognize the growing threat in Afghanistan after the al Qaeda bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998. But it never took decisive action, and when the Bush administration took office, it gave priority to other concerns. It took 9/11 to force Washington to recognize that a global terrorist opposition was gathering strength -- using human and physical capital that the United States and its allies (especially Saudi Arabia) had supplied, through Pakistan's intelligence services, in pursuit of a Cold War strategic agenda.

OPPORTUNITIES LOST

When the Bush administration overthrew the Taliban after 9/11, it did so with a "light footprint": using CIA operatives and the Special Forces to coordinate Northern Alliance and other Afghan commanders on the ground and supporting them with U.S. airpower. After a quick military campaign, it backed the UN effort to form a new government and manage the political transition. It also reluctantly agreed to the formation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the new Afghan government provide security and build new military and police forces. In 2003, the ISAF came under NATO command -- the first-ever NATO military operation outside of Europe -- and gradually expanded its operations from just Kabul to most of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. About 32,000 U.S. and allied forces are currently engaged in security assistance and counterinsurgency under NATO command, while another 8,000 coalition troops are involved in counterterrorist operations. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan coordinates the international community's support for political and economic reconstruction.

In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's overthrow, the presence of coalition troops served as a deterrent against both overt external subversion and open warfare among the various forces that had been rearmed by Washington. This deterrent created an opportunity to build a functioning state; that state, however, now at the center, rather than the margins, of global and regional conflict, would have had to connect rather than separate its neighboring regions, a much more demanding goal. Accomplishing that goal would have required forming a government with sufficient resources and legitimacy to secure and develop its own territory and with a geopolitical identity unthreatening to its neighbors -- especially Pakistan, whose deep penetration of Afghan society and politics enables it to play the role of spoiler whenever it chooses. Such a project would have meant additional troop deployments by the United States and its partners, especially in the border region, and rapid investment in reconstruction. It also would have required political reform and economic development in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

Too little of this happened, and both Afghanistan and its international partners are paying the consequences. Rearming warlords empowered leaders the Afghan people had rejected; enabling the Northern Alliance to seize Kabul put those Pakistan most mistrusted in charge of the security forces. And the White House's opposition to "nation building" led to major delays in Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Effective economic aid is vital to addressing the pervasive poverty that debilitates the government and facilitates the recruitment of unemployed youths into militias or the insurgency. Economically and socially, Afghanistan remains far behind its neighbors. It is the poorest country in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa, and its government remains weak and ineffective. Last year, it raised domestic revenue of about \$13 per capita -- hardly enough to buy each of its citizens one case of Coca-Cola from the recently opened bottling plant near Kabul, let alone take on all of the important tasks at hand.

Because Afghanistan has been so poor for so long, real nondrug growth averaged more than 15 percent from 2002 until this year, thanks in large part to the expenditures of foreign forces and aid organizations and the end of a drought. But growth fell to nine percent last year, and the UN and the Afghan government reported in November that growth "is still not sufficient to generate in a relatively short time the large numbers of new jobs necessary to substantially reduce poverty or overcome widespread popular disaffection. The reality is that only limited progress has been achieved in increasing availability of energy, revitalizing agriculture and the rural economy, and attracting new investment."

High unemployment is fueling conflict. As a fruit trader in Kandahar put it to me, "Those Afghans who are fighting, it is all because of unemployment." This will only get worse now that the postwar economic bubble has been punctured. Real estate prices and rents are dropping in Kabul, and occupancy rates are down. Fruit and vegetable sellers report a decline in demand of about 20 percent, and construction companies in Kabul report significant falls in employment and wages. A drought in some parts of the country has

also led to displacement and a decline in agricultural employment, for which the record opium poppy crop has only partially compensated.

Moreover, the lack of electricity continues to be a major problem. No major new power projects have been completed, and Kabulis today have less electricity than they did five years ago. While foreigners and wealthy Afghans power air conditioners, hot-water heaters, computers, and satellite televisions with private generators, average Kabulis suffered a summer without fans and face a winter without heaters. Kabul got through the past two winters with generators powered by diesel fuel purchased by the United States; this year the United States made no such allocation.

Rising crime, especially the kidnapping of businessmen for ransom, is also leading to capital flight. Although no reliable statistics are available, people throughout the country, including in Kabul, report that crime is increasing -- and complain that the police are the main criminals. Many report that kidnappers and robbers wear police uniforms. On August 24, men driving a new vehicle with tinted windows and police license plates robbed a bank van of \$360,000 just blocks away from the Ministry of the Interior.

The corruption and incompetence of the police force (which lacks real training and basic equipment) were highlighted after riots last May, set off by the crash of a U.S. military vehicle. Rioters chanted slogans against the United States and President Karzai and attacked the parliament building, the offices of media outlets and nongovernmental organizations, diplomatic residences, brothels, and hotels and restaurants that purportedly served alcohol. The police, many of whom disappeared, proved incompetent, and the vulnerability of the government to mass violence became clear. Meanwhile, in a sign of growing ethno-factional tensions within the governing elite, Karzai, a Pashtun (the Pashtun are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan), suspected opposition leaders of fomenting violence by demonstrators, who were largely from Panjshir, the home base of the main Northern Alliance group. (Panjshiri leaders deny the charge.) Karzai responded not by strengthening support for police reform but by appointing commanders of a rival Northern Alliance group to positions in the police force. Karzai argued that he was forced into such an unpalatable balancing act because of the international community's long-standing failure to respond to his requests for adequate resources for the police.

The formation of the Afghan National Army, which now has more than 30,000 troops, has been one of the relative success stories of the past five years, but one reason for its success is that it uses mostly fresh recruits; the 60,000 experienced fighters demobilized from militias have, instead of joining the army, joined the police, private security firms, or organized crime networks -- and sometimes all three. One former mujahideen commander, Din Muhammad Jurat, became a general in the Ministry of the Interior and is widely believed -- including by his former mujahideen colleagues -- to be a major figure in organized crime and responsible for the murder of a cabinet minister in February 2002. (He also works with U.S. Protection and Investigations, a Texas-based firm that provides international agencies and construction projects with security guards, many of whom are former fighters from Jurat's militia and current employees at the Ministry of the Interior.)

Meanwhile, the drug economy is booming. The weakness of the state and the lack of security for licit economic activity has encouraged this boom, and according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, opium poppy production in the country reached a record 6,100 metric tons last year, surpassing the 2005 total by 49 percent. This increase belies past claims of progress, made on the basis of a five percent cultivation decrease in 2005. Although the decrease was due almost entirely to the political persuasion of farmers by the government, the United States failed to deliver the alternative livelihoods the farmers expected and continued to pressure the Afghan government to engage in counterproductive crop eradication. The Taliban exploited the eradication policy to gain the support of poppy growers.

Counternarcotics efforts provide leverage for corrupt officials to extract enormous bribes from traffickers. Such corruption has attracted former militia commanders who joined the Ministry of the Interior after being demobilized. Police chief posts in poppy-growing districts are sold to the highest bidder: as much as \$100,000 is paid for a six-month appointment to a position with a monthly salary of \$60. And while the Taliban have protected small farmers against eradication efforts, not a single high-ranking government official has been prosecuted for drug-related corruption.

Drugs are only part of a massive cross-border smuggling network that has long provided a significant part of the livelihoods of the major ethnic groups on the border, the Pashtun and the Baluch. Al Qaeda, the Taliban, warlords, and corrupt officials of all ethnic groups profit by protecting and preying on this network. The massive illicit economy, which constitutes the tax base for insecurity, is booming, while the licit economy slows.

SANCTUARY IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan's military establishment has always approached the various wars in and around Afghanistan as a function of its main institutional and national security interests: first and foremost, balancing India, a country with vastly more people and resources, whose elites, at least in Pakistani eyes, do not fully accept the legitimacy of Pakistan's existence. To defend Pakistan from ethnic fragmentation, Pakistan's governments have tried to neutralize Pashtun and Baluch nationalism, in part by supporting Islamist militias among the Pashtun. Such militias wage asymmetrical warfare on Afghanistan and Kashmir and counter the electoral majorities of opponents of military rule with their street power and violence.

The rushed negotiations between the United States and Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 changed Pakistan's behavior but not its interests. Supporting the Taliban was so important to Pakistan that Musharraf even considered going to war with the United States rather than abandon his allies in Afghanistan. Instead, he tried to persuade Washington to allow him to install a "moderate Taliban" government or, failing that, at least to prevent the Northern Alliance, which Pakistanis see as allied with India, from entering Kabul and forming a government. The agreement by Washington to dilute Northern Alliance control with remnants of Afghanistan's royal regime did little to mollify the generals in Islamabad, to say nothing of the majors and colonels who had

spent years supporting the Taliban in the border areas. Nonetheless, in order to prevent the United States from allying with India, Islamabad acquiesced in reining in its use of asymmetrical warfare, in return for the safe evacuation of hundreds of Pakistani officers and intelligence agents from Afghanistan, where they had overseen the Taliban's military operations.

The United States tolerated the quiet reconstitution of the Taliban in Pakistan as long as Islamabad granted basing rights to U.S. troops, pursued the hunt for al Qaeda leaders, and shut down A. Q. Khan's nuclear-technology proliferation network. But five years later, the safe haven Pakistan has provided, along with continued support from donors in the Persian Gulf, has allowed the Taliban to broaden and deepen their presence both in the Pakistani border regions and in Afghanistan. Even as Afghan and international forces have defeated insurgents in engagement after engagement, the weakness of the government and the reconstruction effort -- and the continued sanctuary provided to Taliban leaders in Pakistan -- has prevented real victory.

In his September 21, 2006, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, James Jones, a Marine Corps general and the supreme allied commander, Europe, for NATO, confirmed that the main Taliban headquarters remains in Quetta. According to Western military officials in Afghanistan, intelligence provides strong circumstantial evidence that Pakistan's ISI is providing aid to the Taliban leadership shura (council) there.

Another commanders' shura, directing operations in eastern Afghanistan, is based in the Pakistani tribal agencies of North and South Waziristan. It has consolidated its alliance with Pakistani Taliban fighters, as well as with foreign jihadi fighters. In September, Pakistani authorities signed a peace deal with "tribal elders of North Waziristan and local mujahideen, Taliban, and ulama [Islamic clergy]," an implicit endorsement of the notion that the fight against the U.S. and NATO presence in Kabul is a jihad. (During his visit to the United States in September, Musharraf mischaracterized this agreement as only with "an assembly of tribal elders.") According to the agreement, the Taliban agreed not to cross over into Afghanistan and to refrain from the "target killing" of tribal leaders who oppose the group, and the foreign militants are expected to either live peacefully or leave the region. But only two days after the agreement was signed, two anti-Taliban tribal elders were assassinated; U.S. military spokespeople claim that cross-border attacks increased threefold after the deal.

Further north, the veteran Islamist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a favorite of the ISI since 1973, operates from the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar and from the Bajaur and Mohmand tribal agencies, on the border with northeast Afghanistan. This is where a U.S. Predator missile strike killed between 70 and 80 people in a militant madrasah on October 30, and where bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, al Qaeda's number two leader, are most likely to be found.

The strength and persistence of the insurgency cannot be explained solely by the sanctuary the Taliban enjoy in Pakistan. But few insurgencies with safe havens abroad

have ever been defeated. The argument that poverty and underdevelopment, rather than Pakistani support, are responsible for the insurgency does not stand up to scrutiny: northern and western Afghanistan are also plagued by crime and insecurity, and yet there is no coordinated antigovernment violence in those regions.

THE CENTER CAN HOLD

For several years, Washington has responded to the repeated warnings from Karzai about the Taliban's sanctuary in Pakistan by assuring him that Islamabad is cooperating, that public protests are counterproductive, and that the United States will take care of the problem. But assurances that U.S. forces would soon mop up the "remnants" of the Taliban and al Qaeda have proved false. Nor did the United States offer adequate resources to Karzai to allow him to strengthen the Afghan state and thereby bolster resistance to the Taliban. Karzai's short-term strategy of allying himself with corrupt and abusive power holders at home -- a necessary response, he says, to inadequate resources -- has further undermined the state-building effort.

Western and Afghan officials differ over the extent to which Pakistan's aid to the Taliban is ordered by or tolerated at the highest levels of the Pakistani military, but they have reached a consensus, in the words of one senior Western military leader, that Pakistani leaders "could disrupt the senior levels of [Taliban] command and control" but have chosen not to. Disrupting command and control -- not preventing "infiltration," a tactical challenge to which Pakistan often tries to divert discussion -- is the key to an overall victory. That will require serious pressure on Pakistan.

So far, the United States and its allies have failed even to convey a consistent message to Islamabad. U.S. officials should at least stop issuing denials on behalf of Islamabad, as General John Abizaid, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, did in Kabul on August 27 when he claimed that he "absolutely does not believe" that Pakistan is helping the Taliban. NATO and the coalition members have similarly failed to devise a common course of action, in part out of the fear that doing so could cause Pakistan to reduce its cooperation on counterterrorism. But failing to address Pakistan's support of the Taliban amounts to an acceptance of NATO's failure. The allies must send a strong message to Pakistan: that a lack of forceful action against the Taliban command in Baluchistan constitutes a threat to international peace and security as defined in the UN Charter. Pakistan's leaders, who are eager to show that their government is a full participant in the international community (partly in order to establish parity with India), will seek to avoid such a designation. Washington must also take a stand. Pakistan should not continue to benefit from U.S. military assistance and international aid as long as it fails even to try to dismantle the Taliban's command structure.

On this issue, as on others, Washington should reverse the Bush administration's policy of linking as many local conflicts as possible to the global "war on terror" and instead address each on its own terms. A realistic assessment of Pakistan's role requires not moving Pakistan from the "with us" to the "against us" column in the "war on terror" account books but recognizing that Pakistan's policy derives from the perceptions,

interests, and capabilities of its leaders, not from those of the U.S. government. The haven and support the Taliban receive in Pakistan are partly a response to claims Afghanistan has made against Pakistan and are also due to Islamabad's concern about both Indian influence in Afghanistan and Afghan backing for Pashtun and Baluch nationalists operating across the Durand Line.

Accordingly, unified pressure on Pakistan should be accompanied by efforts to address Islamabad's core concerns. The United States and its allies should encourage the Afghan government to open a domestic debate on the sensitive issue of recognition of the Durand Line in return for guarantees of stability and access to secure trade and transport corridors to Pakistani ports. Transforming the border region into an area of cooperation rather than conflict will require reform and development in the tribal territories. And Washington should ask India and Afghanistan to take measures to reassure Pakistan that their bilateral relations will not threaten Islamabad. If, as some sources claim, the Taliban are preparing to drop their maximalist demands and give guarantees against the reestablishment of al Qaeda bases, the Afghan government could discuss their entry into the political system.

Such a shift in U.S. policy toward Pakistan requires a change from supporting President Musharraf to supporting democracy. Pakistan's people have shown in all national elections that support for extremist parties is marginal. The reassertion of the civilian political center, as well as of Pakistan's business class, which is profiting from the reconstruction of Afghanistan, has provided an opportunity to move beyond the United States' history of relying on military rulers. Washington must forge a more stable relationship with a Pakistan that is at peace with its neighbors and with itself.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Creating a reasonably effective state in Afghanistan is a long-term project that will require an end to major armed conflict, the promotion of economic development, and the gradual replacement of opium production by other economic activities. Recent crises, however, have exposed internal weaknesses that underscore the need for not only long-term endeavors but short-term transitional measures as well.

The two fatal weak points in Afghanistan's government today are the Ministry of the Interior and the judiciary. Both are deeply corrupt and plagued by a lack of basic skills, equipment, and resources. Without effective and honest administrators, police, and judges, the state can do little to provide internal security -- and if the government does not provide security, people will not recognize it as a government.

In 2005, coalition military forces devised a plan for thoroughgoing reform of the Ministry of the Interior. The president and the minister of the interior appoint administrative and police officials throughout the country. Reform cannot succeed unless President Karzai overhauls the ministry's ineffective and corrupt leadership and fully backs the reform. In any case, this plan, already three years behind that of the Ministry of Defense, will show Afghans no results until mid-2007. In September, the government established a mechanism to vet appointees for competence and integrity. Finding competent people

willing to risk their lives in a rural district for \$60-\$70 a month will remain difficult, but if implemented well, this vetting process could help avoid appointments such as those hastily made after the riots last spring.

Government officials have identified the biggest problems in civil administration at the district level. In interviews, elders from more than ten provinces agreed, complaining that the government never consults them. Some ministers have proposed paying elders and ulama in each district to act as the eyes and ears of the government, meet with governors and the president, administer small projects, and influence what is preached in the mosques. They estimate the cost of such a program at about \$5 million per year. These leaders could also help recruit the 200 young men from each district who are supposed to serve as auxiliary police. They are to receive basic police training and equipment and serve under a trained police commander. Unlike militias, the auxiliary police are to be paid individually, with professional commanders from outside the district. Elders could be answerable for the auxiliary forces' behavior.

Courts, too, may require some temporary supplementary measures. Community leaders complain forcefully about judicial corruption, which has led many to demand the implementation of Islamic law, or sharia -- which they contrast not to secular law but to corruption. One elder from the province of Paktia said, "Islam says that if you find a thief, he has to be punished. If a murderer is arrested, he has to be tried and executed. In our country, if a murderer is put in prison, after six months he bribes the judge and escapes. If a member of parliament is killed ... his murderer is released after three to four months in prison because of bribery." Enforcement by the government of the decisions of Islamic courts has always constituted a basic pillar of the state's legitimacy in Afghanistan, and the failure to do so is turning religious leaders, who still wield great influence over public opinion, against the government.

The August 5 swearing-in of a new Supreme Court, which administers the judicial system, makes judicial reform possible, but training prosecutors, judges, and defense lawyers will take years. In the meantime, the only capacities for dispute resolution and law enforcement in much of the country consist of village or tribal councils and mullahs who administer a crude interpretation of sharia. During the years required for reform, the only actual alternatives before Afghan society are enforcement of such customary or Islamic law or no law at all. The Afghan government and its international supporters should find ways to incorporate such procedures into the legal system and subject them to judicial or administrative review. Such a program would also put more Islamic leaders -- more than 1,200 of whom have been dropped from the government payroll this year -- back under government supervision.

Attempts to inject aid into the government have hit a major bottleneck: in 2005 and 2006, the government spent only 44 percent of the money it received for development projects. Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Finance, donor countries spent about \$500 million on poorly designed and uncoordinated technical assistance. The World Bank is devising a program that will enable the government to hire the technical advisers it needs, rather than trying to coordinate advisers sent by donors in accord with their own priorities

and domestic constituencies. The United States should support this initiative, along with a major crash program to increase the implementation capacity of the ministries.

As numerous studies have documented over the years, Afghanistan has not received the resources needed to stabilize it. International military commanders, who confront the results of this poverty every day, estimate that Washington must double the resources it devotes to Afghanistan. Major needs include accelerated road building, the purchase of diesel for immediate power production, the expansion of cross-border electricity purchases, investment in water projects to improve the productivity of agriculture, the development of infrastructure for mineral exploitation, and a massive program of skill building for the public and private sectors.

Afghanistan also needs to confront the threat from its drug economy in a way that does not undermine its overall struggle for security and stability. At first, U.S. policy after the fall of the Taliban consisted of aiding all commanders who had fought on the U.S. side, regardless of their involvement in drug trafficking. Then, when the "war on drugs" lobby raised the issue, Washington began pressuring the Afghan government to engage in crop eradication. To Afghans, this policy has looked like a way of rewarding rich drug dealers while punishing poor farmers.

The international drug-control regime does not reduce drug use, but it does, by criminalizing narcotics, produce huge profits for criminals and the armed groups and corrupt officials who protect them. In Afghanistan, this drug policy provides, in effect, huge subsidies to the United States' enemies. As long as the ideological commitment to such a counterproductive policy continues -- as it will for the foreseeable future -- the second-best option in Afghanistan is to treat narcotics as a security and development issue. The total export value of Afghan opium has been estimated to be 30-50 percent of the legal economy. Such an industry cannot be abolished by law enforcement. But certain measures would help: rural development in both poppy-growing and non-poppy-growing areas, including the construction of roads and cold-storage facilities to make other products marketable; employment creation through the development of new rural industries; and reform of the Ministry of the Interior and other government bodies to root out major figures involved with narcotics, regardless of political or family connections.

This year's record opium poppy crop has increased the pressure from the United States for crop eradication, including through aerial spraying. Crop eradication puts more money in the hands of traffickers and corrupt officials by raising prices and drives farmers toward insurgents and warlords. If Washington wants to succeed in Afghanistan, it must invest in creating livelihoods for the rural poor -- the vast majority of Afghans -- while attacking the main drug traffickers and the corrupt officials who protect them.

KNOW THY ENEMY, KNOW THYSELF

Contemptuous of nation building and wary of mission creep, the Bush administration entered Afghanistan determined to strike al Qaeda, unseat the Taliban, and then move on, providing only basic humanitarian aid and support for a new Afghan army. Just as it had

in the 1980s, the United States picked Afghan allies based exclusively on their willingness to get rid of U.S. enemies, rather than on their capacity to bring stability and security to the state. The UN-mediated political transition and underfunded reconstruction effort have only partially mitigated the negative consequences of such a shortsighted U.S. policy.

Some in Washington have accused critics of the effort in Afghanistan of expecting too much too soon and focusing on setbacks while ignoring achievements. The glass, they say, is half full, not half empty. But the glass is much less than half full -- and it is resting on a wobbly table that growing threats, if unaddressed, may soon overturn.

U.S. policymakers have misjudged Afghanistan, misjudged Pakistan, and, most of all, misjudged their own capacity to carry out major strategic change on the cheap. The Bush administration has sown disorder and strengthened Iran while claiming to create a "new Middle East," but it has failed to transform the region where the global terrorist threat began -- and where the global terrorist threat persists. If the United States wants to succeed in the war on terrorism, it must focus its resources and its attention on securing and stabilizing Afghanistan.