

# **Strange Victory: A critical appraisal of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghanistan war**

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## **Strange Victory: A critical appraisal of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghanistan war**

War can never be separated from political intercourse, and if, in considering the matter, this is done in any way, all the threads of the different relations are to a certain extent broken, and we have before us a senseless thing without an object.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*<sup>1</sup>

It is routine for war retrospectives to ask how victory was achieved. But Operation Enduring Freedom poses an additional, more fundamental question: Where has victory delivered us? In two short months Operation Enduring Freedom transformed the strategic landscape of not only Afghanistan, but also Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. It did so in ways that were largely unforeseen and unplanned at the outset of the war and that remain unsettled today. Indeed, seldom has the gap been so great between the clarity of battlefield victory and the uncertainty of what it has wrought. Even the net effect of the victory on the new terrorism is uncertain.

The Taliban have been driven from power and Al Qaeda has been scattered to the hills, but Afghanistan has not come to rest in a stable place. In some respects its new circumstances resemble those of 1992, when a fragile peace brokered by outside powers was about to be tested. In other respects, its situation is reminiscent of the 1970s, when Soviet influence in the country was peaking and a new round in the “Great Game” was about to begin. Concomitant with the war in Afghanistan, the conflicts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and between India and Pakistan also escalated dramatically. Taken together, these developments may portend a period of increased global conflict deeply involving the United States and significantly exceeding the issue of terrorism.

When it was launched, Operation Enduring Freedom was granted the dispensation of being a categorically “new war”, which gave its architects considerable freedom to play it by ear.<sup>2</sup> Actually, what was singular was not the war but the scale and audacity of the attack that America suffered on 11 September.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of this attack, the impulse to war overwhelmed the attention to war’s possible stability effects and broader repercussions. Once war commenced, the measure of success in Afghanistan came to focus too narrowly on battlefield gains. So it should come as no surprise now that, looking up, we find ourselves in *terra incognita*.

Useful analysis of the war in Afghanistan must begin by revoking the war’s dispensation and treating it like any other war. War attains meaning only in the context of the strategic relations and conditions it affects, broadly considered. These effects are measured in terms of the fate of not only armies, states, and alliances, but people too. These propositions inform the present analysis of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

This report begins its assessment of OEF with an accounting of the operation's costs and achievements. In *Section 2*, the report briefly considers an alternative pathway for US action in order to clarify some of the policy choices available to the US administration. *Sections 3 and 4* review the evolution of US war goals and strategy, showing how these interacted with the changing circumstances of the war to produce the outcomes summarized in *Section 1*. The conclusion, *Section 5*, relates the conduct of the war to the administration's military and security policy framework, and it ponders where this might lead the US campaign against terrorism.

## **1. What has Operation Enduring Freedom accomplished?**

### **1.1 The fruits of victory**

The outcome of the operation is easy to summarize in quantitative terms:

- A reasonable estimate is that 3,000 to 4,000 Taliban coalition troops are dead, including those killed in battle, captivity, and by strategic bombardment.<sup>4</sup> Among these dead may be 600-800 "Afghan Arabs" affiliated with Al Qaeda (out of an original total of 2,000-3,000).<sup>5</sup> Notably, only a fraction of Al Qaeda fighters -- perhaps 25 percent -- are pledged members of the organization; the remainder are foreign volunteers brought to Afghanistan to fight in the civil war under Al Qaeda auspices.
- Approximately 7,000 Taliban and foreign troops were prisoners as of 15 January; less than 500 of these had been transferred to US custody.<sup>6</sup> A disproportionate number of the prisoners held by the Northern Alliance militias were foreign fighters, especially Uzbek and Pakistani.
- Most of the top Taliban leadership has survived the war and eluded capture; many are in Pakistan and seeking to re-integrate into Afghanistan. Of more than three dozen Taliban leaders on the Pentagon's "wanted list," more than 12 have been killed, injured or have defected.<sup>7</sup>
- At least eight of the 20 top Al Qaeda leaders and aides pursued by the Pentagon in Afghanistan are believed dead. However, only two had been reported captured as of 15 January.<sup>8</sup> Eleven training camps affiliated with Al Qaeda, and many other Al Qaeda facilities in Afghanistan, have been destroyed or overrun.

Translating these achievements into qualitative terms:

- The Taliban have been driven from power in Afghanistan, fragmented as a political force, and widely discredited as an ideological movement. Nonetheless, many members and veterans are likely to re-assume a role in the Afghan polity -- some as provincial insurgents, others as members or even leaders of other formations.

- Al Qaeda infrastructure and operations in Afghanistan have been destroyed, a substantial proportion of their core cadre have been attrited, and their capacity to act globally has been disrupted significantly -- although perhaps only temporarily.

The acting assistant director of the FBI's counter-terrorism division, J.T. Caruso, estimates that as a result of Operation Enduring Freedom, Al Qaeda's capacity to commit "horrific acts" has been reduced by 30 percent. Caruso expects that the capture of bin Laden would cause a "stuttering" in Al Qaeda operations, but not necessary a "pause" due to the decentralized nature of the organization.<sup>9</sup> One might have hoped that Operation Enduring Freedom would have had a greater impact on Al Qaeda's global capabilities -- given the US expenditure of 12,000 bombs and missiles, the killing of at least 3,000 enemy troops, and the capture of 7,000 more. But most of the US military effort and most of the troops killed or captured in the operation were only indirectly related to Al Qaeda's global terrorist activities.

The Taliban regime, which absorbed most of our attention, bore only a contingent relationship to Al Qaeda's activities outside the region. In fact, most of the Al Qaeda facilities and most of the foreign troops under their control in Afghanistan had to do with the civil war there. Most of the organization's capabilities to conduct far reaching terrorist acts resided and resides outside of Afghanistan, and thus fell beyond the scope of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The essential importance of Afghanistan to the extra-regional goals and activities of Al Qaeda was *not* that it provided a sanctuary and training site for terrorists. Instead, Afghanistan served the organization's global activities principally as a *recruiting ground for future cadre*. The capacity of Al Qaeda to repair its lost capabilities for global terrorism rests on the fact that terrorist attacks like the 11 September crashes do not depend on the possession of massive, open-air training facilities. Warehouses and small *ad hoc* sites will do. Moreover, large terrorist organizations have proved themselves able to operate for very long periods without state sanctuaries -- as long as sympathetic communities exist. The Irish Republican Army is an example. Thus, Al Qaeda may be able to recoup its lost capacity by adopting a more thoroughly clandestine and "state-less" approach to its operations, including recruitment and training.

### **1.1.1 Secondary goals**

In addition to its direct impact on the Taliban and Al Qaeda, the United States might have hoped that Operation Enduring Freedom would serve:

- to deter rogue states generally from supporting terrorist attacks on US assets;
- to counter any impression that the 11 September attacks would cause the United States to reduce its military engagement and operations abroad; and

- to advance the US position in central and south Asia,

*Regarding deterrence effects:* The fate of the Taliban should motivate some rogue states to be more careful in their relations with free-lance terrorist organizations that, like Al Qaeda, might target the United States. *How this will actually affect the frequency of terrorists attacks on US assets depends on a number of additional factors, however:* (i) the deterrent effect might not extend to weak states or quasi-states, like Somalia; (ii) stronger states, like Libya and Syria, might already be substantially deterred from supporting attacks on the United States; and, as noted above, (iii) the new transnational terrorist organizations, like Al Qaeda, might not be especially dependent on state support for their anti-US operations. Finally, OEF might have other effects that counter-balance its deterrent effect: while some states may become more careful about directly or indirectly supporting terror attacks on US assets, terrorist organizations themselves may become more motivated to conduct them.

*Regarding US military engagement:* The speed, scale, and intensity of the US response to the 11 September attack certainly undercut any expectation that the attack might lead to a reduction in US military activism abroad. The subsequent expansion of US foreign military engagement, occurring as part of the campaign against terrorism, further counters such expectations.<sup>10</sup>

*Regarding the US position in Central and South Asia:* OEF certainly advanced the US position in Afghanistan and Central Asia generally. It also has strengthened the US hand in Pakistan -- with the Musharraf regime now substantially dependent on US support. And it has created a new basis for cooperation with India. Translating this improved position into long-term strategic and material gain will not be uncomplicated, however. Russia's influence in Afghanistan also has advanced substantially -- perhaps even more than that of the United States. India has driven stakes in the country, too. Russia will contest US advances in the region; so will China and Iran. America's new (or renewed) ties to Pakistan and India may involve the United States in their dispute, which will be played out not only in Kashmir but Afghanistan as well. Pakistan's increased dependancy on the United States is double-edged; maintaining Musharraf against internal opponents will not come cheap or easy. In sum: translating the improved US regional position into long-term gains will require substantial additional investments, commitments, and involvements, and it will entail a significant risk of future conflict, perhaps on a large-scale.

## **1.2 The costs of the war**

As of 10 January official US personnel losses in the war were two killed by enemy fire (one CIA and one uniformed military) and at least 12 accidental deaths. Afghan militias allied with the United States probably suffered less than 600 combat deaths during the period 7 October 2001 to 10 January 2002, with most of these occurring during the long siege of Mazar-i-Sharif. The Defense Department has estimated that the first three months of the war will cost the United States \$3.8 billion, which the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, an independent NGO, finds roughly consistent with its own estimates.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2.1 The humanitarian cost of the war

Operation Enduring Freedom was not intended or designed to be a stability operation. The Taliban regime was removed in order to punish it and to expedite intense, large-scale action against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan -- not to stabilize the country or relieve its humanitarian crisis. Thus, the principal purpose of toppling the Taliban was realized not in the inauguration of Hamid Karzai, who Washington had slighted until the war was four weeks old, but in the round-up of foreign Taliban volunteers by the Northern Alliance, the ground deployment of US military personnel near Kandahar, and the joint pursuit of Al Qaeda cadre by US and allied Afghan forces.<sup>12</sup> Stability and humanitarian goals were clearly subordinate, and this is reflected in the costs of the operation.

Although Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has driven the Taliban from power and uprooted the Al Qaeda organization in Afghanistan, substantial humanitarian costs were associated with these outcomes. These costs include:

- 1000-1300 civilian deaths due to aerial bombardment,<sup>13</sup>
- 800+ troop deaths due to post-war reprisals and mis-management of prisoners;<sup>14</sup> and,
- A minimum of 3000 civilian deaths attributable to the impact of the bombing campaign and war on the nation's refugee and famine crises. (See *Appendix 1. The war's impact on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan*)

### 1.2.2 Stability costs

To the humanitarian costs of war should be added a variety of "stability costs":

- Attendant on the Taliban's defeat and Northern Alliance victory there has been a revival of warlordism, banditry, and opium production in Afghanistan. Military power is more decentralized and has fragmented along ethnic and tribal lines. The effective power of the national government extends over only the northeast quarter of the country and parts of the Pashtun south. Many of the militia and party leaders responsible for the murderous chaos of the 1992-1996 period have resumed positions of authority.<sup>15</sup> In some areas virtual anarchy prevails, impeding the resumption of humanitarian relief programs. Although the civil war is over, civil and communitarian conflict continue in a more diffuse way. Within this there is a significant potential for the resumption of civil war. In sum: the new Afghanistan is more chaotic and less stable than the old. The task of stabilization has barely begun and remains contingent on substantial, long-term support from the outside -- although promised aid has already come up short.<sup>16</sup>

- The outcome of the war increased conflict potentials among the nations neighboring Afghanistan, who are now competing to adjust the fluid power balance inside the country. By inadvertently advancing the position of some Afghan ethnic groups over others and by creating local power vacuums, Operation Enduring Freedom destabilized the regional coalition that had supported it.
- The war in Afghanistan hardened anti-US sentiments throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Even in moderate Turkey, popular opinion ran 69 percent to 13 percent against the war.<sup>17</sup>
- The outcome of OEF has put Pakistan in an untenable strategic position and put its president in an untenable political one.<sup>18</sup> Almost every assurance given Pakistan regarding the outcome of the war has turned to ash, thus creating the basis for a destabilizing convergence of Islamic and nationalist opposition to the Musharraf government. So far, militant Islamicists have reacted to the events in Afghanistan most significantly by stepping up their activity related to Kashmir.
- The war had a contagion effect on the India-Pakistan and Israeli-Palestinian disputes: During the course of Enduring Freedom, India and Pakistan veered closer to war than they had at any time since their 1999 clashes in Kashmir. This already was true before the 12 December attack by Islamic militants on the Indian parliament.<sup>19</sup> In the mideast, violence on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide increased during the course of OEF, perhaps extinguishing completely the hope for a return to peace talks. During the period 11 September-31 December 2001 the rate of conflict deaths in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rose to twice that of the preceding eight months.<sup>20</sup>

The dramatic reversal of Pakistani and Palestinian interests that has accompanied Operation Enduring Freedom may give the impression that the broader campaign against terrorism will be conducted in ways that brush aside the strategic interests of Arab and Muslim states, apart from their interests in curbing terrorism. This need not reflect any grand design on the part of the United States in order to have the effect of being one. The Arab and Muslim world now eagerly anticipates the next steps in the anti-terrorism campaign, their targets and *modus operandi*. A near-term response on the part of Arab and Muslim states might mix cooperation and resistance to US efforts.<sup>21</sup> A longer-term response would be to work harder at balancing against US power - not in support of terrorism, *per se*, but as a means of improving their strategic bargaining position.<sup>22</sup>



## 2. Avoidable costs: the road not taken

The negative side-effects of Operation Enduring Freedom have had little to do with the real requirements of taking quick action against the Al Qaeda terrorist network. Instead, they derived from (i) the decision to focus the operation on the Taliban government with the aim of toppling it *as a first order of business*, and (ii) the operation's heavy reliance on a broad campaign of aerial bombardment. Less costly and destabilizing approaches were available, although these would have required greater patience, restraint, and imagination.

In bare outline, an alternative approach would have distinguished between (i) the immediate necessity of moving forcefully against al-Qaeda and (ii) a need to address the broader problem of Afghanistan, including the Taliban. (See *Appendix 2. The missing political framework for Operation Enduring Freedom.*)

An immediate campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan could have been limited to special operations and very selective air strikes. Such a campaign would have produced results, not quickly, but reliably -- and with a minimum of negative side-effects. In any case, the most urgent anti-terrorist tasks in the aftermath of 11 September had to do with Al Qaeda cells outside of Afghanistan that might mount new strikes. Interdicting these was largely a mission of intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Resolving the broader problems of Afghanistan might have required a major military operation (including the deployment of ground troops) -- *but this should have been postponed until an adequate political framework was in place*. Even 6-to-8 months of intensive diplomatic, intelligence, and military preparations would have made a significant difference in terms of the impact, effectiveness, and broader repercussions of a military operation aiming to bring stability to Afghanistan. Such preparations might even have obviated war or allowed a reduction in its scale.

The rush into a large and ambitious military operation precluded making adequate arrangements for the post-war political environment and humanitarian needs. Pre-war preparations should have included:

- A clearer, stronger consensus among the Six-plus-Two powers and the cooperating Afghan groups on a war plan and post-war arrangements;
- A solid, truly representative transitional governing body and process *far along in its development before the onset of hostilities* -- and with substantial clandestine links to friendly local leaders inside Taliban areas (including some Taliban);
- Provisions for a peacekeeping force of at least 30,000 troops and preparations to rapidly deploy it behind the forward line of friendly forces as they advanced;

- A post-war *cash-in-hand* development fund and plan; and
- Stronger provisions for maintaining humanitarian aid during the conflict and for expanding it quickly afterward.

Building an adequate political framework for military operations is not a matter of defraying military success or accepting military risks simply for the sake of diplomacy. On the contrary: *The lack of proper political preparation makes it harder to achieve military success and raises its cost.* It also makes it harder to translate battlefield victory into reliable strategic gains.

### **3. War in search of a strategy**

The goals and strategy of Operation Enduring Freedom underwent several revisions during the course of the war -- actually, during its first three weeks. This turbulence reflected the difficulty of finding a strategy that could reconcile the Administration's immediate war aims with a set of broader, longer-term strategic considerations -- such as stability in Afghanistan and in the region surrounding it. During the war's third week it became clear that there was no such strategy available, and this posed a choice: either the United States would have to accept the prospect of a longer war or set aside some of its broader stability concerns. Given the potential political risks associated with any long-war scenario, this was an easy choice to make: the broader concerns were set aside.

#### **3.1 The Taliban become the target**

After 11 September the Bush administration asserted various near-term military objectives with regard to Afghanistan. Among these, the lowest common denominator goal was to bring the leaders of al-Qaeda to justice and destroy their organizational capacity. For many observers this implied a carefully focused response involving special operations units and limited air strikes targeting bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan. The notion of a low-profile operation with a reduced risk of collateral casualties had strong appeal for most allies -- and especially Pakistan. And it appealed to many counter-terrorism experts and "new warfare" advocates as well.<sup>23</sup>

More controversial and demanding were the possible goals regarding the Taliban. After 11 September Administration officials variously suggested two possible goals for military action against the Taliban:

- First, to punish them (in a limited way) for their association with bin Laden and coerce their cooperation in bringing him to justice;

- Second, to topple them, both as a form of punishment and in order to open the way for a new government in Afghanistan that would fully cooperate with US action against Al Qaeda.

Both of these objectives implied military operations of greater scope and intensity than the option of just targeting Al Qaeda. Both would involve air campaigns; even the lesser of the two options -- punish and coerce -- might require action on the scale of the 1999 effort in the Balkans, Operation Allied Force (OAF)

Choosing to target the Taliban government complicated the job of building and maintaining an international coalition. A substantial bombing campaign implied a higher level of collateral damage and gave the impression of an attack on Afghanistan itself. An International Gallup Association poll conducted in 37 countries shortly after the 11 September attacks found large majorities in most favoring a legal response over a military one; only in Israel, India, and the United States did majorities favor quick military action.<sup>24</sup> Qualms about civilian casualties and concerns about the polarizing effects of a big bombing campaign fed controversy.<sup>25</sup> The retributive aspect of such a campaign also raised international legal issues. For Muslim and Arab governments especially, action against an Islamic state was much more disconcerting than an attempt to neutralize a terrorist organization -- and it added no practical benefits for them.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it constituted an attack on a protégée.

The more ambitious of the US anti-Taliban options -- regime removal -- generated additional concerns as well: If the Taliban were removed, who or what would follow them? And what would be the effect on stability in Afghanistan and the surrounding region? Finally, there was the practical issue of getting the job done: No one doubted that removing the regime would require a commitment of ground troops. But how many? And for how long?<sup>27</sup>

None of these issues or questions posed a near-term problem in terms of US public opinion, which after 11 September pretty much gave the Bush administration a blank check.<sup>28</sup> The principal problem was opinion in foreign capitals.<sup>29</sup> On this front one factor helping to enable action against the Taliban was the regime's general isolation. During its short tenure it had done a remarkably good job alienating opinion in the West.

In the weeks leading up to the war, the Bush administration exhibited an artful ambiguity about the goals and nature of the prospective military operation in Afghanistan. Of course, bin Laden was in the cross-hairs. Regarding the Taliban, however, the administration publically emphasized the "punish and coerce" option, while Pakistan attempted to convince the Taliban to comply to American demands and obviate a strike.<sup>30</sup> But there was little hope that the Taliban would or even could comply. The demands made of the Taliban leadership were both quite substantial and non-negotiable: turn over bin Laden and the Al Qaeda cadre, shut down all their camps and sites, and open Afghanistan to US inspections. Even had the Taliban leadership been ready to rid themselves of bin Laden and his top associates, several elements of the US ultimatum made their compliance unlikely.

By some accounts there were as many as 3,000 Al Qaeda volunteers in Afghanistan, the great majority of them involved as shock troops in the local civil war or as a Taliban security force. Al Qaeda's base infrastructure -- estimated as comprising dozens of sites -- also served largely indigenous purposes or figured in the Kashmir civil war. Thus, acceding to the Administration's demands would have probably meant losing the current civil war. Moreover, both the troops and the base infrastructure of Al Qaeda melded into those of the Taliban proper. Given this, the Taliban might have expected that an open-ended US inspection regime would be both intrusive and protracted. Finally, framing these demands as non-negotiable required that the Taliban assume a supine posture. A nationalist reaction should have been predictable. And this gave leverage to the hardliners in Kandahar, rather than the more flexible *shura* in Kabul.

Although the pre-war exchanges with the Taliban were unlikely to bring the two sides together, they were essential to the coalition-building effort, especially with regard to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim states. During the course of its jousting with the Bush administration, the Taliban's idiosyncratic excesses became a focus of administration and media commentary. By the eve of the war, the failure of the Taliban to do as ordered had made them a more prominent target than even bin Laden.

Although before the war the Bush administration had publically emphasized the "punish and coerce" option for action against the Taliban, it also began soon after the 11 September attack to build support among its European allies for the more ambitious goal of forcing a regime change in Afghanistan. By late September the administration was openly encouraging indigenous resistance to the Taliban and pledging indirect support -- but without naming the Northern Alliance as the intended beneficiary.<sup>31</sup> Once OEF got underway, the administration's declared war aims transmuted rather quickly into the overthrow of the Taliban regime.<sup>32</sup> What remained to be determined was (i) who or what would replace the Taliban and (ii) how would the Administration effect the change. As it turned out, battlefield exigencies would make both decisions for the administration during the first month of war. In other words: *war would determine politics and strategy would define its own goals.*

### **3.2 Initial war strategy: split the Taliban**

Initially the goal of regime replacement did not imply unleashing the Northern Alliance or completely uprooting the Taliban in the south. Instead, the United States aimed to pressure and weaken the Taliban through a combination of air attacks, special operations, and limited support to the Northern Alliance war effort. The United States also hoped to induce a split in the Taliban or create one, *de facto*, by killing off the most intransigent elements of the movement and those linked closely to bin Laden -- including Mullah Omar, defense minister Obeidullah Khan, and justice minister Mullah Nooruddin Turabi.<sup>33</sup> A more amenable "rump Taliban" might then meld with other Pashtun elements being assembled by the United States and Pakistan. The final step would be the creation of a unity government incorporating the Northern Alliance, all under the tutelage of King Zahir Shah and the auspices of the United Nations.

The US plan came together hastily in the aftermath of September 11. This contrasts sharply with the experience of preparing for operations Desert Storm and Allied Force. In those cases, four-to-six months of diplomatic work preceded the onset of offensive action; these earlier operations also benefitted from simpler strategic circumstances and stronger pre-war alliance arrangements.

Due to haste, key elements of the initial OEF plan proved to be impracticable. The decision to launch such a politically ambitious campaign so soon after the September 11 attack put an impossible set of tasks before the US State Department. Not only did it have to assemble a multi-national political framework in weeks rather than months, it had to do so under conditions of a war whose objectives and direction were unclear.

The chief problems with the administration's initial approach involved faulty assumptions about:

- (i) how fast a representative Pashtun alternative to the Taliban could be assembled,
- (ii) how fully and effectively Pakistan could be compelled to cooperate in the Taliban's demise when this goal threatened Pakistan's own security and stability,
- (iii) how easily and quickly the Taliban order might be disintegrated by means of an air campaign that lacked a sufficient complement on the ground, and
- (iv) how reliably the Northern Alliance could be won to a campaign that might bleed them white and yet not give them their primary objective: uncontested control of Kabul and the northern half of Afghanistan.

### **3.2.1 Romancing the Taliban**

It proved impossible to quickly assemble a Pashtun alternative to Taliban power while conducting military operations that were killing hundreds of Pashtuns, aiding their northern adversaries, and exacerbating a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> King Zahir Shah's office, including Harmid Karzai, felt under supported. Afghan expert Barnett Rubin's assessment of the effort made on the political side is uncompromising:

They've got one part-time upper-middle-level figure [Richard Haass] working on the political side, and they've got all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff working on the military side. And they can't find half the price of a cruise missile to support Zahir Shah's office in Rome.<sup>35</sup>

Many elements of the Taliban's domestic coalition might have defected to a viable alternative Pashtun coalition, if one had been available. But none could be constructed in the time allotted. This much is clear: there were deep and abiding divisions within the Taliban that might have been better exploited under different conditions.

The divisions within the Taliban had been evident before the war, pertaining especially to relations with the West, and they became apparent again during the Taliban's twilight hours.<sup>36</sup> These divisions pitted the Kandahar shura against the generally more pragmatic Kabul shura, which had direct responsibility for government administration and, supposedly, military affairs. The broader constituency for this group were the "second generation" members of the Taliban ruling coalition -- local leaders, veteran mujahedin, and new Taliban adherents who joined the group during its post-1994 rise to national power. Although it is a misnomer to call this group "moderate", they were no more extreme than many members of the Northern Alliance. Unfortunately, this tendency lost a potential leader when the long-time head of the Kabul *shura* (and Taliban Council of Ministers), Mullah Mohammed Rabbani, died in April 2001. If an organized internal challenge to Mullah Omar was to arise after 11 September, it would have had to be assisted from the outside.

### **3.2.2 Pakistan: between the devil and the red, white, and blue**

Pakistan had a very substantial capacity to remold political circumstances in Afghanistan -- *but not within a month* and not without assurances regarding the power balance between Pashtuns and other Afghan ethnic groups. Up until the eve of the war and even after, the Taliban were heavily dependent on Pakistani support. They also benefitted from Pakistan's porous borders. Finally, Pakistan's military and intelligence establishments had links to the Taliban at multiple levels, reinforced by personnel inside Afghanistan, who were working side-by-side with Taliban cadre. These various linkages and relations of dependency gave Pakistan potential leverage to pressure the Taliban on bin Laden and weaken or potentially split them -- an effort that might have borne fruit given six months and a more nuanced approach.<sup>37</sup> But the explicit targeting of the Taliban compromised many of Pakistan's assets in the country, requiring their quick withdrawal. To be effective, the attempt to assemble a moderate Taliban opposition would have had to precede not follow any signals that the United States was planning removal of the Taliban.<sup>38</sup>

President Pervez Musharraf, under duress and stunned by the terrorist attacks, agreed to an American program of action that essentially cast Pakistan's regional security interests to the wind, threatened the country's internal stability, and put his own presidency at risk.<sup>39</sup> Although the Musharraf government supported the operation, popular opinion opposed it by an 82 percent to 8 percent margin.<sup>40</sup> The most likely outcome of the operation -- the collapse of Pashtun power in Afghanistan -- ran obviously counter to critical Pakistani security interests: it opened the door to a potential threat in the west. Pakistanis need not be members of Pashtun or fundamentalist minorities in order to appreciate this; these concerns had a broader constituency in Pakistan.

Soon after the bombing commenced Musharraf began openly expressing his ambivalence and calling for restraint in the conduct of the operation.<sup>41</sup> Even less consistent was the support of Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment. Religious, ethnic, and institutional ties between the Taliban and Pakistan's military and intelligence services (the ISI and smaller

Intelligence Bureau) militated against any quick divorce. Musharraf had had neither sufficient time nor leverage to bring them fully into line. In fact, some elements worked at deadly cross-purposes to OEF, materially supporting Taliban resistance and undermining efforts to assemble an alternative to the Taliban inside Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup>

### **3.3 The first phase of the air campaign: a lever without a fulcrum**

Through the end of October the air campaign failed to either compel Taliban cooperation or disintegrate the movement.<sup>43</sup> During most of this period air attacks focused largely on air defense, command and control, political, and infrastructure targets as well as military bases and storage sites. What should have been clear from the experience of Operation Allied Force was that the “lever” of air power requires a “fulcrum” on the ground.

The available ground fulcrum in Afghanistan -- the Northern Alliance -- was regarded initially (and accurately) as unlikely to produce the desired political outcome, should it sweep to victory. Thus, support for the Alliance’s war effort was minimally configured to sustain their front and pressure the Taliban without enabling a rapid Alliance sweep. Of course, the only completely reliable fulcrum would have been US troops on the ground in large numbers. But practical and diplomatic problems precluded this option -- at least in the chosen time frame.<sup>44</sup>

For its part, the Northern Alliance -- probably following Russian advice -- was reluctant to risk its troops, assets, and power in vigorously attacking well-defended Taliban positions -- unless the United States provided more air support.<sup>45</sup> The mid-October failure of the Northern Alliance’s first attempt to take Mazar-i-Sharif exemplified the stalemate in the north. This, and the apparent resilience of the Taliban elsewhere, prompted a process of questioning and re-orienting America’s strategy.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the administration’s initial response to the difficulties during the second week of war was not to unleash the Alliance but to increase the intensity of bombing all around. This also increased the rate of civilian casualties and elicited a new round of international criticism. Essentially, the war effort became a race between the cumulative effects of bombing and the international disapprobation that this incurred. Still, through the end of October, the air campaign was no more effective than a lever without a fulcrum.

#### **3.3.1 Strategic bombardment: alienating hearts and minds**

During the operation’s first month aerial bombardment proved more successful in rattling America’s partners and alienating world opinion than in coercing or collapsing the Taliban. It also proved a poor recruiter for the American cause inside Afghanistan: even in Uzbek and Tajik areas, public opinion doubted the wisdom and necessity of the American approach.<sup>47</sup>

Besides directly claiming hundreds of civilian lives by early November, the bombing campaign exacerbated an already severe refugee problem and disrupted relief efforts, leading humanitarian

agencies to call for a halt or pause. Joining this chorus were Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi, and the coalition's preferred future Afghan head-of-state, King Zahir Shah.

Reinforcing the impression of a bombing campaign gone awry were the destruction of a UN de-mining facility, the double bombing of a Red Cross food distribution center, an attack on a Red Cross food convoy, the destruction of a military hospital, and accidental attacks on an old age home and a boys school. Several small villages and residential areas suffered severe attacks. In one case the intended target had been 500 meters from the actual bomb impact point; in another, the intended target was a half-mile's distance. (The problem of errant bombs continued through to end of the war and included accidental injury of the Hamid Karzai, the new Afghan interim prime minister.) (See *Operation Enduring Freedom: Why a Higher Rate of Civilian Casualties?*, PDA Briefing Report 11, 18 January 2002, URL: <http://www.comw.org/pda/0201oef.html>)

The American use of cluster bombs, which began in earnest during the last week of October, also drew sharp rebukes from human rights and de-mining groups. In some cases, cluster bombs had been used near civilian areas, leaving submunitions scattered among residences. Unexploded bomblets were even found 100-km over the Afghan border inside Pakistan, apparently the result of an accidental bomb release. Also contributing to the concern about cluster bombs was the fact that their submunitions were the same color and approximate size of the humanitarian food packets being dropped by the US Air Force: a public relations fiasco for the war effort.

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and other Pentagon spokespersons routinely responded to criticism about civilian casualties by arguing that the United States had taken great pains to limit collateral damage -- but that some amount of it is inevitable in war. On 29 October, for instance, Rumsfeld told reporters that,

War is ugly. It causes misery and suffering and death, and we see that every day. But let's be clear: no nation in human history has done more to avoid civilian casualties than the United States has in this conflict.<sup>48</sup>

Rumsfeld's defense begged several pivotal issues. A fault line in support for Operation Enduring Freedom centered precisely on the question of whether the response to the 11 September attacks should have taken the form of a broad "war" rather than a much more limited military operation - - a "police action" of some sort -- focusing narrowly on the perpetrators of the terrorist attack and their cohorts.<sup>49</sup>

A review of commentary on the war shows literally no critics expressing surprise about the fact that large-scale military action -- and, especially, aerial bombardment -- entail unintended civilian casualties, collateral damage, and other negative inadvertent effects.<sup>50</sup> What they had questioned was the necessity of pursuing aims as ambitious and broad as those that came to define Operation Enduring Freedom. And critics had especially questioned the necessity of conducting a large-scale bombing campaign that included civilian areas in its sweep. Such



disagreements may have been suppressed temporarily by the hope for a “clean war” or by the shared desire to bring the perpetrators of 11 September to justice. But they were re-activated as soon as civilian casualties begin to mount.

### **3.4 A shift in strategy -- unleashing the dogs of war**

For the Bush administration the darkest moments of the war came between its third and fifth week. Indicative of the apparent troubles on the battlefield was a sour turn in press coverage:

“Taliban Hang On; U.S. finds they are not so easy to defeat” (*Newsday*, 26 October);

“Big Ground Forces Seen as Necessary to Defeat Taliban; Bombing has left militia largely in tact” (*Washington Post*, 2 November);

“The week it all went wobbly for the West” (*Sunday Times*, London, 4 November); and,

“U.S. Adjusts Battle Plans as Strategy Goes Awry” (*New York Times*, 9 November).

While the *New York Times* perceived “Strategy Angst” (Oct 27), the UK *Guardian* wrote of the “Wobble Effect” (29 October) and more ominously reported: “Splits open in UK-US alliance” (9 November 2001).

The bombing campaign had been intensified during the second week -- daily sorties rose from about 25 to 90 -- after the Taliban had proved more resilient than initially expected and the Northern Alliance had failed in its initial effort to take Mazar-i-Sharif. But this was still consistent with hopes that the Taliban might be split and co-opted. The truly significant shift was the decision to cast America’s lot with the Northern Alliance military effort.<sup>51</sup> This gained substance during the last week of October when B-52s began to carpet-bomb Taliban positions opposite the Northern Alliance and US Special Operations troops assumed a bigger role in guiding both the air attacks and the Alliance’s efforts. Throughout the first ten days of November air support for the Alliance grew in tandem with criticism of the war’s slow progress and its mounting civilian costs. Alliance air support was accentuated by bringing into play 15,000 pound slurry bombs (the BLU-82 “Big Blue” or “daisy-cutters”) and by increasing the expenditure of cluster bombs.

In the Northern Alliance’s troops US air power found its required ground fulcrum. But it was a devil’s bargain that cost America leverage and control on the strategic level. The contradiction inherent in fully supporting the Northern Alliance military effort was two-fold:

- First, the Alliance’s goals -- beyond defeating the Taliban -- were not the same as America’s;

- Second, American leverage over the Northern Alliance would decrease as Alliance troops closed in on the victory that US air power made possible. Thus, fully supporting the Alliance meant losing control over it.

The Alliance, fully aware of both these facts, quickly discarded their promise of restraint once it became possible for them to ride into Kabul (and into power) without further American assistance.

#### **4. A theater redefined**

The sudden devolution of the Taliban and the lightening ascent of disparate anti-Taliban factions and tribal warlords, which began 10 November, was not anticipated by the architects of Enduring Freedom. This development resulted from: (i) the remarkable synergy of US air power and Northern Alliance ground troops, (ii) the opportunistic strategy of the Northern Alliance, and (iii) the unique structure and strategy of the Taliban.

The Taliban political-military organization -- essentially a coalition of local militias built around a sect -- was prone to catastrophic collapse when put under extreme pressure. Likewise, the Taliban's precipitous withdrawal from Kabul and retreat to Kandahar reflected the movement's nature. It had never substantially outgrown its regional roots or its religious-charismatic orientation. The Taliban was a spiritual vigilante group that had been "called" into politics and Kabul, but had never managed to settle in either place except as an occupying force. Its spiritual leader, Omar, and its soul remained in Kandahar. Retreating to that place was as much a spiritual tactic as a military one. (See *Appendix 3: The rise and fall of the Taliban: a note on their strategy and power.*)

The Alliance victory and Taliban collapse profoundly altered the national and regional strategic situation in several ways -- none of them auspicious in terms of long-term stability:

- First, the rapid victory of the Alliance and collapse of the Taliban released centrifugal tendencies throughout Afghanistan, giving warlordism, banditry, and opium production a new lease on life.<sup>52</sup> This essentially erased the one positive feature of the Taliban period. An immediate effect was the aggravation of the country's humanitarian crisis.<sup>53</sup> A longer-term effect will be greater difficulty in building a unified polity and resilient civilian authority.
- Second, the advance of the Alliance and defeat of the Taliban altered the principal lines of opposition in Afghan society. Rather than following a "Taliban *versus* anti-Taliban" axis, conflict reoriented along purely ethnic, tribal, and sect lines. Within this, the position of Tajik and Uzbek minority interests advanced disproportionately. This will

likely lead to a new bipolar configuration in the country: Pashtun *versus* non-Pashtun. The ethnic reframing of the Afghan struggle altered the political implications of US military operations in the country, which had focused almost exclusively on Pashtun areas since late-November.

- Third, the increased salience of ethnic, tribal, and sect lines of division also increased the centrifugal pressures on the international coalition supporting the operation. Notably, the Alliance victory had substantially increased Russian influence in Afghanistan, contrary to US interests and to the dismay of both Pakistan and Iran. Indian interests (tied to the Tajik militias) also advanced substantially. These developments increased the prospects for intensified regional contention over Afghanistan.

These outcomes were largely the result of America's having augmented and unleashed the Northern Alliance -- a force over which it had insufficient control. This policy shift indicated the extent to which military expediency had come to dominate US strategic calculation. The Bush administration first sowed the seeds of this problem when it decided in September to pursue ambitious war objectives without giving enough time or attention to political preparation. A reckoning was inevitable.

#### **4.1 Reshuffling Afghanistan**

Once propelled into national power by America's gift of victory, the Northern Alliance set out immediately to prove itself incapable of bringing stability and the rule of law to Afghanistan. The new chieftains wasted no time before beginning to conduct reprisals and vie among themselves for power. With the Taliban gone, the Alliance had lost its unifying rationale. Usually, the relative success in war of each member of a war coalition would have determinate influence on the post-war distribution of authority and spoils. *In this case, however, the advances enjoyed by the Northern Alliance had been unearned; so they did not reflect the northern militias' relative strength* -- not individually or as a group. The final distribution of authority remains to be settled -- and the pressing question for Afghanistan is "how?".

The Northern Alliance had four main geographic power bases: (i) the Tajik areas of the northeast, controlled by the Masoud group; (ii) the Uzbek area of the north, centered on Mazar-i-Sharif and controlled by Abdul Rashid Dostum; (iii) the provinces around Herat, in the west -- a Pashtun area controlled by the Tajik warlord Ismail Khan; and, (iv) the Hazara area of central Afghanistan, controlled by the Shiite leader Mohammad Karim Khalili. In each case, the individual Northern Alliance militias rushed into their home power bases as the Taliban collapsed. However, none of the militias exercises firm or intensive control over most of the territory they hold. This, too, is indicative of the fact that the extent and rapidity of their recent victory did not reflect their true power.

The potential for future conflict among the militias resides in several factors: (i) none of the areas under their control are nearly so ethnically homogenous as the militias that control them and (ii) there are large zones in which no one exercises clear authority. Already the Uzbek general Abdul Rashid Dostum is contesting with Tajik militias for control of the provinces of Takhar, Konduz and Baghlan.<sup>54</sup> Throughout Afghanistan, north and south, adjustment to the sudden change in the constellation of power has entailed an increase and diffusion of ethno-religious, tribal, and factional conflict.<sup>55</sup> However, the process of change in the Pashtun south has differed from that in the north.

In the Pashtun belt the effect of the Taliban's collapse was to atomize political power and organization, reducing it to its local and tribal components -- which put the south at a distinct (although temporary) disadvantage *vis a vis* the north. When the Taliban fled Pashtun areas they handed power (and cadre) over to secondary religious and tribal leaders. Many of these had been warlords who had come to terms with the Taliban, joining their coalition as junior partners or retiring from political activity.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence of Taliban rule, these leaders and their organizations were relatively weak. A more formidable Pashtun leadership element was the expatriate tribal leaders and former mujahedin whom the Taliban had driven from the country after 1995. With the Taliban's retreat these former leaders and warlords began returning hastily from exile in a competitive drive to re-establish old networks of power.<sup>57</sup> Relative to their northern counterparts, however, these Pashtun leaders also were weak -- having been disorganized, separated from their power bases, and denied external support for the past six years. External support for this group is now reviving, with the West focusing on Pashtun royalists and Pakistan focusing on the former mujahedin.

In the north, the Alliance had dissolved into its constituent parts, which began consolidating their influence on a provincial and ethnic basis. In the south, smaller groups within the Pashtun community began competing for local hegemony. This process in the south should be seen as a first step toward reconstituting Pashtun power and filling the gap left by the departing Taliban. Should the relative organizational strength of Pashtuns be restored, Tajik domination of the government might be seriously challenged. Another concern is that an important part of reconstituting Pashtun power in the south and east is the absorption of former Taliban cadre (and even leaders) -- and this puts some Pashtun communities at odds with US policy on the disposition of former Taliban members.

#### **4.2 Regional winners and losers**

The greatest benefit of the US military efforts accrued to the Uzbek and, especially, Tajik military factions within the Northern Alliance, under the command of Abdul Rashid Dostum and Mohammad Qaseem Fahim, respectively. Although competitors, these militias share two things: Russian sponsorship and an antipathy toward the West.<sup>58</sup> Their advance is Russia's as well. The rapid takeover of Kabul against US wishes by the Tajik forces was reminiscent of the Russian drive on Pristina at the close of the Kosovo war. Russia moved quickly to consolidate its gain,

setting up a temporary mission and flying 12 cargo planes filled with humanitarian supplies into Bagram airport on November 26 -- which is more than the United Nations was able to manage.<sup>59</sup> Along with the humanitarian supplies have come several hundred armed Russian personnel, at least.

India, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan also benefitted significantly from the advance of the Northern Alliance. Pakistan's interests, by contrast, were almost entirely displaced. The Pakistan-supported Peshawar Convention won only 10 percent of the positions in the new government. For Iran, the outcome was mixed. Like Pakistan, it is not happy with the increased role of Russians in Afghanistan, nor is it happy with the prominence of royalists in the new government. The specific Afghan leaders and factions supported by Iran -- some belonging to the Northern Alliance and some belonging to the "Cyprus group" -- constituted a chorus of dissent from the agreement reached in Bonn.<sup>60</sup> While welcoming the outcome in Afghanistan and Bonn, the Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharazi, also noted "weaknesses" in the Bonn agreement, warned against "illusions", and predicted that "Afghanistan is facing grave hurdles ahead."<sup>61</sup>

Afghanistan looms large in the security calculations of both Pakistan and Iran, and both are likely to work energetically to "re-balance" the distribution of power there.<sup>62</sup> To their advantage they share close cultural and institutional ties with 57 percent of the population. And 65 percent of Afghanistan's border abut either Pakistan or Iran. Since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom the two countries have been more closely coordinating their policies on Afghanistan. They presently maintain a joint committee on the post-war development of Afghanistan.

#### **4.3 The structure of post-war Afghan instability**

The potential for instability in post-Taliban Afghanistan resides in three systemic features of the new strategic environment:

- The present distribution of national and provincial authority in Afghanistan bears little relationship to the balance of interests and resources within and around the country. Instead, it is a *collateral effect or byproduct* of Operation Enduring Freedom. Long-term local and regional players disfavored by the war's outcome will mobilize resources and try to compel an adjustment.
- The post-Taliban balance between warlords and civilian authority decisively favors the former, although,
- No central or single indigenous military authority yet comes close to exercising reliable or predominant control over the country, which remains a patchwork of fiefdoms and contested or lawless areas.

These features of post-Taliban Afghanistan imply a significant potential for internecine conflict, including terrorist activity. Two steps that might have mitigated this potential were (i) the early formation of a well-balanced government of national unity and (ii) the early deployment of a large-contingent of peacekeepers to support it. The aim would have been to shunt conflict into a non-military -- ie. political -- process. Although the 2001 Bonn meeting produced both a new government and a peacekeeping force for Afghanistan, neither of these really fill the bill, for several reasons.

#### **4.3.1 The Bonn agreement: nation-building or “cut and paste”?**

The successful formation of a new Afghan government in Bonn was a great relief to US, UK, and UN leaders -- coming as it did more than three weeks after the surrender of Kabul and just one day before the final route of the Taliban in Kandahar. But the agreement generated substantial dissent among many Afghan leaders who had spent the previous month consolidating new positions of power throughout the country. (See *Appendix 4: The limits of the Bonn agreement and the challenges facing the interim Afghan government.*)

The interim government fashioned in Bonn essentially reflected a compromise between the predominant Tajik interests -- who gained the powerful defense, interior, and foreign ministries -- and those of Prime Minister Harmid Karzai, a Pashtun royalist.<sup>63</sup> But neither Karzai nor the other (much weaker) Pashtun members of the administration can reliably command the loyalty of all the Pashtun factions -- not even all the decidedly anti-Taliban ones.

Karzai lacks significant military power that he can reliably call his own. (The final defeat of the Taliban in the south was mostly due to the action of US air power and the ground forces of Gul Agha Shirzai, the former and now restored mujahedin boss of Kandahar.) Karzai is dependent militarily on US forces, whose continuing operations in Pashtun areas -- especially bombing runs -- have been a divisive, not a unifying factor there. So there is tension between Karzai's source of military power and his need to build his ethnic political base. And this weakens his position *vis a vis* the other interests represented in the government.

Karzai's relative weakness parallels that of the interim government. It is dependent on the ethnic and warlord militias allied with it -- most of whom are not entirely reliable. At present there are in Afghanistan at least six centers or clusters of indigenous military power beyond the reliable control of the government. The principal power clusters in Afghanistan are:

- The *central government*, which has at its disposal those Tajik militias directly commanded by Defense Minister Fahim and the Pashtun militias immediately loyal to Karzai; these together may involve as many as 12,000 fighters presently -- the majority of them Tajik.

- The Uzbek Northern Alliance general *Abdul Rashid Dostum*, based in Mazar-i-Sharif, who controls five provinces in the north and a military force of 5,000 to 8,000 fighters; he was awarded the position of deputy defense minister, but remains strongly independent -- and volatile.
- The Tajik Northern Alliance warlord *Ismail Khan*, based in Herat, who controls five western provinces and perhaps 5,000 fighters;
- Northern Alliance warlord *Mohammad Karim Khalili*, leader of the Shiite Hazara party coalition, Hizb-Wahdat-i-Islami-yi; Based in Bamiyan province, he controls a larger swath of the Afghan interior and commands as many as 8,000 fighters;
- *Burrhanuddin Rabbani*, former Afghan president and leader of the Northern Alliance, who is allied with Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf, a Pashtun leader of the Saudi-backed Ittihad-i-Islami party.
- *Pashtun fundamentalist leaders and groups outside the government or on its sidelines:* the Peshawar group led by Pir Syed Gailani; followers of former Afghan prime minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who control Logar province; Haji Abdul Qadir, former Northern Alliance council member and head of the Pashtun Eastern Council, which controls Nangarhar province and incorporates three other warlords: Mohammad Zaman, Hazarat Ali, and Younis Khalis; and, the party of former-Taliban dissidents, Khuddamul Furqan, which has influence in four eastern provinces. Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, currently allied with former Afghan President Rabbani, might also gravitate toward a radical Pashtun alliance.
- *Gul Agha Shirzai*, the notorious warlord governor of Kandahar, who controls four southern provinces; devoted to the king, but highly sectarian, he is a competitor of Karzai's for influence among southern Pashtuns. He may command 3,000 to 5,000 fighters.

The diffuse character of military power in post-Taliban Afghanistan constitutes a substantial limitation on the government's effective authority. Of course, the Karzai government can call on US support whenever it needs it. But US priorities are not identical to those of the interim government (a point further addressed below). Principally, the United States is engaged in a punitive expedition and a manhunt, not a nation-building exercise.

The long-term stability of Afghanistan, the authority of its government, the relief of its humanitarian crisis, and the country's prospects for reconstruction and recovery all depend on reversing the decentralization of military power and beginning a process of factional disarmament. Until these things occur, the rule of the Kalashnikov will remain alive.

### 4.3.2 Peacekeepers for Afghanistan: too little, too late

Under pressure, delegates to the Bonn meeting agreed to deployment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan. A military technical agreement was signed by the new government on 6 January 2002. But the agreed force is too small (4,500 troops) to accomplish the necessary stability tasks -- and it comes too late: it is supposed to fully deploy to five Afghan cities by mid-January 2002.<sup>64</sup> Peacekeepers could have played an essential role much earlier -- as early as when Afghan cities began to fall to the Northern Alliance in mid-November. And, indeed, the British were ready to deploy several thousand troops in mid-November.<sup>65</sup>

Deployment of a large, outside stability force could have substantially mitigated the challenges faced by the interim government, dampened the potential for internecine violence, and facilitated humanitarian relief efforts. Such a force might also have served to support disarmament efforts and train a new national army. Minimally adequate performance of these missions would require a contingent of at least 30,000 high-quality troops -- assuming substantial support from neighboring countries and Afghan government forces.<sup>66</sup> Peacekeeping troops might be divided among the major cities and cross-road towns, boundaries between ethnic militias (as needed), humanitarian crisis areas, and militia liaison units. A portion of these forces might also be set apart as a rapid reaction component -- a job best left to US military units and air power.

Opposition to either a large or early-deploying peacekeeping force came from two quarters:

- The Afghan militias (especially the Uzbek and Tajikistan ones) and Russia generally opposed peacekeeping forces of any size other than symbolic -- understanding perfectly well that such forces would counter-balance their power. Pressed into accepting peacekeepers, they wanted to see them restricted to the capital and tucked away for emergency use only.<sup>67</sup> Only some Hazara militias dissented from this position.
- The United States also resisted the early insertion of peacekeeping troops. The principal reason for US opposition was concerns that such forces might become targets or crimp US freedom of action against Taliban and Al Qaeda suspects.<sup>68</sup> By late November US opposition to the quick deployment of peacekeepers and the full restoration of humanitarian efforts had begun to fray relations with other international coalition partners.<sup>69</sup>

The best option for early deployment of peacekeepers would have been to have several thousand US ground troops seize key objectives *alongside the Northern Alliance as it moved forward -- while it was still dependent on US air support and before it could assert a dominant political position.* This insertion of US forces would have been the driving wedge for a larger, mostly Muslim peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance force that could have begun supplementing or supplanting US units almost immediately. The near-term task of these forces would have been to secure humanitarian relief efforts, take control of prisoners, and assist the militias in maintaining order -- especially to the benefit of refugees and internally displaced persons. Of course, this



“best option” (or anything like it) would have implied a different mission definition for Operation Enduring Freedom -- one in which stability and humanitarian goals held a more prominent position. Clearly, it also would have required more preparation.

#### **4.4 A new game: US and Afghan interests diverge**

The collapse of the Taliban dramatically altered the context and meaning of Operation Enduring Freedom.<sup>70</sup> Inside Afghanistan, the military priorities of the United States and those of its indigenous allies began to diverge in critical ways:

- For the United States, toppling the Taliban regime and shattering the local Al Qaeda organization were only the first two in a series of related goals. America’s terminal goals were to capture and imprison the top Taliban leaders and all Al Qaeda cadre. Moreover, the United States wanted those rank-and-file Afghan Taliban who did not defect to be disarmed; foreign fighters generally were to be disarmed and interned. From the US perspective, there was no acceptable alternative to these terms, which meant a willingness to prosecute them to the death.
- For our Afghan allies, however, the end of Taliban and flight of Al Qaeda meant the end of the war and the beginning of a post-war period governed by its own imperatives. Allied militias increasingly turned their attention to building their ethnic and factional power bases. In accord with this, conflict and cooperation no longer followed a simple Taliban *versus* anti-Taliban dichotomy, as noted above: ethnic and tribal allegiances became more important.

In the Pashtun areas especially, Afghan militias took a much more liberal attitude toward the disposition of captured Taliban (including top leaders) than the United States demanded. For the anti-Taliban Pashtun groups, the reason for pursuing the Taliban and their leaders was to force their re-alignment or retirement -- not to punish, imprison, or neutralize them *en masse*. In this there was a recognition that adopting an overly punitive posture might spark a protracted tribal conflict and detract from the rehabilitation of Pashtun power. (Notably, top Taliban leaders are also the clan leaders of the Ghilzai tribe -- the principal tribal competitor to the Durrani from which the prime minister and the king both come.)

At the national level, Afghan leaders responded to the Taliban surrender of power by shifting their emphasis to the goals of conflict limitation, reconciliation, and reconstruction. The new Afghan leadership also supported the capture and imprisonment of remaining Al Qaeda leaders and cadre -- but not with the single-mindedness exhibited by the United States. Instead, they gave priority to the tasks of building government legitimacy, averting communal violence, and relieving the nation’s humanitarian crisis. And no Afghan leader at any level -- national or local -- demonstrated a willingness to risk much political, human, or material capital in efforts that did not conform with local post-war imperatives.

Increasingly, Afghan cooperation with America's terminal war objectives became partial or irresolute, and it was accompanied by complaint and manipulation. This is less true at the national than at the provincial or local level -- but most of the effective power in Afghanistan resides at the subnational level. Examples of the recent problems include:

- The repeated, summary release of Taliban leaders and armed Taliban cadre in Kandahar province and elsewhere;<sup>71</sup>
- The growing opposition among allied Afghan leaders to the continuation of aerial bombardment;<sup>72</sup> and,
- Several instances in which US bombing missions may have been co-opted by local intelligence sources in order to settle ethnic scores.<sup>73</sup> Also,
- Status competition among local warlords who were assisting the search for bin Laden in the White Mountain range seems to have needlessly prolonged or misdirected the effort.<sup>74</sup>

Behind the post-Taliban divergence of priorities among the allies is the reality that the US-Afghan coalition has been rife with differences from the start. Efforts converged, however, when the United States decided in late-October to throw its support more fully behind the Northern Alliance. This convergence facilitated the Taliban's defeat, gave Afghanistan to its present rulers, and won for the United States greater freedom to pursue bin Laden throughout the land. But the close parallel of US-Afghani efforts ended with the Taliban's defeat. Since then the United States has been increasingly on its own, pursuing its terminal objectives with a ferocity that impacts some part of Afghanistan every day, but that bears little positive relationship to what Afghanistan's new rulers view as their most pressing problems.

#### **4.4.1 A failure to adjust**

The divergence of priorities within the US-Afghan coalition has been especially disruptive to the US campaign because it was premised on close cooperation between US and Afghan forces. More than cooperation, the effort required a degree of dependency on unfamiliar local fighters that set it apart from any of America's recent wars, including Vietnam. *This dependency virtually guaranteed that, should priorities diverge, US mission capabilities would be seriously compromised.* The problem lies not with the concept of "cooperation", *per se*, but rather with the expectation that a strong basis for cooperation, trust, and joint operations can be established overnight.

The change in strategic circumstances that followed the Taliban's demise challenged Operation Enduring Freedom in other ways as well. With the collapse of the regime, the immediate mission of US forces changed, exposing weaknesses in America's operational concept. The combination of US air power and thousands of mediocre allied militia (supplemented by US SOF

units) had been sufficient to drive the Taliban from the field and from government. But the combination was much less effective in capturing or killing the 50 or 60 specific individuals on the Pentagon's "most wanted" list and also less effective in interdicting the majority of Al Qaeda cadre, once they had dispersed.

Toppling a regime is very different than interdicting small bands of guerilla fighters -- especially if the goal in the latter case is to get them all. Defeating large units who are attempting a positional defense is also quite different than capturing individual leaders who have gone underground or "taken to the hills." Notably, a nation's field army can be shattered if even less than ten percent of its members are quickly killed. In the hunt for Al Qaeda, however, a ten percent interdiction rate would not qualify as success.

Two parts of the OEF force mix -- local militia and aerial bombardment -- were wrong for the terminal phase of the war. Local militia posed problems not only of will and intent, as noted above, but of capability as well. They were not sufficiently agile, disciplined, or coordinated to effectively trap or fix small enemy groups when the latter refused combat.

As for aerial bombardment: it proved too blunt an instrument for interdicting small numbers of enemy personnel on the run. Often these were mixed too closely with civilians for this type of attack. And, as noted above, the quality of the local intelligence that provided bombing targets deteriorated when ethnic rivalries flared in the Taliban aftermath. *As a result, the ratio of enemy to civilian casualties during the post-Taliban phase of the war may have been one-to-one.*<sup>75</sup> This damaged the legitimacy of the new government at a critical time and caused friction both within the government and between it and the United States.

What was needed in the terminal phase of Operation Enduring Freedom was a greater emphasis on US special operations troops, elite and light infantry, and air assault units *in the primary combat role*. In pivotal operations, most local militia should have been relegated to secondary missions and supporting roles -- public affairs among them. And aerial bombardment should have become a rare thing. Several of the controversial attacks in which dozens of civilians were killed -- for instance, the late-December bombings of a convoy in Paktia province and the village of Qalaye Niazi -- would have been better handled by US special and elite troops.

The failure to adjust US operations in line with the post-Taliban change in theater conditions cost the United States some of the fruits of victory and imposed additional, avoidable humanitarian and stability costs on Afghanistan. Why the United States failed to adjust is unclear, but several possible explanations are reasonable: The Administration may simply have failed to notice that strategic conditions had changed, or it may have failed to appreciate the significance of these changes. More likely, it was deterred from making more use of US troops by the prospect of increased US casualties that this would entail. America's acute post-cold war sensitivity to combat casualties may still prevail, 11 September notwithstanding.

## 5. The tunnel at the end of the light

### 5.1 The path charted by Enduring Freedom

The clearest achievement of Operation Enduring Freedom was forcing the Taliban from power. But this goal was secondary to the one of destroying the Al Qaeda network, which is down but not out. And, despite the change of government in Kabul, Afghanistan is less stable today than before the operation.

At the regional level, one factor of instability -- the Taliban-Al Qaeda nexus -- has been displaced by another potentially more serious one: regional interstate contention over the direction of an unsettled Afghanistan. The war also left Pakistan and its president in a precarious position and it contributed to a dangerous escalation of the conflicts in the Mideast and Kashmir. Finally, the operation -- especially the bombing campaign and the post-war treatment of prisoners -- has fed anti-American sentiments throughout the Arab and Muslim world.<sup>76</sup> For many observers there, the various effects of the campaign easily combine to give the impression that the war is precisely what the Bush administration says it is not: an assault on Arab and Muslim interests.<sup>77</sup>

In sum: for a counter-terrorism operation, Enduring Freedom left an enormous strategic wake. Indeed, its inadvertent effects over-shadow its intended ones.

Instead of stability, Enduring Freedom has produced residual management tasks of uncertain proportion. The Bush administration now proposes to handle these through a substantial additional investment of strategic capital -- notably, an expansion of overt military presence, assistance, and activism in central and south Asia.<sup>78</sup> This is what US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has in mind when he promises that the United States will not again forget about the countries in these regions. Prime Minister Karzai and presidents Musharraf and Islam Karimov may see billions in this pledge; Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz sees bases.

While US influence in Central Asia has been quietly growing for years, the post-OEF expansion of its military aspect will make it a more contentious issue for Russia and China -- not to mention for the region's Islamicist movements.<sup>79</sup> There is an irony in this that will be lost on the bin Ladens of the world: their jihad against US military influence in Muslim areas has prompted an expansion of precisely the thing that aggravates them. But we should not expect this outcome to deter them from continuing as before. They are as immune to deterrence as they are to irony.

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has signaled a willingness to deploy to another 15 countries in pursuit of terrorists.<sup>80</sup> But the method and path charted by Enduring Freedom would lead the United States into a thicket of civil, ethnic, and interstate conflicts involving much more than the issue of terrorism (as is already the case in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Israel). In such complex circumstances, the single-minded exercise of US military power is bound to produce inadvertent

and chaotic results. Moreover, it will implicate the United States as a partisan in local disputes in ways not originally intended.

The United States will not likely meet a foe that it cannot beat in war for some time. But other nations will seek increasingly to balance against a more activist US military in order to retain their own regional influence. In the meantime, the Enduring Freedom model will pose a problem of strategic over-extension for the United States. The rudiments of this problem are already evident in plans to substantially boost defense spending despite two years of projected budget deficits and a sharp decline in expected future budget surpluses. The 2003 defense budget has been set at \$379 billion. This sum represents a 30 percent inflation-corrected increase over the 1998 budget and it is 93 percent as high as average spending during the cold war decade of the 1980s. Additional real increases in defense spending are likely during the decade. However, the projected budget surplus for the next ten years has declined 71 percent since last year, according to the Congressional Budget Office.<sup>81</sup>

## **5.2 The triumph of expediency**

Enduring Freedom was also distinguished by the degree to which military expediency determined strategic choices -- such as the decision to unleash the Northern Alliance. This feature of US decision-making in the war contributed to the preponderance of inadvertent and unplanned outcomes. The US relationship with the Northern Alliance was governed by a mutual opportunism whose operating principle was: “the enemy of my enemy is potentially useful to me.” Tactical alliances are not unusual in war, of course. But the degree of US dependency in this case, and the differences in the broader goals, interests, and values that separated the United States and its battlefield partners ensured that the American victory would be neither tidy nor complete.

More than an aberration, *ad hoc* reliance on disparate local partners has been heralded as an essential feature of the “new warfare”. Like most aspects of the method of war demonstrated in Afghanistan, this is not entirely new; it finds a precedent in American cooperation with the Kosovo Liberation Army during the 1999 Operation Allied Force. In the Afghanistan case, however, the governor came off. This calls to mind an even earlier precedent for the use of local forces: US cooperation with the Afghan mujahedin during the late-1970s and 1980s. So in some respects US policy has come full circle. Of course, now there is a determination to remain engaged and police the results of such cooperation. As suggested above, however, this solution involves negative consequences of its own.

## **5.3 The ascendancy of Defense**

The decision to unleash the Northern Alliance came during the second week of the war. Some analysts have detected in this decision the resolution of a debate within the administration that

had pitted the views of the State Department against those of Defense.<sup>82</sup> At heart, the disagreement regarded the importance of providing for post-war political arrangements in Afghanistan, safe-guarding against negative stability effects, and attending to the strategic concerns of alliance partners, especially Pakistan and other Muslim countries. DoD was more prepared than State to unleash the Northern Alliance and less inclined to invest in splitting the Taliban. DoD also was reluctant to pace the bombing campaign to meet what the State Department regarded as political requirements. The turning point in the war supposedly came with the ascendancy of DoD's view, which reframed the rout of the Taliban as a rather simple matter.

The purported tussle between State and Defense has the feel of a familiar old tale and it may be true -- but what should we make of it? The facile conclusion is that political and diplomatic considerations had dominated military ones unnecessarily during the campaign's first month, thus hobbling the war effort. However, if we take a longer perspective on the war, something like the opposite appears true: *The rush into an unnecessarily ambitious and complex operation so soon after 11 September made adequate political preparation impossible -- and this bred the operation's short-comings.*

The historiography of the war holds that the Bush administration demonstrated judiciousness and restraint in waiting 25 days before responding militarily to the 11 September attacks. This would certainly be true if the action in question had been a limited one. By historical standards, however, three-and-half weeks is not a long time to pause before initiating a large-scale military campaign in a highly volatile region bordering Russia and China. Although it was necessary to take prompt, forceful action against the Al Qaeda network, it was not necessary to rush a regime change in Afghanistan. Nor, as it turns out, was it possible to do so without sacrificing important stability, alliance, and humanitarian interests. The two tasks -- destroying Al Qaeda and stabilizing Afghanistan -- although related, should and could have been pursued in parallel, each within its own appropriate time line.

While it is fair to say that alliance and stability concerns initially constrained the conduct of the war, they did so from an already subordinated position -- a position of trying to catch up to the war wagon and steer it toward a more balanced set of objectives. This proved an impossible task. Battlefield imperatives and broader strategic concerns could not be sufficiently reconciled within the chosen time frame. The results of this dilemma were evident both before and after the war's mid-November turning point. It was evident before 10 November in the desultory progress of the operation. And it was evident afterward in a sudden "come-back" victory achieved by jettisoning important interests and stability concerns -- an act of simplification that later rebounded to haunt America's victory.

## 5.4 Realism redux

More important than the differences between State and Defense is the policy framework in which both operate. The conceptual apparatus that the Bush administration brings to the current crisis combines a naive Realism and a sturdy faith in the utility of military power as a political solvent.<sup>83</sup>

Consistent with the administration's policy framework is a reduced emphasis on "humanitarian interests," international legal mechanisms, stability issues and operations (including peacekeeping), and attempts at nation-building. Especially relevant to Operation Enduring Freedom, the administration has placed a renewed emphasis on the role of states in supporting terrorism and a new emphasis on "regime removal" as a sanction for rogue behavior.<sup>84</sup>

From the administration's security policy perspective the problem of terrorism admits a fairly straight-forward solution: one simply acts as quickly and decisively as one's power allows to remove the offending actors and those governments that consort with or tolerate them. The broader aim is to "drain the swamp" (of bad actors) and deter future flooding. Within this framework the possible negative and inadvertent repercussions of rapid, large-scale action -- collateral damage, destabilization, "blowback" -- are treated as entirely tractable. The decisive application of force in defense of national interests and the presumed deterrent effect of such action are supposed to be a sufficient palliative. Residual instabilities can be managed through an expansion of peacetime military engagement. This last axiom evinces a confidence that the United States can achieve "escalation dominance" of a sort over whatever problems might arise in the wake of war.

The administration's policy framework induces a kind of tunnel vision that makes precipitous action and ambitious war objectives likely. With regard to the goals of Operation Enduring Freedom, it dictated targeting the Taliban for extinction and minimized the effects of pursuing this course. With regard to the war's strategy, it led the United States to overestimate its capacity to quickly and reliably bend Pakistan to its purposes. And then, midway through the war, it led the United States to minimize the risks of unleashing the Northern Alliance. Throughout the war it led the United States to depreciate the negative repercussions of the strategic bombing campaign, the problem of post-war chaos, and the importance of measures to stabilize and rehabilitate Afghan society.

The administration's focus on states and state actors comports well with the structure of American military power and with prevalent concepts about its proper use -- including the application of decisive force and traditional notions of deterrence. But the administration's paradigm reduces attention to subnational and transnational dynamics, where most of the answers regarding the new terrorism reside.

Terrorists are notoriously difficult to deter -- especially the suicidal variety; the same is true of social movements that are driven by visceral hatred or apocalyptic visions. States, however, are

more amenable to deterrence -- at least in Realist orthodoxy, which treats them as unified, rational agents. Unfortunately, this axiom has limited application in the case of the fragile quasi-states in whose territory organizations like Al Qaeda often take residence.

At any rate, the proposition that transnational terrorist organizations need states in order to survive and prosper is simply false. None of the terrorist capabilities demonstrated on 11 September require a large infrastructure and none require an intentionally cooperating state. Indeed, the 11 September terrorist cells were less dependent functionally on Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan than on flight schools in Florida.

What was most important to the genesis of Al Qaeda was a circumstance: the 20-year Afghan civil war -- and the Kalashnikov culture it produced. Although outside powers -- especially the Soviet Union, United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia -- played pivotal roles in this terrible drama, none sought or expected this outcome; it was inadvertent. Likewise, the terrorist activities of Al Qaeda that concern us the most were peripheral to its relationship with the Taliban. That relationship attests not to the rationality of the Taliban quasi-state, but to its weakness and dysfunctional nature.

A true appreciation of the new terrorism should draw our attention back to the "problem cluster" of which it is part, encompassing the phenomena of fragile states, war-ravaged societies, inter-communal and ethnic conflict, and associated regional rivalries. It should accentuate the importance of remedial steps: conflict reduction, humanitarian relief, and development assistance of all types. And it should sensitize us to the problem of inadvertency in the conduct of military affairs. But these issues and requirements fall largely outside the scope of Realist tunnel vision.

## **5.5 Bread and bombs**

In 6 December testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Haass, the director of Policy Planning for the State Department, pledged that the United States would strictly limit its involvement in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan. Other countries will do most of the work and provide most of the funds, he suggested, because the United States did the "lion's share of the world's work" in the military operation.<sup>85</sup>

We want to do enough to basically realize our goals in Afghanistan, to put it crudely, so that we don't have to do what we've just done in several years. On the other hand we don't want to get involved in the intrusive nation-building which would be resented by Afghans or resisted by them ultimately.

But Haass' perspective and priorities are inverted. First, nation-building is too important to simply subcontract. Second, the military and non-military aspects of bringing stability to Afghanistan should be integrated, not dichotomized -- and certainly not along national lines.



Finally, it is not nation-building that is likely to make America a target of Afghan resentment. More serious are the residual effects of the bombing campaign, which directly claimed the lives of at least 1,000 Afghan civilians, probably added more than another 3,000 deaths to the toll of the country's humanitarian crisis, and certainly produced 500,000 new refugees and displaced persons. At the top of America's post-war priorities should be measures to reverse the impression left by the bombing campaign.

For Juma Khan, a resident of a Khanabad suburb, who lost 15 members of his extended family in a US bombing raid, the calculus is simple: "[W]hoever bombed me is my enemy."<sup>86</sup> Consternation over civilian bombing casualties also reaches into the ranks of pro-Western militia leaders, such as Haji Muhammad Zaman, who is military commander for the Eastern Shura. Zaman's troops were central to the operations against the Al Qaeda camp at Tora Bora. Reflecting on bombing errors in nearby villages -- by various reports between 35 and 200 civilians were killed -- and on subsequent official denials, Zaman was incredulous:<sup>87</sup>

Why are they hitting civilians? This is very bad. Hundreds have been killed and injured. It is like a crime against humanity. Aren't we human?

Zaman's sense of alienation from the American purpose will register in the Afghan understanding of Operation Enduring Freedom. On a more intimate level so will those of Rukia, a mother who lost her five children to a bombing raid outside Kandahar:

It is our wish to have peace, but it is impossible. First, we had the war with Russia. Then the Taliban came, and now the United States attacking us again and again. I will pray that the trouble America made for us will fall on America. We hate Americans.<sup>88</sup>

These reactions should be counted among the long-term effects of the bombing campaign. But in the logic of state-centric Realism they virtually disappear. They are presumed to be sealed within a black box called the nation-state, which can be disciplined by traditional deterrence or decisive force. The events of 11 September should have ended forever the influence of this reassuring vignette. The attacking entity was subnational in origin and transnational in character. It was driven by visceral hatred, not state power. And what distinguished it, if anything, was its capacity to live and breed in the interstices of the nation-state and the international system.

Effective action against terrorism depends on a unique synergy of military and non-military measures -- the latter including diplomatic, humanitarian, development, peace-building, and law-enforcement efforts. The synergy of the military and non-military aspects of response is that the latter serve to keep threat generation down to a level that military efforts can manage. In turn, military efforts serve to guarantee non-military measures and help maintain the conditions in which they might hope to succeed. The ultimate aim and measure of success is the establishment of a self-sustaining stability -- one that does not leak terrorism.

It is also essential that we combat terrorism in ways that do not contribute to interstate instability -- that is, war potentials of the interstate variety. A failure to do this would simply exchange one type of problem for another and undermine the basis for attending to either. The maintenance of international stability requires that the solution to transnational problems be detached from the advance of any one nation's (or alliance's) exclusive interests or power position. It also requires that the resort to force in international affairs be strictly limited -- especially when it is undertaken on a unilateral or narrowly multi-national basis. A failure to abide by this stricture would lower the threshold for war generally, thus increasing the burden of deterrence.

It is in the integration, balancing, and pacing of military and nonmilitary, unilateral and cooperative initiatives that Operation Enduring Freedom failed -- and the result is greater instability in Afghanistan and in several regions of the world.

## 5.6 The fog of peace

Operations Desert Storm, Allied Force, and Enduring Freedom suggest a greater US ability to transcend the problems associated with Vietnam-type "quagmires". This capacity involves the quick application of decisive force, a reliance on proxy fighters and standoff modes of warfare, the presence of a relatively weak and isolated foe, the absence of a competing superpower, and the effective shaping of media discourse. Also important are new technical capabilities that allow the US military to see the battlefield, allocate forces, and attack targets more accurately than before -- what some see as a capacity to thin, if not lift, the fog of war.

America's recent experiences on the battlefield may give it greater confidence in war. But there is more to be concerned about down this road than just Vietnam-style "quagmires". The experience of the First World War is suggestive. The interlocking military pacts, minor wars, colonial competitions, multiple interventions, and arms races that preceded the First World War constituted a different type of quagmire: *a self-constituting or emergent one*. This quagmire had no discernible boundary. It developed almost imperceptibly before reaching a catastrophe point and then suddenly engulfing its participants. The precipitating incident was an act of state-supported terrorism involving Serbia and Austria-Hungary that drew 15 more nations into war. The resulting disaster, which claimed 15 million lives, had been forty years in the making. And every step of the journey, except the last ones, seemed manageable to the nations that were taking them. Although they walked confidently, they could have no real appreciation of the cumulative interactive effects of their military initiatives.<sup>89</sup> These were shrouded in uncertainty -- what might be called the "fog of peace".

The example of the First World War suggests that it is not enough that nations be careful where they walk in the world -- as the United States did following its Vietnam debacle. It is also necessary that nations take care *how* they walk in the world. This poses a daunting challenge to national leadership, which must practice restraint even when the field of action appears clear.

And meeting this challenge will never be more difficult than when a nation finds itself in hot pursuit of the devil.

## **Appendix 1. The war's impact on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan**

### **A1.1 Estimating the cost in lives of Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis**

This report uses an estimate of 8,000-18,000 Afghani deaths occurring during the mid-September to mid-January period and due to starvation, exposure, associated illnesses, or injury sustained while in flight from war zones. Of this total, at least 40 percent of the deaths (3200+) are attributed to the effects of the crisis and war.

This estimate of 8,000-18,000 deaths during the relevant period is based on an extrapolation from the reported experience of several village clusters and large camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The number of Afghans in critical need -- ie. imminent danger of starvation -- was estimated before the war by aid agencies to be 1.5 million. The sample used in this study to estimate deaths constitutes approximately one-fourth of this total and covers slightly more than one-half of the four-month time period under consideration. Thus, the sample is quite large relative to the population and time of interest.

Reports from refugee camps *inside* Afghanistan suggest that as many as 2,500 people died (out of a total camp population in excess of 400,000) from starvation, exposure, and associated illness during the four months from 15 September to 14 January. The facilities from which data was drawn included IDP camps near Herat, Konduz, and Mazar-i-Sharif: Amirbad, Baghe, Dasht-e-Arzana, Dehdadi, Maslakh, Nasarji, and Sherkat.

For two months the relevant mortality rate at Beghe Sherkat camp was 4 deaths per 1,000 people per month. For four months the relevant mortality rate at Behdadi camp was 3.25 deaths per 1,000 people per month. For two months the relevant mortality rate at Maslakh camp was 1.5 deaths per 1,000 people per month, but lower for one other month. Taken together these camps house more than 60 percent of the Afghan IDPs in official camps. Correcting for size differences among the camps suggests an average relevant mortality rate of at least 1.5 deaths per 1,000 people per month -- less at the beginning of the period and more toward the end. The information from the other camps, although less systematic, was broadly consistent with this finding. Applied to the total IDP camp population of more than 400,000 this rate suggests at least 2,500 avoidable deaths during the four months from mid-September to mid-January.

*Many more Afghans would have died during the four-month period among the larger group of perhaps one million Afghans who were outside the camps but at severe risk. A worst case may be represented by 2,000 families in the central highlands who were suffering mortality rates in excess of 7.5 people per 1,000 per month. However, others may have fared better than those in the camps. (The experience of the central highlands is not representative of the entire country.)*

Another 5-6 million very poor Afghans would also have suffered some number of avoidable deaths. Finally, refugees in transit through dangerous areas would have suffered deaths due to

accident, exposure, and criminal attack. The overall estimate of 8,000-18,000 avoidable deaths used in the present report assumes that between 5,500 and 15,000 of these occurred among the “at risk” and “very poor” population *outside the official IDP camps*. Seeking to err on the conservative side, this implies a mortality rate for these larger groups that is *lower* than that for the camp populations.

## **A1.2 Estimating the impact of the war**

The bombing campaign affected the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan by (i) swelling the flow of refugees, (ii) disrupting relief efforts for the 1.5 million Afghans already considered at extreme risk, (iii) impeding the planting of winter crops, and (iv) degrading the country’s infrastructure, which was already in a perilous state.

The general effect of the crisis and war were to increase the level of humanitarian need while reducing or interrupting food production and the supply of aid. It increased the number of “internally displaced persons” by approximately 360,000 -- a 40 percent increase -- and it prompted 200,000 others to flee to neighboring countries (mostly Pakistan and Iran). The war also caused a 40 percent decline in *national-level* food aid deliveries during the month of October, although this slowly and intermittently recovered during November.

More important, the distribution of aid and food *at the local level* was almost fully interrupted for 2 to 3 months in many areas. And, as of mid-January 2002, it still had not fully recovered in some areas either due to lawlessness, residual military operations, or problems of winter inaccessibility affecting perhaps 20 percent of the high-risk population. A nation-wide four-month average reduction in planned grassroots aid delivery of 50 percent is consistent with the available evidence. Based on this and on the increased *need* caused by the war, it is reasonable to conclude that the war *more than doubled the size* of the gap between the supply of aid and the need for it. However, *the present study conservatively attributes no more than 40 percent of the relevant deaths during the period to the effects of the war*. This, because some percentage of those at risk would not have been reached by aid programs in any case.

A December surge in national-level food deliveries helped avert a large-scale humanitarian disaster -- although local need is still dire in some places, as noted above. Other effects of the war -- the lost planting season and infrastructure destruction -- can be mitigated, provided that aid flows as promised and that the internal security situation does not deteriorate. Deployment of peacekeeping troops, to be complete by late January, should help, although their number (4,500) is insufficient.

### **A1.3 The interaction of relief efforts and war: a closer look**

In the aftermath of 11 September relief efforts waxed and waned with the changing security situation in and around Afghanistan. Prior to the September attacks, the World Food Program had been preparing to augment its relief activities in Afghanistan due to a worsening of famine conditions there. But this effort derailed soon after the 11 September events, as the security situation deteriorated, borders closed, and transport became difficult to procure. The bombing campaign further impeded food delivery and distribution beginning 7 October. Relief organizations sought ways to work around the war and were able to gradually restore deliveries to central distribution points between 30 October and 11 November.

Throughout the entire period, however, the war severely restricted efforts to move supplies down the supply line and into the hands of those people who needed them. And, as chaos and lawlessness spread in the wake of the Taliban defeat, the situation on the national level also deteriorated once again, beginning 12 November. Adequate levels of food import were not re-achieved until 25 November. After 7 December national food deliveries soared upward as the international community responded to the crisis conditions; especially important was a US food aid package of \$325 Million, representing about 35 percent of the emergency aid promised Afghanistan. By the end of the month total food stocks inside Afghanistan were sufficient to avert a humanitarian disaster.

Local distribution of food and other essentials still lagged behind the success on the national level, however. As noted in 20 December British parliamentary report:<sup>90</sup>

The primary distribution of food has, despite all obstacles, been delivered in adequate quantities, but the failure of the secondary distribution systems has prevented its delivery to all those in need.

According to the report one reason for this failure was that,

The collapse of the Taliban did not bring the safe humanitarian space which had been hoped for; it often substituted one security concern for another... Banditry and lawlessness replaced military conflict.

Another cause of difficulty in reviving the secondary distribution system was what the aid group Doctors without Borders called “dislocation of decision-making”. Generally speaking, relief organizations cannot uproot their local organizations and then simply redeploy them weeks or months later, during the winter, and into completely transformed circumstances without suffering some serious degradation of capability. Due to the war, population patterns and transportation infrastructures had been disrupted. And some local aid offices had been looted or destroyed.

Only in the last two weeks of December did local deliveries begin to reach adequate emergency levels in many areas. Some areas of the north, east, and south (including Kandahar with 230,000

people in need) were still regarded as “no go” zones at the year’s end; in addition, winter snows were seriously impeding emergency relief of some remote mountain areas of north and central Afghanistan. And dislocation left aid agencies less able to handle the sudden influx of aid. For instance, 1000 tons of flour were delivered by the World Food Program to the region of Abdullah Gan (whose residents had been widely reported to be subsisting on grass) -- but local relief workers were not informed of the delivery. Once they discovered it, they had to hastily make provisions for its safe storage and delivery. Usually, mud storage huts are built in advance to shelter such supplies from the weather. These could not be built so late in the season, however.

US aid officials have conveyed a fairly positive picture of how well the relief delivery system has recovered. UN relief agencies have offered somewhat less sanguine reports. Local aid delivery organizations are least satisfied. Summarizing the recovery, the public affairs officer for the UN World Food Program, Abby Spring, said on 11 January:<sup>91</sup>

Have we prevented a widespread famine in Afghanistan? Yes, we have. You don't see Afghans in the major urban areas who are keeling over and dying. But because of the lack of security, there are still areas of difficulty. We still have no access to Kandahar, because of the fighting. Jalalabad is very difficult right now. And between the cities of Mazar-i Sherif and Kandahar, different warlords are controlling the roads, stopping convoys and looting vehicles.

The delay caused by the war is most salient for agencies who are struggling locally to get the now abundant aid to areas cut off by winter. For them there is no way to simply recoup the loss, despite the flood of new aid. As one aid worker put it: "It's a shame about the timing. If only we'd been here a few months earlier."<sup>92</sup> In the individual treatment of starvation there also are unique problems associated with delay. People starve in stages. In the final stage, medical needs multiply and grow more acute. Even feeding becomes a medical procedure -- although the body may lose its capacity to recover. Thus, the demands placed on the care-giving system grow, while the effectiveness of intervention declines. There are some losses that cannot simply be recovered.

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## Appendix 2. The Missing Political Framework for Operation Enduring Freedom

The events of 11 September made clear the necessity of attending to the stability of Afghanistan - but not simply because Osama bin Laden and his cohort resided in that country, nor even because top Taliban leaders permitted them to do so. Both these facts were symptomatic of conditions that have made Afghanistan an incubator of terrorism for more than twenty years. The culprit is no one individual, organization, or government but, instead, a set of conditions: interminable civil war, a shattered civil society, and weak, non-responsive governance. Outside powers have contributed generously to these conditions over the years -- grinding down Afghan society and seeking variously to subjugate the country, use it as a springboard for their strategic ambitions, or exploit its internal divisions and conflicts. This indicates the extent to which the Afghan prospect has been and is embedded in a wider web of interstate competition. For this reason, progress on Afghanistan requires attention to issues of regional stability as well.

As Operation Enduring Force attests, it is perfectly possible to pursue Al Qaeda and similar groups in a single-minded fashion, with inadequate attention to the stability problems that beset the nations and regions in which these groups nest. But this approach is a myopic one that poorly serves the longer-term goal of curbing the new terrorism. In some important respects, the terrorism problem that confronts the world today is related to several other problems: the post-cold war proliferation of failed states, inter-communal and ethnic conflict, and associated regional rivalries. These related problems have substantially determined the character, extent, and magnitude of the new terrorism, making it a unique phenomenon. Together these problems form a set -- a "problem cluster" -- that has been augmented further by several residual effects of the cold war: the broad availability of light military weapons and the large number of demobilized military personnel and insurgency veterans.

To be truly effective, the US anti-terrorism campaign must attend to and balance the variety of issues constituting the problem cluster of which the new terrorism is only one aspect. This means attacking terrorism by both direct and indirect means -- parallel measures -- each with its own appropriate time line. Should the United States fail to take a broad and balanced approach to combating terrorism, the effort will become a labor of Sisyphus. Indeed, taking a too narrow or single-minded approach runs the risk of aggravating the conditions that germinate and sustain the new terrorism.

With regard to operations in Afghanistan, a balanced approach would have attended equally to the immediate task of disrupting Al Qaeda and the broader tasks of stabilizing Afghanistan and preserving stability in the region. *At minimum, the immediate tasks regarding Al Qaeda should have been undertaken in a way that did not exacerbate other, related problems.*

As an alternative to the approach the US adopted in Operation Enduring Freedom, immediate action against Al Qaeda might have emphasized special operations with only a very selective

resort to air strikes. Efforts to improve stability in Afghanistan -- or “drain the swamp,” as some say -- should have been pursued on a separate, parallel track and time line.

Stabilizing Afghanistan might have required a large-scale military operation in any case -- but not immediately. It certainly should not have been attempted before a supportive political framework was in place. The purpose of more substantial political and diplomatic preparation would have been to transcend the Hobson’s choice between the Taliban and Northern Alliance, and to ensure a quick transition to a strong, stable, and responsive government. Better preparation might also have limited the human cost of any large-scale stability operation and reduced its negative impact on regional stability. Giving more time and attention to political and diplomatic efforts might even have obviated large-scale military action.

Preparatory steps for decisive action on Afghanistan should have included:

- Establishment of a strong legal framework for action;
- Development of strong consensus among the “Six-plus-Two” powers on a plan of action;
- An emphasis on winning consistent and thorough Pakistani cooperation;
- The quarantine of the Afghan conflict and substantial expansion of humanitarian relief efforts;
- Creation of a strong and stable “government in waiting” or “transitional authority”
- Adequate provisions for post-Taliban internal security;
- Preparation and funding of a post-transition development program; and
- Measures to reduce the risk of conflict contagion (with special attention to the Kashmir and Israeli-Palestinian disputes).

This program of action would have concluded in UN recognition of the transitional authority as the legitimate governing body of Afghanistan. Subsequently, the transitional authority (supported by the Six-plus-Two powers) would have delivered (i) an ultimatum to the Taliban to step aside and (ii) an invitation to some of its key leaders to join the new Afghan authority. Given the preparatory steps outlined above, there would have been hope for a less bloody, chaotic, and destabilizing transition than that accomplished in the course of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The next sections of this appendix examine in more detail some of the preparatory measures that, in accord with humanitarian and stability concerns, should have preceded the forceful removal of the Taliban regime.

### **A2.1 Laying the legal and cooperative foundation for decisive action on Afghanistan**

The first step in building an adequate political framework for stabilizing Afghanistan would have been a finding by the UN security council that the civil war, the chronic humanitarian crisis, and the general failure of governance in that country constituted a serious threat to the peace and security of the international community. The next step would have been a Security Council mandate for the “Six-Plus-Two Group on Afghanistan” to stabilize the internal situation, facilitate the formation of a more effective and representative government, and end the use of Afghan territory as a base for terrorist and insurgent activities elsewhere. The time limit for decisive action on Afghanistan -- including military action, if necessary -- should have been set at not more than seven or eight months after the beginning of political and diplomatic work.

The United States and its allies would have had to take a leadership role in building consensus for this process, setting it in motion, and seeing it through to completion. To these ends, a full panoply of persuasive tools would have had to be brought into play -- among these: trade bargains, economic assistance, sanction relief, promises of security cooperation, and debt forgiveness.

### **A2.2 Quarantine of the Afghanistan conflict and relief of the humanitarian crisis**

The contact group together with other involved parties (notably India and Saudi Arabia) would have taken immediate steps to quarantine Afghanistan and “freeze” the civil war there. This would have involved several related measures, including

- The imposition of much tighter border controls;
- Efforts to effect a cease-fire in the civil war and stabilize the key fronts in that war;
- A cessation of all military assistance not related to stability goals -- essentially a ban on all military aid to the Taliban and strict limits on aid to their opponents; and
- A substantial increase in humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population in the country and in refugee areas outside it -- to be administered chiefly by the United Nations and nongovernmental aid organizations.

Pakistan and Iran, especially, would have been hard pressed to implement these measures, although their full participation would have been critical. The G-7 and Persian Gulf states would have had to provide financial support to underwrite Iranian and Pakistani efforts. Moreover, in order for Iran and Pakistan to have devoted adequate military resources to the task of border control, they would have needed some mitigation of their other security concerns. For Pakistan, this would have implied some reduction in tensions with India (a prospect that is addressed below). For Iran, it would have implied a reduction in military tensions with the United States

and some security guarantees regarding their border with Iraq (which might also have been provided by the United States).

### **A2.3 Creating a transitional government and preparing for post-conflict transition**

Central to preparations for positive change in Afghanistan would have been the construction of a strong “transitional authority” or “interim government-in-waiting” *well in advance of beginning a stability operation*. Being prepared in this way would have had two advantages: first and obviously, it would have helped to limit any post-conflict chaos; second, it would have helped limit any nationalist reaction to military operations and could have served to attract broader Pashtun support for change.

To be effective an interim government would have had to involve balanced representation from all the major constituencies and political tendencies that were willing to participate, including some elements of the Taliban, if possible. The transitional authority would have been constituted on the basis of an agreed process for electing a subsequent government. Once in place, the transitional administration could have begun the task of constituting a national army and police force, relying in the meantime on peace and stability forces provided by outside powers under UN mandate.

- Pakistan would have pursued a parallel process of probing the Taliban coalition for ranking individuals and groups who might be willing to join the new interim government as soon as it challenged for power. It also would have had the task of mobilizing the support and involvement of Pashtun elements outside the country.
- Following US leadership the G8 group together with the Gulf states would have assembled a five-year \$15 billion development and relief package for building a new Afghanistan. This package should have taken the form of grant aid, not loans, and it might have been disbursed through the World Bank -- so that country pledges would involve commitments to repay the Bank for funds advanced.
- To assist the new government in administrative and development tasks, the UN would have mandated formation of a corps of outside technical and administrative experts;
- To help stabilize the new government, the United Nations would have mandated formation of a peacekeeping force of at least 30,000 troops drawn mostly from Muslim countries -- Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia -- although NATO might have provided units for specialized support tasks. To further support the peacekeeping contingent, a smaller strike force of US, British, and Russian troops might have been based in neighboring Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

#### **A2.4 Building Pakistani cooperation in charting a new course for Afghanistan**

No nation was more important than Pakistan to the effort to stabilize Afghanistan -- and no nation was more bound to the *status quo* by security concerns and religious, ethnic, and institutional ties. In a program to stabilize Afghanistan, Pakistan's tasks would be to:

- Exert tight control over its border areas,
- Provide intelligence on bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network,
- Constrain the activity of Pakistani extremists engaged in insurrectionary activities outside Pakistan (principally in Afghanistan and Kashmir),
- End military support for the Taliban while pressuring them to give up bin Laden,
- Assemble an alternative Pashtun leadership from among leaders and groups living in exile; and,
- Probe the Taliban and the Afghan Pashtun community for prospective participants in a new, post-Taliban government.

*This set of actions implies a dramatic reorientation of Pakistan's foreign and security policy. Along with this it entails for Pakistan the possibility of internal instability and a weakened external security position, both east and west. Any Pakistani government attempting to implement such a plan would expect to face resistance -- passive and active, overt and covert -- from the intelligence and military establishments. Although the United States had sufficient leverage to compel President Musharraf agreement on many of these points, it is in the US interest to avoid destabilizing Pakistan because such an outcome would add substantially to US security concerns and to the potential for regional conflict. At any rate, what the United States has really needed from Pakistan is the type of consistent, thorough, and energetic cooperation that cannot be coerced.*

*There is some commonality of interest between the United States and Pakistan regarding the future direction a new Afghanistan might take. This should have formed the essential foundation of cooperation between the two countries in dealing with the Afghanistan problem. Both powers would hope to (i) limit the expansion of Russian and Iranian interests in Afghanistan, (ii) ensure the full representation of Pashtun communities in a future government, and (iii) prevent the emergence of Pashtun political tendencies that might seek to form a greater "Pashtunistan" (comprising portions of Afghanistan and Pakistan). US actions in Afghanistan should have conformed to these imperatives because they are worthwhile in their own right and because they were pivotal to maintaining Pakistani cooperation and stability.*



*The prospect of developing an alternative structure of Pashtun power in Afghanistan (possibly including the Taliban) was a strong motivator of Pakistani cooperation with US policy. Prior to the actual formation of a new Afghan government this “structure” would have resided in the organization of Pashtuns outside Afghanistan and in the contacts that Pakistani intelligence agencies could have developed with responsive Taliban and non-Taliban elements inside Afghanistan. Given six months these efforts should have been able to proceed far enough to facilitate the devolution of Taliban power and the rapid constitution of an alternative Pashtun coalition.*

*For strategic, political, and practical reasons a reduction in tensions between Pakistan and India would have improved Pakistani cooperation on Afghanistan. The prospect of fundamental change in Afghanistan has entailed a substantial reduction in Pakistani influence there. First among Pakistani security concerns has been the possibility that a less-than-friendly government would emerge in Afghanistan, adding a challenge from the west to the one it faces to the east. This concern could have been mitigated by achieving a reduction in the military tensions between Pakistan and India.*

## **A2.5 Reducing tensions in the Kashmir and Israeli-Palestinian disputes**

The prospect of military action in Afghanistan entailed the danger of conflict contagion, especially regarding the conflict in Kashmir and between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In either case, contagion would threaten to undermine the cooperation needed to bring stability to Afghanistan and to act effectively against Al-Qaeda. Thus, part of establishing a proper framework for effective action in Afghanistan (and against Al-Qaeda) was making some progress in reducing tensions in these other conflicts.

*A2.5.1 The prospect of taking action on Afghanistan created both the possibility of and the necessity for reducing tensions in the Kashmir conflict.*

The improvement in India’s security position that would result from US anti-terrorist and stability operations in Afghanistan created a basis for some progress in reducing the tensions between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LOC). And this might have served to counter-balance some of Pakistan’s security concerns in the west. Conversely, any increase in tensions along the Kashmir front would make Pakistani cooperation in the west more difficult. This calculus should have prompted an early and vigorous effort by the United States to mitigate tensions over Kashmir. The United States had at its disposal a range of inducements -- trade bargains, economic assistance packages, and debt and sanction relief -- to use in pressing for change.

Reasonable near-term steps for relieving tensions between India and Pakistan included:

- A substantial expansion of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) and the return of observers to the Indian side of the LOC.

Currently only 45 monitors are deployed and only on the Pakistani side. Subject to yearly review, this group might be expanded to 500 observers – half of them stationed on each side of the LOC. Among their tasks would be the monitoring of cross-border movements by insurgents. And the United States could provide substantial technical assistance to UNMOGIP.

- Fuller implementation and extension of the confidence-building measures that the two countries have already agreed to adopt -- for instance, expansion of the “no fly zone” around the LOC and lower thresholds for notification of troop movements.
- For the duration of the Afghan crisis the two countries should have been urged to reduce or pull-back a portion of the heavy weapons that they deploy along or near the LOC. Each side might admit monitors from the other to verify this process. The expanded UNMOGIP group might also play a role monitoring this partial withdrawal.
- Progress in Afghanistan might create a basis for a further reduction in India-Pakistan tensions. The prospect for this resides in the likelihood that the flow of outside militants (Pakistani extremists trained in Afghanistan) into India’s portion of Kashmir could be significantly reduced or even halted entirely. In this light, India might be induced to seek a cease-fire with insurgents indigenous to Kashmir and begin serious negotiations with them regarding increased local autonomy.

**A2.5.2** *The prospect of taking action on Afghanistan also created a necessity for a US re-engagement with the Middle East peace process.*

The United States is deeply implicated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict whether or not it chooses to involve itself actively as a “peace broker”. This is true by virtue of the very substantial military assistance it provides Israel. The course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the US role in it acts as a lens through which the Arab and Muslim world judges the US campaign on terrorism. Progress in the peace process would encourage Arab and Muslim cooperation in broader efforts against terrorism and help dispel the notion that the United States is engaged in a crusade against Islam or a “clash of civilizations” (as bin Laden would like the world to believe). Conversely, a deterioration in the mideast situation undermines cooperation with Arab and Muslim states in a variety of areas.

Developing a wise and productive policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires that the United States resist and discourage false analogies between this conflict and the broader campaign against terrorism. Although the Palestinian Authority bears responsibility for failing to act decisively against terrorist elements within the Palestinian community, the broader context of this failure is one in which both sides have acted, in different ways, reprehensibly. Both sides have real and substantial concerns and grievances. But neither side can rightfully justify its actions in terms of the behavior of the other: terrorism is simply inexcusable; so are gross violations of human rights.

To intervene decisively against the actions of only one side in the Mideast conflict would be wrong and unwise. Likewise, to simply subsume the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (or allow it to be subsumed) within the framework of the campaign against global terrorism would distort the meaning both. (Not least among the differences relevant to US and western interests is that Palestinian terrorism is not globalized in the way that the actions of Al Qaeda and its affiliates have been.) This, and the needs of the broader campaign against terrorism, argue for maintaining an even hand in the middle east.

- Minimum US objectives with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should have been to induce the parties to enact a cease-fire and exercise extraordinary restraint in the event of violations. *To support the cease-fire, the United States should have insisted on immediate implementation of the provisions of the Mitchell Commission Report regarding the deployment of monitors.*
- The United States should have expected from the Palestinian Authority determined and aggressive action against terrorists. It should have expected from Israel an end to the practices of “targeted killing” (ie. assassination), collective punishment, and re-occupations.
- Finally, the United States should have pressed for an immediate resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations within the already established framework of the Oslo accord and subsequent agreements. The American position should be that the conduct of negotiations is not conditional; it is not a “reward” or “punishment” for the behavior of either side.

### **Appendix 3. The rise and fall of the Taliban: a note on their strategy and power**

The Taliban military coalition comprised (i) Taliban members proper (including long-time veterans and new adherents), (ii) warlord (former mujahedin) and tribal contingents, (iii) seasonal village conscripts, (iv) foreign forces.

- The veteran core of the Taliban may have been no larger than 2,000-3,000 personnel; new (post 1995) adherents may have numbered another 6,000-8,000.
- Warlord, tribal, and conscripted indigenous troops probably comprised an additional 20,000-25,000 troops; these troops constituted the soft outer shell of the Taliban coalition, likely to defect or desert under pressure.
- Finally, foreign volunteers probably numbered 8-12,000. These included 5-7000 Pakistanis, 1,500-2,000 Chechens and members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and no more than 2-3,000 foreign fighters imported by the Al Qaeda network -- mostly Arabs. Among the troops controlled by Al Qaeda only hundreds were likely core Al Qaeda members, distinguished by having signed a *bayat* or oath of allegiance to the jihad as defined by bin Laden.

Among the Taliban adherents, the most important were the veteran cadre from Kandahar and surrounding provinces: these were the glue or the “solder” that held the Taliban coalition together. But the “soldering agent” in their rise to power was momentum, which they gained through their early victories and the promise of a return to peace and order that the Taliban embodied. This mobilized former students of the madrassahs on a broader basis, brought in new recruits, and helped sway Pashtun warlords and tribal leaders to join the coalition. The support of commercial trading interests and Pakistan also was essential to building Taliban power.

Reinforcing the power of the Taliban were the foreign volunteers, the largest group being Pakistanis, who served as cannon fodder. Of course, the most important group of foreign fighters were the Afghan Arabs (organized through the al-Qaeda network) who combined dedication, experience, and relative fighting prowess.

#### **A1. The dilemma of Taliban success**

The Taliban accomplished what none of their mujahedin predecessors could: the relatively rapid unification of most of Afghanistan. This they did through a combination of (i) religious discipline and fervor, (ii) mobilization of a grassroots constituency (ie. village religious leaders and students) that cut across many divisions of tribe and locality in the Pashtun belt, and (iii) one genuinely popular program plank: the restoration of law and order.

Many core Taliban leaders had been young members of the mujahedin militias during the time of the anti-Soviet war -- especially the more traditionalist Islamic parties, Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami and Younis Khalis' faction of Hisb-e-Islami. Within these they were distinguished by their religious devotion and training. What gave the Taliban initial organizational and ideological coherence was their common training in a few of the Pakistani madrassas. What shaped their identity as a movement was the experience of the post-Soviet civil war, during which the militias of the earlier period sank into political opportunism, banditry, and tribal strife. This motivated the Taliban founders to organize a campaign of unification and purification from below. And their role as local religious leaders, teachers, and students put them in a good position to mobilize support -- at least in the Pashtun tribal areas of the south and southeast.

The qualities that made the Taliban a successful social-military movement in the Pashtun areas -- their grassroots orientation and religious discipline -- did not serve them as well when they moved farther north. Nor did it serve them (or anyone) well in the administration of government. For the Taliban the essence of government was the promulgation and enforcement of Sharia. And so nothing functioned nearly so well in the Taliban government as the Ministry for the Enforcement of Virtue and Suppression of Vice.

The expansion of Taliban territorial control and the need to balance the requirements of war and governance also posed a classical problem of over-extension for the regime. This was exacerbated by the regime's failure to open the ranks of leadership. Throughout the period of its rule, the Taliban regime remained overly dependent on a small core of Pashtun cadre, especially from the vicinity of Kandahar. These it circulated endlessly between two broad tasks or fronts: the military front in the north and the "internal front," which involved maintaining Sharia (and Taliban power) everywhere else. In this context, the Taliban embrace of bin Laden -- and his resources -- makes a modicum of sense. Al Qaeda may have brought as many 3,000 foreigners into Afghanistan and these the Taliban used everywhere: as shock troops, as military trainers, as "virtue police", and as leadership bodyguards.

## **A2. Air power and the disappearing Taliban**

The US military campaign dramatically increased the dilemma of the Taliban leadership as it sought to maintain its military front in the north and control of the population elsewhere. Bombing disrupted leadership and social control functions in the cities and it attrited the Taliban's core, which included no more than 5,000 Taliban veteran and Al Qaeda cadre. Nonetheless, throughout October the Taliban seemed able to manage this challenge, with the aim of surviving until winter conditions would ease the pressure on the military front and impede the bombing campaign. The beginning of the end for the Taliban came in early November when the United States more fully synchronized its military efforts with those of the Northern Alliance. The resulting synergy was something the Taliban could not withstand -- at least not in frontal battle.

The synergy of US air power and Northern Alliance ground troops (guided and assisted by US special operations forces) broke the Taliban defensive positions outside Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul in two steps:

- First, air power tore gaps in the Taliban defensive line, which were widened by group defections. The Taliban regularly rotated and redeployed troops at the front with the aim of filling gaps and maintaining morale. However, their capacity to reinforce diminished with time, while the pace and intensity of US aerial bombardment increased.
- Second, Northern Alliance troops exploited the growing gaps in the Taliban line to attack the flanks and rear of Taliban positions, which broke the morale of Taliban troops and induced panic, at least locally.

When these tactics are applied effectively, an opponent finds it difficult to withdraw in an orderly fashion. The goal for the attacking ground force is to maintain the engagement until the defending force disintegrates and flees, at which point it is easier to interdict it (from the air) or overtake and capture or destroy it on the ground. In the case of the battles of Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul, it seems the Taliban had enough presence of mind to foresee the inevitable and begin withdrawing select troops and cadre before their lines collapsed completely under pressure.

The dissolution of the Taliban involved:

- the defection or desertion of allied troops,
- the intentional withdrawal of Taliban cadre and high-value foreign troops,
- the release of local Taliban adherents and conscripts, and
- the abject abandonment of Pakistani seasonal volunteers.

Thus, when the Taliban forces finally and fully quit their positions, it gave the appearance of their having simply disappeared. The Northern Alliance forces were not perceptive, vigorous, or agile enough to overtake those Taliban units that departed in order. Nor was US air power able to detect and fully interdict their movement. There was only so much that 100 tactical fighters could do over a country the size of Texas, especially given that most were based 700+ miles from the battle areas.

This pattern was repeated throughout Pashtun areas that the Taliban had decided to surrender. But the disposition of the released and retreating Taliban troops was quite different in the north and the south of the country. In the south, those Taliban who did not retreat to Kandahar were able to melt into their surroundings. This process was evident in Jalalabad, for instance, where former mujahedin leader Younis Khalis negotiated the turnover of the city from the Taliban. The Taliban leadership fled the area, but lower-level Taliban fighters with local ties remained

behind, many presumably joining Khalis' militia. Khalis' had headed one the traditionalist parties during the anti-Soviet war -- a faction of Hisb-e-Islami -- with strong Pashtun tribal connections. Mullah Omar, among other Taliban leaders, had been a member of this faction. Khalis had allied himself at different points in the past with both the Taliban and the Rabbani government. Now he claims independence from both.

In the north, those Taliban coalition troops left behind could not easily re-integrate locally. This was especially true for Pakistanis and Arabs. Many were pursued into Mazar-i-Sharif, Konduz, Khanabad, and Taloqan, surrounded, pummeled by US power, and killed or captured. More than 800 Taliban coalition troops were killed in reprisals or after capture.

### **A3. What were the Taliban thinking?**

More than a tactical military retreat, the Taliban had executed a strategic withdrawal and reorientation during the second week of November, relinquishing any pretense to power in three-quarters of the area previously under their control. In essence, when they withdrew their core cadre, they removed the solder that held their political-military coalition together. Their apparent strategy was to reconstitute with their best fighters in and around their home areas in the south, where they might conduct a combination of positional defense and guerilla warfare. The Taliban also effected a separation from most of the Al Qaeda care, many of whom took refuge in the Tora Bora fortified base near Jalalabad, about 350 miles from Kandahar.

Retreating armies usually try to fall back on their lines of supply, if they can, and return to their base areas, where their control and support is (presumably) greatest. This is what the Taliban attempted, although in their case they sought principally to fall back on their lines of *political power*.

The Taliban's rapid divestiture of power also followed the logic of Afghan tribal warfare. The Taliban might have hoped that their surrender of the capital and retreat to their provincial base, together with their separation from Al Qaeda, would satisfy the war objectives of their opponents. In the Afghan way of war, such an accommodation might permit the re-integration of the Taliban as a provincial party.

But these stratagems were flawed for several reasons:

- First, the United States did not operate within the logic of tribal warfare; it sought the complete destruction of the Taliban as a force in Afghan society, including the southern provinces. Moreover, their separation from bin Laden did not matter: the Taliban had been virtually identified with Al Qaeda in the US war discourse since shortly after the war began. The US mission was no longer simply to pressure, split, or topple them, but to destroy them.

The “logic of tribal warfare” is not as alien to the West as it might first seem. Something like it prevailed in superpower military relations during the cold war, when the prospect of protracted, indecisive, and highly-destructive warfare between two blocs dictated limited means and objectives. Of course, the logic that might prevail between two superpowers or between two tribes does not apply in a contest between the world’s sole superpower and one of the poorest states on earth -- especially if the former is able to prosecute war from a fairly safe distance. The Taliban grossly underestimated the effective imbalance between their military capabilities and those of the United States. But this was not simply a matter of their having deficient powers of calculation. As the leading faction of the Taliban leadership perceived the contest, it involved the core interests and values of their movement, which they could not surrender without a fight.

- Second, the Taliban’s retreat to the south and their adoption of a positional defense made the job of US air power easier. Although retreat allowed the Taliban to concentrate its best assets in the defense of a much smaller area, it also allowed the United States to better concentrate its air power. Moreover, Kandahar is much closer than Kabul and Afghanistan’s northern towns to the Arabian sea. This implies shorter flight times for America’s carrier-based combat aircraft, which translates into more sorties, bigger weapon payloads, or more time (and flexibility) over target areas. Clearly, the Taliban’s strategic retreat did not solve the problem posed by US air power.
- Finally, the Taliban underestimated the effect of their retreat on their political authority. The growth of Taliban power had been based on two things: a core of disciplined, dedicated cadre and forward momentum. But just as forward momentum had served as a “soldering agent” during their rise, defeat and retreat acted as a solvent during their decline. They could not reconstitute their power in the south, not even with their best cadre, because the fact of their having had to retreat transformed political conditions in the south: It robbed them of their charisma and authority.

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## **Appendix 4. The limits of the Bonn agreement and the challenges facing the interim government**

Four groups of Afghan representatives attended the nine-day meeting Bonn, which began 27 November 2001. The Northern Alliance and the “Rome Group” (royalists) were allocated 11 delegates each. The Pakistan-supported “Peshawar Group” and the Iranian “Cyprus Group” were allowed five delegates each. The outcome was an interim government with the Northern Alliance holding 17 portfolios; the Rome group, nine; and the Peshawar group, three; and the Cyprus group, none. Ethnicity cuts across the groups so that ethnic Pashtuns hold eleven positions; ethnic Tajiks, eight; ethnic Hazaras, five; ethnic Uzbeks, three; and other smaller groups, three. The ethnic mix of the Afghan population is Pashtun 38%, Tajik 25%, Uzbek 6%, and Hazara 19%.

The distribution of portfolios somewhat under-represented Pashtuns and Hazaras, and over-represented Tajiks and Uzbeks. Harmid Karzai, a Pashtun, was chosen as Prime Minister. The next three most powerful portfolios -- defense, foreign affairs, and the interior -- went to Tajiks. On balance, this outcome tilts in favor of the Tajiks. But a more serious issue concerns the strength of connection between the representatives chosen in Bonn and the Afghan ethnic communities and organizations they supposedly represent. In this regard, several gaps are evident.

First, the interim government essentially represents a coalition between the Northern Alliance -- especially its Tajik component -- and Pashtun royalists (who command little in the way of organization on the ground inside Afghanistan). The Rome group does not exercise anywhere near the amount of influence among Afghans, their parties, militias, or tribal groups as it did in Bonn. Thus, the government will have to work hard to deepen its connection to Pashtun communities and organizations inside Afghanistan. A particular challenge will be to win over the many organizations and groups of Pashtun ex-Mujahedin, who are not well-represented in the government, and Taliban sympathizers, who are not represented at all. Although Karzai seems well-equipped for the position of Prime Minister, it is no secret that he was not the meeting’s first choice. He was boosted by the United Nations and United States. Thus, the government will have to work hard to allay suspicions of US and Tajik domination.

Second, the government’s composition seems generally to have disappointed a number of influential militia commanders or warlords inside Afghanistan, several of whom presently act as *de facto* provincial governors. To varying extents they feel that their interests, organizations, or ethnic groups are not sufficiently represented in the government. This problem involves leaders who as a group control at least 40 percent of Afghanistan’s provinces and command a significant majority of the forces formerly at the disposal of the Northern Alliance. Indeed, among indigenous forces, only the Tajik militias of the northeast and Karzai’s modest forces seem to be fully at the government’s disposal. (Indigenous action against the Taliban in the Kandahar region depended mostly on the forces of the notorious warlord Gul Agha Shirzai, who now controls the

area; His support of the Kabul government is contingent and unreliable.) This suggests an incipient “civil-military gap” like the one that capsized the 1992 effort to form a government of national unity.

The tension between the central government and the militia chiefs evinces a structural problem: military power in Afghanistan is relatively independent of civilian authority. The immediate practical problem is that the government presently has insufficient means to enforce its will against the militia chiefs or compel a transformation in the relationship between civilian authority and military power. The option of calling on US air power to do the job poses problems for government legitimacy. Further complicating the issue is the fact that Afghanistan is presently in a process of state formation and the existing interim government is in the process of building legitimacy. It is not yet truly representative of the Afghan nation, as its “interim” nature and its principal mission -- to build toward a national tribal assembly -- attest.

To build legitimacy Afghanistan’s new government must stand above internecine conflict, act as a fair broker among competing interests, pursue a process of political inclusion, and facilitate programs of relief and reconstruction. Given sufficient resources, the new prime minister may be able to defuse conflict potentials and draw most dissenters into the political process. But the roster of complaint that faces the new government at its outset is daunting:

- Among those who are dissatisfied with the Bonn outcome are the Uzbek leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostum (based in Mazar-i-Sharif); the independent-minded Tajik warlord Ismail Khan (based in Herat); and Mohammad Karim Khalili, leader of the Shiite Hazara party coalition, Hizb-Wahdat-i-Islami-yi, who is based in Bamiyan province. These three firmly control 11 of Afghanistan’s 32 provinces and command a significant majority of the Northern Alliance fighters.
- The former president and leader of the Northern Alliance, Burhanuddin Rabbani, also feels alienated from the interim government and is forming a new party to contest for power. Although he has few fighters at his command, he is allied with another dissident member of the Northern Alliance, Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf, a Pashtun leader of the Saudi-backed Ittihad-i-Islami party.
- As noted above, the outcome of the Bonn meeting was not very rewarding or satisfying for either the Pakistan-backed “Peshawar group” or the Iran-backed “Cyprus group”. The Peshawar group, formed after the war began at a meeting of 1,000 exiled Pashtun leaders, is led by the Sufi religious leader and royalist Pir Syed Gailani, who in the past has served frequently as a unifying figure for disparate mujahedin groups. Gailani, says that the Cabinet does not fairly represent those who fought the Soviet occupation of the 1980s.
- Among the Iranian-backed Cyprus group is the Pashtun radical Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his faction of Hizb-i-Islami. Once the favorite of Pakistan and the CIA, Hekmatyar had been the chief opponent of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masoud in the

Afghan civil war, until he was driven out of the country by the Taliban. The Cyprus group won no positions in the new government, which Hekmatyar regards as a Tajik and US-dominated confection. His supporters currently control Logar province in Afghanistan.

- Haji Abdul Qadir, former Northern Alliance council member and present head of the Pashtun Eastern Council walked out of the Bonn meeting, claiming that Pashtun interests were under-represented. He is the brother of Abdul Haq, who had been slain by the Taliban on 26 October 2001 while trying to organize resistance inside Afghanistan. Before his assassination, Abdul Haq had been favored by the United States as a potential post-Taliban leader of the Afghani Pashtuns.

The Eastern Council (or *shura*) controls the city of Jalalabad and the surrounding province of Nangarhar. Besides Abdul Qadir, it incorporates three important warlords: Mohammad Zaman, Hazarat Ali, and Younis Khalis. Khalis, who once headed a faction of Hizb-i-Islami, maintained good relations with the Taliban and Pashtun tribal leaders throughout the Taliban period. Thus, the Eastern Council has the distinction of combining elements close to the Northern Alliance, the Taliban, Pashtun tribal leaders, and pre-Taliban Pashtun Islamists.

- A party with ten former Taliban ministers, deputy ministers, and high officials is also contending for influence outside the present government. Most members of the group come from Logar, Paktia, Nangahar, and Paktika provinces in eastern Afghanistan. Having been the object of Pakistani efforts during the war to foment a coup by “moderate” Taliban -- which were ended abruptly when hardliners murdered Abdul Haq - - the group defected to Pakistan in early December. They have revived an old Islamist party, Khuddamul Furqan, with the aim, they say, of countering northern domination of the new Afghanistan. Most of the defectors had been members of the mujahedin party Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami during the anti-Soviet war. As their leader they have chosen a widely respected Afghan religious leader, Pir Ahmad Amin Mojaddedi, who has lived in exile in Pakistan since the 1980s.

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## Notes

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Apart from official reports, there are good accounts by leading participants and eyewitnesses of numerous battle deaths, among these: reports of up to 500 Taliban killed in battles leading to the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, 85 Taliban killed in the bombardment of the village of Dar-e Suf, 300-400 hundred killed in battles in and around Konduz and Taloqan, 300 Taliban killed from one unit of 800 defending Kabul, 300 Taliban killed in a battle around Tarin Kot (near Kandahar), dozens more in other battles and convoy interdictions preceding the fall of Kandahar, and more than 200 in the battle of Tora Bora. Although these accounts certainly involve some exaggeration, they reflect only a portion the war's combat engagements. Notably, they exclude an accounting of engagements in Herat province and the southwest generally, give only a partial accounting of battles in and around Kabul and Kandahar, and cover only one battle in the areas to the east and

south of Kabul. They also mostly do not cover losses suffered from the routine “strategic” bombardment of leadership sites, military infrastructure, and troop residences. Finally, these accounts do not cover Taliban coalition troops killed while in custody.

The Red Cross has reported burying “hundreds” of individuals around each of several major battle zones -- although these dead may include soldiers on both sides as well as civilians.

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- reframe justifiable uses of force in terms of community interests and collective action, rather than in terms of a clash of parochial interests and prerogatives;

- focus remedial acts of force precisely on transgressors and transgressions of law and norms;
- limit the degree and methods of force to that which is strictly necessary to accomplish consensual ends; and
- extend to civilians in war zones the same types of protections that domestic law enforcement agencies ideally grant to the citizens they serve.

Within the framework of domestic police or law-enforcement action, “collateral” casualties and damage are strongly proscribed. In accord with this, domestic authorities may limit police resort to high-speed chases and set restrictive rules for the use of firearms -- even though this may complicate law enforcement activities and add to the risks faced by police officers. Incidents such as the deadly 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian complex in Waco (Texas) and the 1985 Philadelphia police siege of the MOVE commune (a local Philadelphia radical group) are broadly considered to constitute misuses of power. (The siege of the Branch Davidians claimed 80 lives, including those of 22 children. The siege of the “MOVE” commune in Philadelphia resulted in 11 deaths, including those of four children, and the destruction of 60 houses in the surrounding neighborhood after local police used an incendiary device to force the groups’ surrender.)

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