

Stabilizing Afghanistan: Proposals for Improving Security, Governance, and Aid/Economic Development



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Tobias Ellwood, MP

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About this Report

The proposals in this report are based on evidence collated from a series of visits to Afghanistan over the last six years. It brings together ideas and concerns expressed by a wide variety of personalities both from Afghanistan and from the international community. Many of the concerns and ideas were presented off the record.

The conclusions drawn and the recommendations made are personal and do not reflect the position of the British government. They are meant to encourage further debate about what could be achieved by the Afghan people and the international community in the lead-up to the International Security and Assistance Force's (ISAF) departure in 2014.

About the Author

Tobias Ellwood was elected Member of Parliament for Bournemouth East in May 2005. Since then, he has held a range of positions including opposition whip; shadow minister for culture, media and sport; Parliamentary private secretary to Defense Secretary Rt. Hon. Liam Fox; and Parliamentary private secretary to the Minister for Europe Rt. Hon. David Lidington in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Mr. Ellwood spent five years in the Army with the Royal Green Jackets, headquartered in Winchester and served in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Kuwait, Germany, Gibraltar, and Bosnia. He holds an MBA from Cass Business School at City University in London.

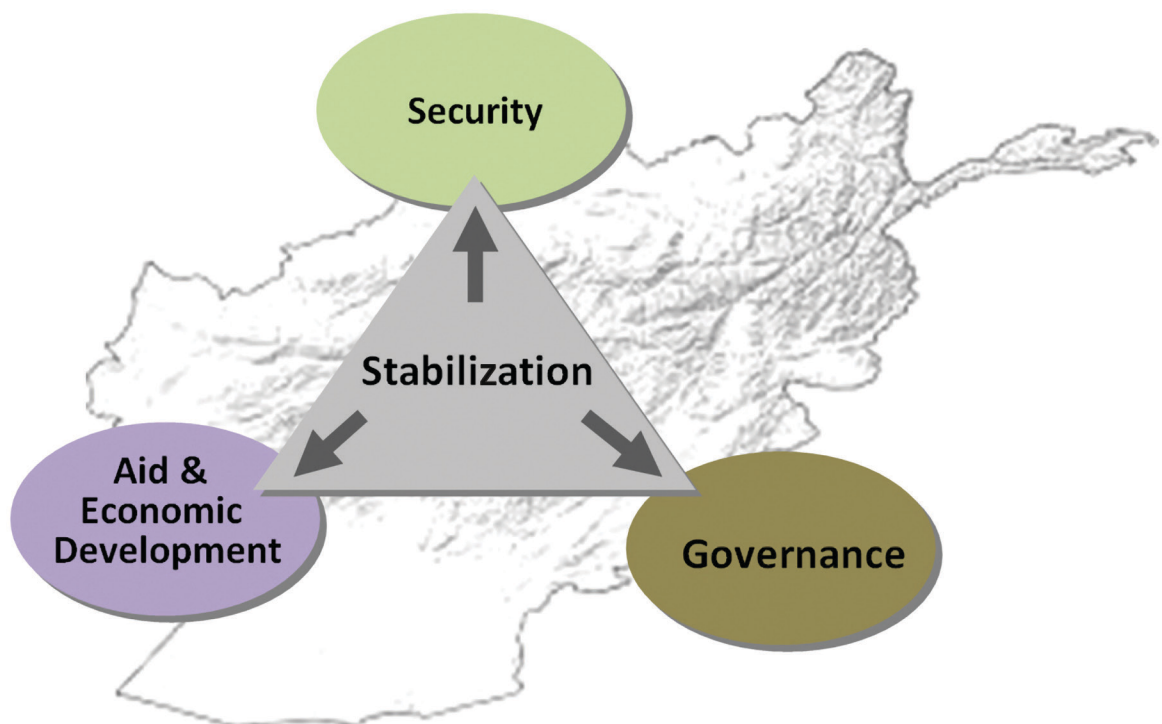




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Foreword

General James L. Jones is a former US national security advisor and is the chairman of the Atlantic Council's Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security. During his long and distinguished career, he served as commander of United States European Command and supreme allied commander Europe (2003-06), during which NATO assumed greater responsibility for security operations in Afghanistan.

Tobias Ellwood is, without a doubt, one of the premier experts on Afghanistan and the surrounding region. He has spent several years both witnessing on the ground and also studying the complicated route taken by NATO in trying to forge a successful outcome to an intervention that has now taken a decade's worth of resources and human sacrifice by all participating countries.

His report suggests, quite accurately, that by failing to adequately address the fundamental truth that stability in Afghanistan has always been dependent on the proper balanced effort between security, economic development, and governance and the rule of law, the odds of success (post-2014) are greatly diminished.

His report is a compelling study that should be taken up in all military and foreign policy schools, for in it the reader will find the blueprint for similar engagements for the balance of the 21st century.



General James L. Jones, Jr., USMC (Ret.)
*Chairman, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security
Atlantic Council*



Executive Summary

Afghanistan's future remains bleak. After a painful decade, all must now admit that Plan A (as outlined in the Bonn Accord¹ and confirmed in the Afghan constitution²) has yet to create the necessary foundations for stability. Much of the international community privately acknowledges the gloomy outlook and now seeks a decent interval of stability after 2014 to distance itself from the responsibility for what might happen next as global attention turns to the jihadist threat in the Sahel region of Africa.

This report assesses the progress in Afghanistan from three mutually dependent pillars for national stability — namely **security, governance, and economic development** (and reconstruction), and it extrapolates to predict the significance of where Afghanistan is now in the leadup to ISAF's 2014 operational withdrawal. Improvements in all three areas are found wanting:

- The flawed political structure does not reflect the ethnic diversity, regional influences, and the precedence of local decisionmaking in Afghanistan. It also lacks transparency, resulting in endemic corruption. Only the international community's presence provides the government an air of legitimacy (meaning the West is fueling the problem). It also provides the country enough stability to prevent civil war. Despite the removal of Osama bin Laden, the Taliban still have not entered into a meaningful dialogue, and there is no feasible political strategy to encourage insurgents to the table.

- ISAF may be confident that its revised security strategy is finally working — allowing for a formal, staged transition of responsibility to a more competent-looking and sizable ANSF; but the insurgent threat will not be removed by force alone. Geographic, demographic and historic factors are working against this large conventional force, which commands limited discipline, equipment, and skills to maintain the peace without the greater consent of the population.
- Despite the scale of international aid that has been poured into the country (estimated to be some \$430 billion), conflicting agendas, poor coordination, lack of overall ownership, an absence of regional economic strategies, and an ignorance of local requirements have led to time, effort, and finances wasted on an industrial scale. Whilst there have been many microlevel success stories, this commendable work is not enough to establish the fundamental economic building blocks (leveraging the country's strengths of agriculture and mineral wealth) that are needed to lead the country to eventual self-reliance.

Time is running out. Sensing failure, the international community is suffering from "Afghanistan fatigue." Yet the progress on local and regional governance, along with the improved, if fragile, security situation and historic precedence, all provide an opportunity for an alternative solution.

¹ The Bonn Agreement, <http://www.afhangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>

² Afghanistan Constitution, http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html

The growth in size and confidence of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is impressive. But it is not without its own challenges. Chapter 2 discusses the worrying ethnic divisions that are developing (with Uzbeks and Tajiks joining the Afghan National Army (ANA) and southern Pashtuns dominating the Afghan National Police ANP) which could lead to a future ethnic feud. Per thousand population, the Afghan army is now the largest in the world. As this chapter explores, there are ways in which a sizeable part of the ANSF could be re-trained (and Official Development Assistance [ODA] funded) as a corps of engineers to assist with the building of basic infrastructure projects, eventually civilianized into a number of regional construction companies.

The opaque, Western-designed political structure ignores historical precedents regarding the balance of power between the center and regions. It also gives Parliament or any formal opposition few powers to hold the executive to account. Chapter 3 recommends the revision of presidential powers; first to a more devolved form of government based around the country's economic hubs, each establishing an interim regional council as a precursor of regional elections, and second to a more accountable position of prime minister, answerable to parliament, which is elected under the Alternative Vote system. As Annex 2 illustrates, the president's grip on power, from national to district level, is formidable; changing any political strategy would therefore require future presidential candidates to support amending the power base of the president with the possible introduction of the position of prime minister, which would be more accountable to parliament.

Most commentators now agree that the Taliban can at best achieve a stalemate. But they are unlikely to take a more committed seat at the negotiating table unless the offering changes. Chapter 4 considers how steps toward reconciliation and reintegration could take place with the creation of a more regionalised political structure, creating the possibility of the Taliban participating in subnational government.

Stability in Afghanistan cannot be considered in isolation, but as part of a wider regional approach to security and development. Chapter 5 looks at the differing relationships Afghanistan has with its regional neighbors and how uncertainty in Afghanistan has led to the pursuit of conflicting agendas and a hesitance to make long-term economic or security-related commitments. As stability in Afghanistan and the wider region is mutually dependent –

revisiting one necessitates revisiting the other. Chapter 5 considers how a review of Afghanistan's political strategy could form the building blocks toward agreeing upon a wider strategy for the region.

Long before Afghanistan developed into a nation state, the land and population benefited from the transit of Euro-Asia trade routes termed the Silk Road. By Asian standards it has always been a prosperous region. In the 1950s Afghanistan was a net exporter of agricultural produce, growing more peanuts than California. After four decades of war eroding its markets, infrastructure, and skills base, it ranks third out of 158 countries in the Global Terrorism Index. Chapter 6 evaluates the impact of the twelve years of international aid and investment from a macro and micro perspective. With the country still reliant on external financial support for 80 percent of its budget, it looks at the economic prospects for the country, in particular the potential of harnessing the country's vast mineral wealth to generate future income if critical infrastructure (including railways – see Annex 3) is improved.

From ISAF to the Asian Development Bank, and from Doctors Without Borders to USAID, the international community has in various guises taken an unprecedented interest in helping build a peaceful, democratic and prosperous state. Chapter 7 evaluates the collective impact the international community has had over the last decade and the lessons to be learned, that might be addressed prior to 2014, and more widely in readiness for the next large-scale international response or upstream engagement.

ISAF's more targeted security strategy has reaped dividends, and on a microlevel it has wandered into areas of governance and economic development through its stabilization initiatives conducted village by village and town by town—effectively bypassing the (corruption-prone) influence of Kabul.

Enough time remains before the 2014 deadline to finesse a more suitable and enduring regionally focused political strategy that would not only attract the Taliban to the negotiating table, but would also better reflect the country's ethnic makeup, as well as take advantage of the existing economic hubs. The Afghan campaign now costs the international community \$8 billion³ a month. Funding is our biggest leverage, but we are now too timid, too disparate—and war weary—to harness its immense power as a condition for change. It's time to acknowledge, reevaluate and modify the political strategy if civil war is to be avoided.

³ Source: ComISAF briefing February 17, 2011



Afghan Security

By any measure the new NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan (NTM-A) strategy has been impressive, pumping recruits through the eight-week program on an industrial scale. The standard is not high, and desertion rates hover around 30 percent.⁴ But training is ahead of schedule with the ANA numbering over 187,000⁵ and the ANP over 149,000.⁶ Of the 148 Kandaks (battalions), less than half could be termed as ‘capable of independent operations.’ The expedited pace of handover has seen the number of ISAF fatalities drop to just 400 in 2012 (the lowest in four years), but Afghan fatalities have increased to more than a thousand, an increase of 20 percent compared to the previous year. Discernible progress is being made. However, both forces have some way to go and it remains unclear who will fund the ANSF over the next decade.

- Establishing a capable security force that is able to deal with domestic and foreign issues is the expectation—indeed, right—of any new state. But the agreed target size of the ANSF is enormous and has some worrying ethnic divisions, which means, in the long term, that it is unsustainable and potentially dangerous.
- Southern Pashtuns show little interest in joining the Afghan army. Instead they are filling the ranks of the Afghan police in their home areas, where the other ethnic groups are poorly represented. Left unchecked this imbalance could become a dividing line for any potential civil war. And is it wise to create such large, unsustainable armed forces, which, per one-

thousand population, will be one of the largest in the world? How will this be funded in the long term? If by 2015, changes to governance have not taken place and civil unrest becomes a reality, the army (or part of it) might step in themselves.

- The current recruitment and training budget is reaping dividends. Qualified soldiers are being produced faster than the bases are being built to house them. However, the standard of soldier produced is not high. The daily program (determined by the Afghan Ministry of Defense) is not strenuous and is peppered with breaks, finishing daily at 3 pm. But since 70 percent of recruits are illiterate and 20 percent are addicted to drugs, education, and to a lesser extent detoxification, comprises a sizeable part of the training.⁷
- Progress in developing the Afghan police continues to lag behind that of the army. Corruption and bribery are rife, hampering acceptance of the police as a force for good. A recent UN survey suggested half of all Afghans see the police as corrupt. Many units have yet to evolve beyond the paramilitary role.
- Mixed views remain about the success of the Afghan local police (ALP). This so-called ‘local defense program’ mimicking the ‘Awakening’ initiative developed in Iraq, establishes lightly armed Afghan units under the command of the Afghan government, tasked with working alongside the ANP and ANA in defending communities from the Taliban. But some view this as recreating local militias. There have been

⁴ “US troops show concern over readiness of Afghan army,” *BBC News*, October 16, 2010

⁵ ISAF, “Kabul Military Training Centre looks to Future,” *News*, January 5, 2013

⁶ <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120930.pdf>

⁷ NATO Training Mission Afghanistan, “Drug Rehabilitation support to the ANSF,” Press notice, October 6, 2010

reports of groups, numbering around 30, that have been fighting not just each other, but also Afghan and ISAF forces.⁸

- Corruption and lack of discipline in the ANSF remain issues. The scale at which power is abused is, in some cases, pushing communities closer to the more disciplined Taliban. General Wardak, the minister of defense, and the interior minister, Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, were subject to a vote of no confidence in 2012, which led to the resignation of General Wardak. Subsequently, however, Bismillah Khan Mohammadi was introduced as the minister of defense.
- From a purely military perspective, the \$21 billion training budget is striking. It has provided a boost and a sense of urgency to the ANSF training program, which for many years has gone wanting. From a strategic perspective, it is unclear whether this money is well spent. Could channeling some of this enormous budget toward nurturing soft power produce the same results in terms of reconciliation and reintegration?
- The duration of this campaign has tested the patience of many contributing NATO countries. France, Canada, and Holland have all removed their troops early.

Recommendations:

- **Call for an Afghan Strategic and Defense Security Review (SDSR)**

To allay concerns about the growth of the ANSF, an Afghan Defense Review should be conducted that would allow discussion and then agreement about the future size, structure, composition and role of the Afghan army. A vicious circle needs to be broken. The size of the Afghan army reflects the size of the threat, but that threat (the Taliban) will not downsize militarily if its former Northern Alliance foe has itself the potential to exploit a weak Afghan government using coercive power. A plan for the eventual downsizing of the army, therefore, needs to be transparent.

- **Converting part of the ANA into infrastructure specialists**

An SDSR would allow for a plan for downsizing the huge security force to be agreed in advance. A simple and constructive way for this to be achieved is by altering the training program to include training for corps of engineers skills. This would firstly expedite the completion of important infrastructure and development projects (particularly in insecure areas) such as road and irrigation systems, incomplete garrisons, and large-scale projects like railway lines and electricity networks.) Second, once the security situation is benign enough to downsize the armed forces, these regiments of engineers could transfer into the civilian sector (state-owned or private) and form a number of regional companies focused on continuing this important work outside the military framework.

- **Advancing NATO's spectrum of capabilities**

ISAF's security strategy took far too long to establish, wasting crucial time needed to recruit, equip, and train the ANSF. Lawlessness, destruction of civil infrastructure and lack of governance are not core competencies NATO trains to respond to. Yet in every recent intervention such stabilization skills have been needed once the war fighting is over. NATO should consider developing greater Three Block War⁹ skills in order to fill any vacuum caused by the absence of civilian agencies once a workable umbrella of security has been created.

- **Formation of an international academy for police training**

The delays in establishing effective local police recruitment and training programs placed additional security burdens on international forces, allowed common criminality to go unchecked and then to be played into the hands of the Taliban who offer local communities safer (if more controlled) environments. Such is the demand for adequate and honest policing across the world. The international community should consider investing in a permanent international policing academy where recruits can be flown in and trained to various levels, without any delays in establishing programs from scratch. The academy could also run more senior courses attended by officers from developing countries around the world. (Essentially a form of upstream intervention.)

⁸ <http://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20110217/1690952.html>

⁹ The **Three Block War** concept: U.S. Marine General Charles Krulak: Soldiers should be trained to conduct war fighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid operations within the space of three contiguous city blocks.



Afghan Governance

Although cautious optimism continues to be expressed about the security mission, the same cannot be said about the political mission. Until a similar revolution takes place, which harnesses the improved understanding of the country to update a poorly designed constitution, stability in both Afghanistan and the wider region cannot be guaranteed. In the words of the UK's Development Committee, 'Despite ISAF's presence and the significant international support, the control of the Afghan Government is tenuous.'¹⁰

The absence of a robust governance strategy means few can agree where Afghanistan is heading, and consequently there is little confidence in investing in its future. The 2001, Western-influenced, top-heavy constitution fails to understand the traditional and? complex relationships between the state and the various levels of society.

- From Dost Mohammad Khan to the last king Mohammed Zahir Shah, the country has traditionally been lead by a dominant Kabul-based figure, but with generous autonomy granted to the various tribal regions and subregions that were free to go about their business.
- Despite the rhetoric from Kabul, the state has historically been viewed with some suspicion by rural Afghanistan, which does not necessarily view itself as a single nation with agreed interests. The notion that today a modern centralized government with functioning departments can somehow be created,

trained and imposed on a country where the majority of towns and villages (which contain 85 percent of the population) have long developed their own independent rule of law is an anathema.

- The constitution is not to blame for what it contains, but for the details it omits. As summarized in **Annex 3**, it does not wander far from the boilerplate measures expected in any new Islamic basic charter. It fails to specifically recognize Afghanistan's diverse ethnic makeup and distribution of power, and to enshrine appropriate standards of scrutiny, accountability, and patronage in the political structure. Disproportionate power is therefore, by default, granted to the president in relation to parliament, and provisional power bases (for example, governorships) are not mentioned at all.
- A fundamental error (equivalent to the disbanding of the Baath Party in Iraq) was made in 2001 when the local Shura/Jirga system was outlawed in favour of an imposed system of justice, controlled from Kabul. Admittedly, Shuras/Jirgas did fall short in recognizing the rights of women and were prone to influence by warlords and tribal leaders. However, peace cannot prevail across so many relatively isolated communities without local reliance on community justice, and this cannot be administered from Kabul. Indeed polls suggest the justice exacted by jirgas is far preferred to that of the Taliban and state courts, since it is simpler to bribe one Taliban local leader or a district governor than a group of elders.

¹⁰ UK Parliamentary Select Committee on Development –Sixth Report – 2012-13

- To compound matters, there is little scrutiny of central powers. Indeed parliament's impotence was illustrated in 2011 when the president refused for months to formally open parliament after the chaotic and fraud-riddled elections for the lower house.¹¹ The executive's relationship with the legislative branch continues to be strained. But as there is no constitutional requirement for parliament to question him, this has little consequence.
- The chosen voting system is ill-suited for the complex ethnic makeup of Afghanistan; it actually encourages corruption. With dozens of candidates competing for a handful of seats in any parliamentary region, just 3 percent of votes suffice to secure victory. This has had dangerous consequences in provinces such as Badghis, which is 40 percent Pashtun; but these people have absolutely no representation in Parliament or the local provisional council. Formal political parties are also prohibited from forming, with candidates effectively standing as independents.
- The legitimacy granted to the Afghan government by ISAF's presence disguises where true power actually lies across the country. The real 'influencers' number less than one hundred, many of whom are discouraged from airing alternative views due to sponsored patronage or payroll. That loyalty is likely to erode with the departure of ISAF, since this disparate grouping of tribal elders, warlords, and community chiefs, whose power bases are not recognised in Karzai's centralized model, reassert influence in their respective areas.
- The chaos of war disguises the true state of Afghan affairs with much of the country out of reach of authoritative data collection, as conditions are too dangerous. Corruption itself is used by some as a tool to increase the grip of power, to hold potential power brokers and enemies at bay, and to exploit the vast sums of overseas aid funneled into the country via central government departments. The Kabul Bank scandal, failure to rein in Wali Karzai's criminal interests (while he was alive), and layers of outsourcing used to complete the ring road are just three examples that reflect the level of corruption and cronyism in Afghan politics.
- The international community has taken little responsibility for the political quagmire, resorting to the ubiquitous 'get out clause': 'It's up to the Afghan people to decide.' "The Afghan people" are in reality the office of president, as no other individuals, political parties, or ethnic groups (other than the Taliban) have a public voice.
- The Kabul Bank, established in 2004, is the main commercial bank the government uses to pay security forces and government employees. The fraud and mismanagement scandal surrounding the bank is one of the most visibly damaging examples of corruption in recent times. The announcement that \$900 million was identified as missing caused a run on the bank and prompted the IMF to suspend its credit program.¹² It has been alleged that several current and former cabinet ministers received large loans from the bank, many of which remain outstanding.¹³
- Western leaders attempt to qualify progress by stating that 'We are not trying to build a Jeffersonian Democracy.' Ironically, Jefferson believed that America's greatest democratic innovation was the New England Town Meeting—an occasional gathering of the community to discuss topical matters and give direction to their representatives. The big success story in Afghanistan has been on a microlevel where basic community governance structures have been put in place—finally incorporating the traditional local shura/jirga system. In the Kunduz province for example, there is a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)-approved local Shura office co-located in the justice office and the department of women's affairs. Decisions are binding so long as they do not violate Afghan law, Shari 'a law, or international women's rights principles. Sixteen thousand village jirgas covering 70 percent of the nation's villages are now elected.

¹¹ Afghan Electoral Commission: Elections for the Lower House (the Wolesi Jirga) were held on September 18, 2010. Twenty-five hundred candidates competed for 249 seats. Voter turnout was approximately 35 percent. There were 4.3 million valid votes cast with 1.3 million discounted.

¹² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/28/afghan-elite-ransacked-kabul-bank>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12348045>

Recommendations:

■ Review of the constitution toward a less centralized structure

With less than two years to go before the West effectively turns its back on Afghanistan, urgent action is required to design a more inclusive political strategy, which allows maturity of the state by developing a more representative and accountable structure. The successes in governance development at a local level point to a less-centralized approach that incorporates Afghanistan's rich ethnic makeup rather than ignoring it. Power, including some budgetary authority, can devolve to a regional level. The vagaries of the current constitution allow this to happen without amendment, though such changes could be incorporated at a later stage. Indeed a modern-day precedent has already been set with the autonomy now enjoyed by the Governor of Balkh, Usted Atta, who has returned the city of Mazar-i-Sharif into a thriving economic hub with international imports worth \$730 million and a bustling civilian airport with flights to Dubai, Turkey, and India—all leading to a construction boom.

■ Formation of Interim Regional Councils

Building on the Afghan model of regional governance developed in the 1950s, centralized power should be dissipated to a number of regions (possibly seven), each with its own economic hub (See Annex 4). An 'Interim Regional Council' could be established as a precursor to more formal regional elections following agreement of the delineation of regional and national power—including the ability to raise taxes.

■ Election of a prime minister

Complementing the revision of presidential powers to a local level, national governance would be better managed with greater transparency with a new position of prime minister, possibly elected from the ranks of parliament to ensure the position remains fully accountable to the elected house of the people, the Wolesi Jirga.

■ Future role of the president

The role of president should be downsized to a figurehead and the new elected position of prime minister introduced (who would be more accountable to parliament) within the new, less-centralized system.

■ Reform of the voting system and political party development

Following the last elections, the 2010 Asia Foundation study found the number of Afghans afraid to vote rising to 83 percent in the southwest. As recommended by Democracy International, the role of parliament and its voting procedures should be overhauled to allow the development of effective political parties.¹⁴ This should include a replacement of the single nontransferable vote (first past the post) system with the alternative vote system. For example, the winner from a ballot sheet of one hundred candidates does not succeed with just 2 percent of the vote. Development of political parties should also be allowed.

■ Improved international community (non-ISAF) leadership

The civilian face of the international community has always lacked a 'Petraeus/McChrystal/Allen' character with the stature and authority to ensure all agencies follow the same agenda. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board urgently requires a charismatic and respected figure with the authority to ensure that huge sums of international aid are accounted for and spent in ways that genuinely assist a security, political, or economic strategy.

■ Overhaul of the Kabul Bank

Removing corrupt practices surrounding the Kabul Bank must be a priority. Until this occurs the Afghan government will continue to lose international credibility, and IMF funds for a range of development and governance projects funded by agencies across the globe, including Department for International Development (DFID), will be held back.

■ Micro-level community development

Afghanistan is a textbook study in the difficulties of attempting to build a developing country from the top down—even with unprecedented support from superpowers. History illustrates that most citizens learn and uphold democratic values through local roots, village authorities, town councils, guilds—all subnational institutions. In 2008, this was finally recognized, and funding for grassroots governance and justice development was doubled. It was doubled again a year later. It has now been cut — a decision that urgently needs to be reversed, with a focus on legitimizing and modernizing Afghanistan's first natural tier of governance.

¹⁴ <http://www.afghan2010.com/sites/default/files/2010-04-DI-Consensus%20Electoral%20Reform%20Recommendations-ENG.pdf>



The Insurgency

With the 2014 deadline for withdrawal of International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) combat troops now confirmed, the time to introduce any significant political changes is running out. As the previous chapter illustrates, a workable political strategy offers the Taliban little incentive to integrate. It sees the regime as corrupt and inferior to the pre-9/11 model. The offering needs to change and reconciliation needs to be more sincere and multidimensional.

- The organization, impact, and influence of the Taliban is often overstated by the international media and underestimated by politicians. Wherever the truth lies, this insurgent force remains a spoiler for peace and prosperity (particularly in the south) and needs to be addressed.
- Continuing to take advantage of safe havens for training and regrouping in Pakistan, the Taliban has succeeded in making deep inroads in swathes of the country previously regarded as relatively safe—the north, northwest and center. In September 2012 the Taliban launched its most brazen attack against Camp Bastion, breaching the wire and destroying six US aircraft, illustrating a gearshift in training and competence.
- ISAF estimates the strength of the insurgency at around 25,000-35,000 launching, with forty attacks per day in 2011¹⁵ (up 20 percent from 2009), two thirds of all incidents occurring in just nine of the 401 districts of Afghanistan.¹⁶

■ The main insurgent groups are:

- **The Taliban** led by **Mullah Mohammad Omar**;
- **Hezb-e-Islami** led by **Gulbuddin Hekmatyar**; and
- **The Haqqani network** led by **Jaluddin Haqqani** and his son **Sarajuddin**.

All three are separate from the Pakistani Taliban. Efforts are loosely coordinated. Common goals are shared, but all have different command structures and work under separate strategic plans.

- **The Taliban** operates from the city of Quetta in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province. From there funds are provided along with military supplies and strategic guidance, including an annual campaign review by Mullah Omar to establish key objectives. It focuses on southern Afghanistan but is also attempting to spread its influence in northern and western provinces. The group runs its own governance structure (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) that appoints shadow governors, runs a parallel justice system under Shari 'a law, and levies taxes. This legal system in particular has won some support where the Afghan government is seen as ineffective or corrupt.
- **Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)** was founded in 1977 by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Although well-financed during the Soviet occupation, it was sidelined by the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s. It then reemerged as an aggressive militant group, claiming responsibility for many bloody attacks

¹⁵ Afghan NGO Safety Office Report 2012

¹⁶ MOD House of Commons Statement February 15, 2011

against coalition forces and the Afghan government. However, it has close ties through former Hizbis now in government, and is seen as the group most likely to agree to reconciliation.

- **The Haqqani network** is the most active insurgent group responsible for various high-profile kidnappings and attacks, including the 2008 bombing of the Serena Hotel in Kabul and the Indian Embassy. Maulvi Haqqani rose to prominence while fighting the Soviets during the occupation. When the Taliban took control, Haqqani was rewarded with the cabinet post of minister of tribal affairs. The network allegedly retains links with ISI and al-Qaeda. There has been some press speculation about Karzai offering Haqqani a senior cabinet role, possibly prime minister, if he and his followers abandoned their links with the Taliban.
- Pakistan's hesitation to deal with the Afghan Taliban has hinged on its long-term threat of a Tajik/Uzbek-run Kabul that would align itself with India. The Taliban has therefore been fighting a proxy war for Pakistan. Conversely, with the outcome of the insurgency unclear, Pakistan has, until recently, been unwilling to pick a fight with the very people who might be in power (in some guise) in the near future. The prospect of civil war and improved relations with the US has encouraged Pakistan to play a more credible role in tackling the Afghan Taliban based in Pakistan.
- Although the presence of al-Qaeda prompted the 2001 US-led invasion, there is little evidence today of any al-Qaeda activity. The killing of its symbolic leader Osama bin Laden prompted calls to expedite ISAF's departure from Afghanistan. Bin Laden's death has done little to improve the competence of Afghan security forces or decrease levels of corruption in the government.
- The high peace council, established by President Karzai, has not effectively opened a high-level dialogue with any insurgents. In September 2011, Burhanuddin Rabbani, former president and chairman of the council was assassinated by the Taliban. Under the new chairmanship of his son, Salahuddin Rabbani, the council has succeeded only in opening up a regular dialogue with Pakistan, and visited the country last year.
- The role of the Pakistan Internal Security Intelligence (ISI) in influencing Afghan insurgency is critical. It was thanks in part to the ISI that the Taliban was able to seize power in Kabul in 1996. Some commentators have suggested that higher-level Taliban operatives feel pressured by the ISI, who have threatened to hand over those reluctant to fight to the US authorities, who would then send them to Guantanamo Bay.
- Following the Kabul Conference in 2010, the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) was created to entice low-level Taliban fighters to defect by offering financial initiatives and training. The APRP budget was \$123.7 million in 2012 but to-date, the project has had limited success.
- The Taliban remains attractive to some Afghans in remote communities. Polls suggest that while there is genuine fear of attack by the Taliban, the threat from criminal gangs, warlords, drug traffickers, international forces, corrupt police, and intertribal violence is actually greater and the Taliban offer some attraction in restoring a form of law. The difficulties in persuading a number of rural Afghans that supporting the Taliban is not in their interests is due to the Pashtun revenge culture ('If you kill me — my brother will kill you'). A simple way to exact revenge for a brother's death is to join the ANA and attempt a green-on-blue attack.

Recommendations:

■ **Bringing the Taliban to the table**

There is still little to entice the Taliban to agree on a local ceasefire (let alone consenting to more formal talks) unless the prospect of a new political strategy is on the table. The West must not confuse tactical success against the insurgency (as seen, for example, in Helmand) with strategic success. Evidence suggests the Taliban continues to be well financed and supplied and, despite the surge, its objectives are unchanged. The 'carrot' offered to the Taliban should be the conditional inclusion into a new, more regionally focused structure where it has a real opportunity to participate and win elections in regions such as the greater Kandahar area. This, however, is only possible through governance and the party political reform outlined in the previous chapter.

■ **Formal communications with the Taliban**

The US must begin the process of formally communicating with the Taliban by establishing agreed interlocutors with the various strands. This

task should be easier following progress made at the London (January 2013) Conference by presidents Zardari and Karzai for greater collaboration. Figures of particular importance are those who lie close to the Taliban leadership and harbor a vision of political accommodation.

■ **Establish a Taliban 'embassy' in an Arab country**

Military pressure alone will not bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. The Taliban should be encouraged to establish a form of political representation. There has been discussion of the Taliban opening an 'embassy' in the Qatari capital for some time, about which both President Karzai and the US have made equivocal statements. Therefore, although no substantive talks have taken place so far, there is a general agreement on the opening of a Taliban office and this should be seen as a significant step in the right direction.



Regional Influences

The concern over Afghanistan's relationships with its neighbors is every bit as sensitive as those relationships between groupings inside the country. Analysis of these relationships shows how Afghanistan's instability is rippling well beyond its own borders. Any radical overhaul of political strategy would therefore require the endorsement of these same countries. As things stand, the current lack of political clarity prevents these countries from designing long-term (mutually supportive) strategies.

- Conscious of the looming 2014 deadline, Karzai is making sustained efforts to strengthen alliances with Iran, China, and Russia (including military cooperation), so as to reduce dependence on the US. Moscow has proposed a key role for Kabul in the **Shanghai Cooperation**, the central Asian group of countries that focuses on security and their economies.
- **Pakistan** has for the most part been a reticent participant in helping Afghanistan. Instead, it has focused on its own substantial sectarian/religious violence, which is far greater than Al Qaeda has imposed on the West. This is a consequence of General Zia-ul-Haq's (Islamification) policies of the 1980s, when thousands of fundamental madrassas were created through which volunteers (both domestic and foreign) formed numerous sectarian groups,—such as the mujahideen—in order to fight proxy wars. Many of these groups, with separate agendas, are still active today, and are largely responsible for over thirty-five thousand

deaths in Pakistan over the last decade. Matters are compounded by the limited reach Pakistani authorities have over parts of the country, particularly along the Afghan border. Both the UK and the US have provided Pakistan with billions of dollars in aid to tackle terrorism. However, no strings were attached and the hardware acquired is more suitable for tackling Pakistan's second issue, the perceived threat from India.

- The recent trilateral conference hosted by the British prime minister¹⁷ did however result in a commitment to greater cooperation in dealing with the insurgency. Tacit support of the Taliban no longer serves Pakistan's interests; the Taliban cannot claim victory in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its own internal insurgent challenge would suffer if its neighbor continued in an endless war, offering refuge to the Pakistani Taliban.
- **India** has long enjoyed close cultural and economic relations with Afghanistan. For many years, Afghanistan was active in supporting India's bid for independence and subsequently cooperated over respective conflicts with Pakistan. It was the only country in the region to recognize the Afghan Communist government during the Soviet occupation and India aided the Northern Alliance in its war with the Taliban. Relations between India and Pakistan were improving, but the dialogue broke down when India claimed the ISI assisted in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

¹⁷ Tri-Lateral Conference at Chequers, January 28, 2013: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/transcript-pm-and-president-karzai-press-conference/>

- **Iran** is confusingly supporting both the insurgency and Karzai, suggesting there may be no unified position from the various power bases in the country. President Ahmadinejad admits supporting Karzai with regular injections of cash, while at the same time convoys destined for the Taliban have been intercepted containing Iranian-designed rocket systems. It continues to expand its influence in the Herat province with the building of Afghanistan's first railway link from Herat to Marshad. And it is hampering ISAF's work by restricting the number of tankers delivering fuel to Afghanistan to forty a day, as it claims the fuel is being sold onto ISAF.¹⁸
- When the Taliban was in power, it supported terrorist groups active in central Asia and China. The **Chinese** subsequently supported the Northern Alliance, thus playing a key role in the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. Since the Taliban's demise, Afghan-Chinese relationships have strengthened with frequent visits by senior officials moving both ways. **China** has avoided any involvement with security operations, choosing instead to assist with infrastructure projects and providing funding directly to support the Afghan Government. It has been one of the first countries to exploit mineral opportunities (see Chapter 8).
- Afghan-**Russian** relations have long been polarized by Russia's support for the Uzbeks and Tajiks in the north and its animosity to the Pashtuns in the south. It is therefore cautious toward the Pakistanis who supported the Taliban's overthrow of the Islamic regime (dominated by northerners) in 1996. Russia was initially reticent about NATO forces marching around its neighborhood, but belatedly recognized it may be left to pick up the pieces if NATO pulls out. As a result, it has increased its assistance to the NATO mission by opening up logistical corridors and providing other military aid to the ANA. Some accuse Russia of encouraging the growth of Russian speaking, ex-Soviet minded communities in the north of the country.
- **Saudi Arabia** is arguably responsible for blurring the lines that should separate religion and politics in Afghanistan. Afghanistan forms the critical link in the logistical chain, which allows Saudi Arabia's Islamic voice to reach and compete with Iran's influence in the Stans. Saudi Arabia matched the aid given to the mujahideen by the US by fueling the Afghan guerrilla war against the Soviets. Unlike the US, which turned its back on Afghanistan, Saudi involvement continued after the Soviet departure with a program of radicalization that eventually led to the creation of the Taliban. Saudi Arabia was one of just three countries to officially recognize the regime, but cut official ties after 9/11. Since then, other than some generous sums of aid to Afghanistan, it has adopted a low profile for much of the last decade. Saudi Arabia's obvious strategic interests aside, the country would prove highly influential in encouraging the Taliban to come to the table.
- **Turkey** has enjoyed a close relationship with Afghanistan dating back several centuries. Today, Turkey is one of the larger contributors to ISAF, taking on security duties in the capital and the neighboring Wardak province. It also has a good relationship with Pakistan. Trilateral summits occur on a regular basis. All three countries have pledged to coordinate political and military ties in the fight against terrorism and are now participating in joint military exercises. Turkey is well placed to take a more proactive role in a peace initiative.
- The potential redrawing of regional strategic alliances could prove problematic for both the US and India, which is looking more isolated within the region. India has invested heavily in Kabul, much to the annoyance of Pakistan, which fears a Tajik/Uzbek-run Afghanistan.

¹⁸ Afghanistan News Centre – January 2011

Recommendations:

- **Developing a wider strategy for the region**

Although a number of bilateral agreements in the region have been struck, stability in Afghanistan is clearly mutually dependent on wider national and international stability. Were a new political strategy for Afghanistan proposed and agreed upon, it could be used as a building block to discuss and agree to a wider strategy for the region.

- **Support for Pakistan**

Following the death of bin Laden, the Pakistani coalition government faced a critical few months as it came to terms with the charge of facing both ways regarding terrorism and a worsening of relationships with the US. While fingers were pointed at Pakistan, demanding change, so endemic is the

issue of terrorism that this cannot be resolved without outside support. If Pakistan is abandoned to its own cause, the prospect of a failed state is very real—and Afghanistan would invariably follow suit. The US must continue and deepen its renewed engagement.

- **Encouraging international economic support**

Just as domestic ethnic influences cannot be ignored, neither can cross-border relationships. Iran, for example, has a strong historical and economic connection with Herat. Trading links with Iran should be encouraged but with a recognition that its influence be kept in perspective and respectful of any new Afghan political structure. This regional and somewhat isolated relationship is repeated across the country, and again point toward a call for several smaller economic development plans rather than one countrywide one.



Economic Development and Reconstruction

Four decades of war and turbulence means Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a third of its population surviving on less than \$1 a day. 71 percent of Afghanistan's GDP is funded externally, and the economy is reliant on international effort to directly fund Afghanistan's political, security, and economic programs. Taxes raise \$1.3 billion now with GDP at just over \$15 billion.¹⁹

An improved plan for growth is critical. The World Bank is predicting a rapid decline in Afghanistan's economic prospects as international interests and attention soon shift elsewhere. There is an urgent need for a more tailored, short and long-term economic plan focused on infrastructure development supporting agriculture and mineral wealth extraction.

- As PRTs across the country begin to close down, there are searching questions for the international community to answer regarding the limited progress after the largest overseas development/aid, and security assistance program in the world.
- Life has undoubtedly improved for Afghans in some areas as government institutions attempt to exert greater influence beyond Kabul. However, these gains are limited and fragile. The country does not grow enough food to feed its population, and almost one in three children are malnourished. Supporting and expanding the agricultural sector should therefore be a priority. Despite 85 percent of the population being involved in agriculture, only 12 percent of the country is arable and only half of that percentage is currently under cultivation.

- A combination of disparate agendas from key stakeholders in both the Afghan government and the international community has, over the last decade, denied the country, and more specifically the regions, the ability to implement appropriate economic plans. The absence of ownership in the challenge of economic development and transparency in how funds have been spent has resulted in huge sums of money being frittered away, denying the rural populations the tailored economic development programs they desperately need. The Department for International Development (DFID)'s latest report states that both the Kabul government and the provinces (local government) lack the technical, financial, and project management skills required, often resulting in funds coming through line ministries and being directed toward ill-informed priorities or given to corrupt individuals and institutions.²⁰

- Over the last three years coordination has improved with the creation of 22 National Priority Programs, better scrutiny of the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (the principle program through which international donations are directed to Afghanistan). The newly formed Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (jointly chaired by the Afghan government and UNAMA) are designed to coordinate donor participation. However, legacy projects such as the National Solidarity Program, the Afghan Social Outreach Program, and the District Delivery Program have very similar objectives in funding community development, but differing levels of transparency.

¹⁹ CIA WORLD Fact Book, Afghanistan

²⁰ DFID Report: Afghanistan Development prospects after 2014

- The building of Highway 1, the national ring road, is a classic illustration of the challenges that continue to hinder a swifter economic recovery. Lauded as a significant achievement, this major road system, started in 2002, is still not fully metaled due to a combination of the siphoning of funds and contracts being outsourced through layers of companies. Once everyone has taken a cut, the layer of tarmac put down is too thin to last an Afghan winter. The completion of this ring road was made a priority—and on any Afghanistan map it does look impressive. Yet strategically this makes little sense, since the whole road is not used for NATO resupply routes. For the 91 percent of Afghans who venture no further than their neighboring town, it is of no value at all. This is not to say it should never have been completed. But more hearts and minds would have been won if a strategy had been followed that linked together towns and the regional economic hubs, allowing market routes (free from IEDs) to open up.
- Optimists point to the prospect of harnessing Afghanistan's vast mineral deposits as sources of wealth, which will enable the country to become self-sustaining. Indeed recent geological studies suggest there is around \$1 trillion worth of iron, copper, cobalt, gold, lithium, and other minerals with extraction potential.²¹ However, with limited infrastructure, corrupt practices, and security issues, the full potential of both Afghanistan's mineral deposits and the economy as a whole is over a decade away. This timeframe could be shortened if a more urgent and focused approach was adopted. The new Afghan Mines Minister Wahidullah Shahrini is an improvement on his predecessor (who is alleged to have taken a \$30 million bribe from the Chinese to secure the first major copper mining deal at Aynak). However, with little faith in the ability of the ANSF, other potential projects such as in Hajigak near Bamiyan (Asia's largest untapped source of iron ore) may see the controversial introduction of international privately funded militias to provide protection.
- This \$808 million copper mining deal reflects the absence of a coherent and transparent mining strategy as well as China's growing favored status. Aside from the alleged backhanders, promises of associated aid projects (which supposedly tipped the project China's way ahead of Canadian and US bids) have all been dropped, and China's dangerous mining techniques involving the discarding of large quantities of toxic chemicals is likely to damage the environment. The bidding process is not fit for purpose.
- After a decade of discussion about the merits of railways in helping the economy, construction of a new line between Mazar-e Sharif and Termez in Uzbekistan has finally begun. The \$165 million project is financed by the Asian Development Bank, Japan, and the US and is the first part of a wider program to develop a proper rail network for the country. Progress has been hindered by a failure to prioritize and the pursuit of separate agendas among the international community, though discussions are now moving forward.²¹
- Critical to allowing both small and large businesses to grow is the ability to own or rent land, yet 50 percent of Afghanistan's land tenure is not formalized. To compound matters 90 percent of returnees own no property. Returning refugees congregate in the major cities, swelling their populations. Kabul's population, for example, has grown from half a million in 2001 to 4.5 million today.
- The scale of education reform is impressive with 5.3 million children now in school compared with one million in 2002.²³ But schooling alone is dangerous if there are no jobs for this new breed of educated children to graduate into. The majority of the population is under 18, and the general program in place stops when a child reaches the age of 11.²⁴ This generation's expectations may be different from their elders who have endured little other than decades of war. Some argue that the older generation must perish before Afghanistan is able to progress. But without jobs available, a new generation may grow disillusioned and either seek employment (and possibly a life) outside of Afghanistan, forfeiting the educational investment made, or pick up old habits and collectively take matters into their own hands by demonstrating against the system, causing more instability.

²¹ "U.S. Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010

²² <http://www.railwaygazette.com/nc/news/single-view/view/connecting-china-and-europe.html>

²³ "Afghanistan's Children," November 11, 2011:<http://blogs.dfid.gov.uk/2010/11/afghanistans-children/>

²⁴ UN Data, Afghanistan Country Profile: <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx>

Recommendations

■ **Creating regional and national economic strategies**

Political uncertainty, corruption and security concerns are blighting the development of any long-term economic policy. The demography and history of Afghanistan, with its limited infrastructure, points towards promoting a number of separate but complimentary economic strategies focused around a number of the major cities across Afghanistan. Strategy should be created for the region, with central support to determine its specialism in what it produces, mines, markets, buys or sells. A more regional approach would relieve the congestion of decision-making in Kabul and allow more tailored economic plans to develop based on the respective area's economic strengths, mineral wealth, varying infrastructure, and security and political challenges.

■ **Focus on arable farming**

The Afghan economy is largely agriculture-focused, and involves 85 percent of the population. Yet only 12 percent of the land is currently arable and only half of this is utilized. The large-scale Helmand irrigation/canal project completed in the 1950s (in part by USAID) created one of the most extensive farming zones in southern Afghanistan, opening up thousands of acres of desert for cultivation and habitation, illustrating what can be done if a suitable local economic vision is funded and pursued.

■ **Harnessing Afghanistan's mineral wealth**

Hurdles facing mineral extraction should not stop a comprehensive and ambitious strategy from being developed. More focused regional economic plans, combined with appropriate infrastructure projects (road and rail), would increase international investment interest in mining. Focus on the country's mineral wealth prospects have come late in the day and must urgently be addressed in order to provide the Afghan government's much needed revenues.

■ **Development of Afghanistan's railways**

Afghanistan has long sat on the crossroads of a number of historical continental trading routes

(including the Silk Road) that link the Middle East to Asia. Its geographical significance should be reinvigorated. However, as Frederick Starr and Andrew Kuchins suggest, 'absent is the overall prioritization, coordination, and risk management that will enable Afghanistan to emerge as a natural hub and transit point for roads, railroads, pipelines, and electric lines.'²⁵ Whether it is the export of pomegranates, wheat, copper, or marble, the only viable way to transport these goods in bulk is by rail. Of course, Afghanistan's railway is nonexistent, but the country is surrounded by an impressive network covering all points of the compass (built by invading forces, including the British, to carry munitions to the Afghan border). Coincidentally, most of the economic hubs are less than sixty miles from the railway border termini, which could link these cities to the international Trans-Siberian railway and the European network as well as the international shipping port in Karachi.

■ **Priority given to local road building**

The contribution that reliable roads make to improving security and helping the local economy has only recently been understood. A metaled road increases the amount of local traffic as trade grows and isolated towns gain access to previously inaccessible markets. It forces the insurgents to change tactics away from IEDs and allows governance to spread. With Afghanistan's economy so strongly dependant on agriculture, ISAF see road building as a game changer in winning over local hearts and minds. Rather than wait for corrupt contracts to be honored, it is building the roads itself.

■ **Harnessing the education of a new generation**

Separate regionally focused strategies would encourage some of the newly educated generation towards the job opportunities resulting from a more regionally tailored economic plan. This should include the creation of a university specialism needed for mineral and resource extraction so the country can develop its own experts who can harness this natural wealth.

²⁵ <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1005Afghan.pdf>

■ Improving land rights

Critical to economic growth is confirmation of land ownership and the ability to buy or rent property. However, decades of conflict have seen land change hands (often more than once), leading to bitter and often-fatal disputes as to who is the rightful owner. This problem is compounded by the scale of refugees returning to the country claiming ownership on property now occupied by powerful commanders currently occupying land illegally.

Efforts have been made to reconcile disputes and identify areas for domestic and foreign investment, but progress has been painfully slow with disputes caught up in the courts process which is prone to corruption. Establishing a reputable land registry with a more efficient system of dispute resolution is a critical foundation stone to attract new businesses needed to stimulate economic growth and harness mineral wealth.



Role of the International Community

The international community's financial commitment to assisting Afghanistan has been exemplary. The bill for security alone since 2001 is estimated at \$600 billion and over \$40 billion has been donated in development and aid. Considering the uncertainty of Afghanistan's future twelve years on, international, civilian, and military communities all have serious questions to answer about the lack of progress in the three fundamental pillars of stabilization:

- **Security:** Why did it take so long to establish a clearer sense of purpose in its mission and to train domestic forces to a standard where they were able to maintain a basic umbrella of security under which governance and economic development could progress?
 - **Governance:** Why was such an overcentralized, western-style governance structure created (without the appropriate transparency checks and balances), which fails to acknowledge existing traditional regional influences and tiers of local governance? And why, after a decade, has no progress been made with the Taliban?
 - **Economic:** Despite involvement of some very senior international agencies including the UN, the World Bank, IMF, USAID, DFID, and the EU, why was there not more coordination of spending on direct aid, infrastructure, and economic regeneration?
- The 2008 change in security strategy not only reinvigorated the ANSF program, producing a better caliber of soldier and policeman, it also compelled ISAF forces to learn new, softer skills of building relationships and connecting with communities using larger discretionary funds. This has been extremely effective at the district level and has advanced the remit of the soldier into the once traditional and protected domain of the NGO or state-run equivalent (e.g., DFID or USAID), which would normally be expected to lead in devising a strategy for local governance, aid, and development.
 - ISAF's change in approach reflected a greater local political awareness, which was then integrated into community strategies, thus avoiding unnecessary provocation and duplication of effort. As the largest, most coordinated, funded, and skilled international organization in the country, it was a mistake to restrict its contribution to security issues alone. For too long windows of opportunity were wasted as liberated areas waited for initiatives to begin, but neither Afghan NGOs nor other agency programs were put into action in time.
 - ISAF is attempting to hand over a force that is now losing over one thousand soldiers a year in its attempt to maintain peace. This is unsustainable. The ANSF cannot defeat the Taliban by force. Only by reducing the insurgent threat through political means can Afghan security forces prevail. With far too much focus on annihilating the threat, a political solution has not been pursued with enough vigor by the international community.

- From the Bonn Accord through last year's London, Chicago, and Tokyo conferences, the international community has not just helped design the governance structure, but at regular intervals has unconditionally endorsed it. Yet all major international agencies (including UNAMA) privately acknowledge the present centralized model is failing to deliver, and that corruption is so endemic it assists the Taliban's cause. The absence of any regional representation goes against the grain of Afghan history.
- A 'we are where we are' attitude overshadows the international community. This is due to war weariness after a decade of involvement showing limited results, fueled by an inability to craft a convincing narrative that justifies continued intervention to a skeptical Western population. Yet any visitor to ISAF or UNAMA would be presented with 'selected' news rather than given frank assessments for fear of being labeled as a failure. This attitude has contributed to years of misplaced optimism and a denial of what needs to be done. For example, comments are frequently made about the growing size of the ANSF, the jump in children attending school since 2001, or the numbers of clinics built. In reality, a sizable portion of the ANSF would struggle to operate unsupervised, half of all children still do not attend school, and there remain fewer than two-thousand physicians for a population of 24 million. Much of the country remains too dangerous to collect accurate data, but according to the UN, the Global Acute Malnutrition Rate is around 16 percent, rising to 30 percent in parts of the country. Anything above 15 percent is deemed an emergency. Considering the scale of international interest for over a decade, questions must be asked as to why more has not been achieved.
- **The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB)** was formed by the Afghan government and UNAMA to better manage international efforts, but currently lacks any authority to coordinate the disparate agendas of the myriad of international agencies. Government agencies and departments do not have the experience, coordination, or reach to run countrywide programs. Consequently there is often an overlap: the National Solidarity program, the Afghan Social Outreach Program, and the District Delivery Program are implemented in the same villages with duplicate objectives—and DFID funding goes to all three. **The Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund**²⁶ managed by the World Bank has finally become the principle vehicle used by the international community to pool funding for the National Priority Programs (NPPs). This is a huge improvement in accountability, but many of these programs—ranging from government training to major infrastructure projects—remain unapproved due to bureaucracy.
- Afghanistan has exposed some serious fault lines about how post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization is done. Some civilian agencies refused to work for ISAF as they wore the uniform. Other agencies, including DFID, would demand local contractors were employed, even if it meant waiting for months and building insensitive projects such as irrigation trenches. For many years, large agencies such as the EU have signed checks for billions with no accountability as to how the money might be spent.
- Essentially, the international community, rotating through on six month- to year-long contracts, failed to articulate an economic vision for the country or its regions, instead expecting a newly elected government in its infancy to produce one. A focus on security concerns overshadowed any serious advancement of governance and economic planning. Twelve years later, Afghanistan's GDP remains over 70 percent reliant on outside funding.
- Yet the international community has made impressive progress at a microlevel, recently joining forces with ISAF to liberate (if required) and develop local plans for towns and villages to promote governance, justice, and economic reform. Over nine hundred so-called 'District Community Councils' have been created through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) across the country.²⁷
- In preparations for ISAF's departure, international aid and development programs are already downsizing with many coordination centers (PRTs) such as the British-led one in Helmand shutting completely. There is no doubt that a society so reliant on donor-funded projects will suffer consequences once this support is removed. As this occurs, many of the wealthy will take capital flight and many of the poor will resort to the one market that has thrived in war-torn Afghanistan for decades, namely opium.

²⁶ <http://projects.dfid.gov.uk/project.aspx?Project=114525>

²⁷ Afghanistan MOD Parliamentary Briefing –March 8, 2011

Recommendations

■ **Harnessing ISAF's reputation and skill sets beyond the provision of security**

After a decade-long campaign, ISAF's skill sets and training at last recognize that a soldier's job continues beyond the kinetic (war fighting) phase and into the governance/stabilization/reconstruction phase, coordinating its strategy with civilian agencies. ISAF has adapted to the needs of the local environment and is arguably the only international organization thinking strategically. This is not to take away from the many examples of support by individual agencies that have completed commendable work across the country. This work, however, is tactical — not strategic. If the prize is stability, the international community should not be sensitive about who provides what pieces to complete that jigsaw. If a major overhaul of political strategy with a more regional focus is to take place, there could be an enhanced role for ISAF. This would require greater military cooperation with an NGO community that still harbors reservations about working too closely with those in uniform.

■ **Preparation of a UN monitoring and peacekeeping force**

Throughout its long history, Afghans have passionately resented foreign incursions. Withdrawal of foreign combat troops is therefore a critical step

toward a peace settlement. However, to date, there has been little planning to prepare for the departure of ISAF. Key questions to be answered are: what role might a (UN) follow-on monitoring and peacekeeping force undertake? How can this be promoted to ensure acceptance on all sides? And which (particularly Muslim) countries might be encouraged to participate?

■ **Greater cooperation between International agencies**

The obligation for organizations such as the UN, World Bank, and the IMF to work together post-conflict (or indeed in the pre-conflict stabilization environment) is nothing new. While each country's commitment is likely to be different, there are some basic protocols that could be established for how funding at national, regional, and local levels is streamed, how governance support is provided, and how economic plans are developed.

■ **A single authority to coordinate international aid**

In addition to increased international agency cooperation, thought should be given to how a lead or new authority could develop the necessary skill sets and reputation to act as the recognised voice in coordinating all international aid and economic programs alongside the national and local authorities. Such an authority should be willing to provide upstream engagement as well.



Conclusion

As the evidence and commentary in this report imply, there are a number of factors that suggest that if action is not taken, stability in Afghanistan post-ISAF is likely to worsen. However, a compromise solution, for which history shows there is a precedent, is a possibility.

The question for the West is: do we attempt one last effort or ignore the signs, allow war weariness to get the better of us, and risk having to return on humanitarian grounds in the aftermath of yet another civil war?

Afghanistan has experienced almost every system of government, including a monarchy, republic, theocracy, and communist state. The most notable periods of extended peace were experienced when there was an accepted charismatic leader in the center with freedoms for tribal groupings in the regions to manage their own affairs. Any seasoned observer, Afghan parliamentarian, or opposition voice asked to sketch out a basic structure of governance on a blank sheet of paper reveals an answer that is not just surprisingly consistent, but is a far cry from what is in place today. The favored model is a more regionalized structure, possibly similar to that of the 1950s where a number of economic hubs (Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad, Kunduz, etc.) were free to operate at arm's length from the center. Factors, both positive and negative, which support a rethinking of a political strategy are:

Key positives:

- The post-2008 security strategy has reaped dividends. Competence of the ANSF is improving.
- The seeds of basic governance and economic development are being sown at a subnational level.

- The Afghan constitution is not prescriptive enough to hinder the development of a new political structure—though some amendments may eventually need to be made.
- Tentative talks of reintegration/reconciliation have already been made.
- Mineral extraction—though still some way off—could be a game changer for the economy, if harnessed promptly. Its potential also provides the country with a vision and a glimmer of hope.
- The West has a better collective understanding of how Afghanistan works: its makeup, its, and its challenges. The last decade has been a huge reality check as to what will work and what will not.

Key negatives:

- It is no longer clear why we are fighting this war. Can we continue supporting a government structure prone to corruption that has no guarantee of stability? Or are we simply too war weary to do anything about it?
- The limits of the constitution place too much power in the hands of the president — encouraging abuse and denying efficient decision-making at the regional level. The voting system is simple to beat (some seats are won with just 1 percent of the vote).
- Many ethnic groups in provinces have little to no representation in parliament or in provisional councils.
- There is consequently no coherent and agreed-upon political strategy, and corruption often goes unchecked.

- Without a workable political strategy there is nothing to entice the Taliban to go to the negotiating table. The Taliban also recognizes the fragility of Karzai's government and how its authority will be tested once ISAF departs.
- Pakistan will not root out Afghan terrorism south of the Durrand line; this will only change once it has faith in the long-term stability of Afghanistan and an Indian-backed Uzbek/Tajik-run Kabul is not a reality.
- The enormous size of the army could be a threat to stability if it has no faith in the politicians. Ethnic splits in the ANSF could lead to civil war.
- The international community has not been unified or coordinated enough to challenge the status quo.

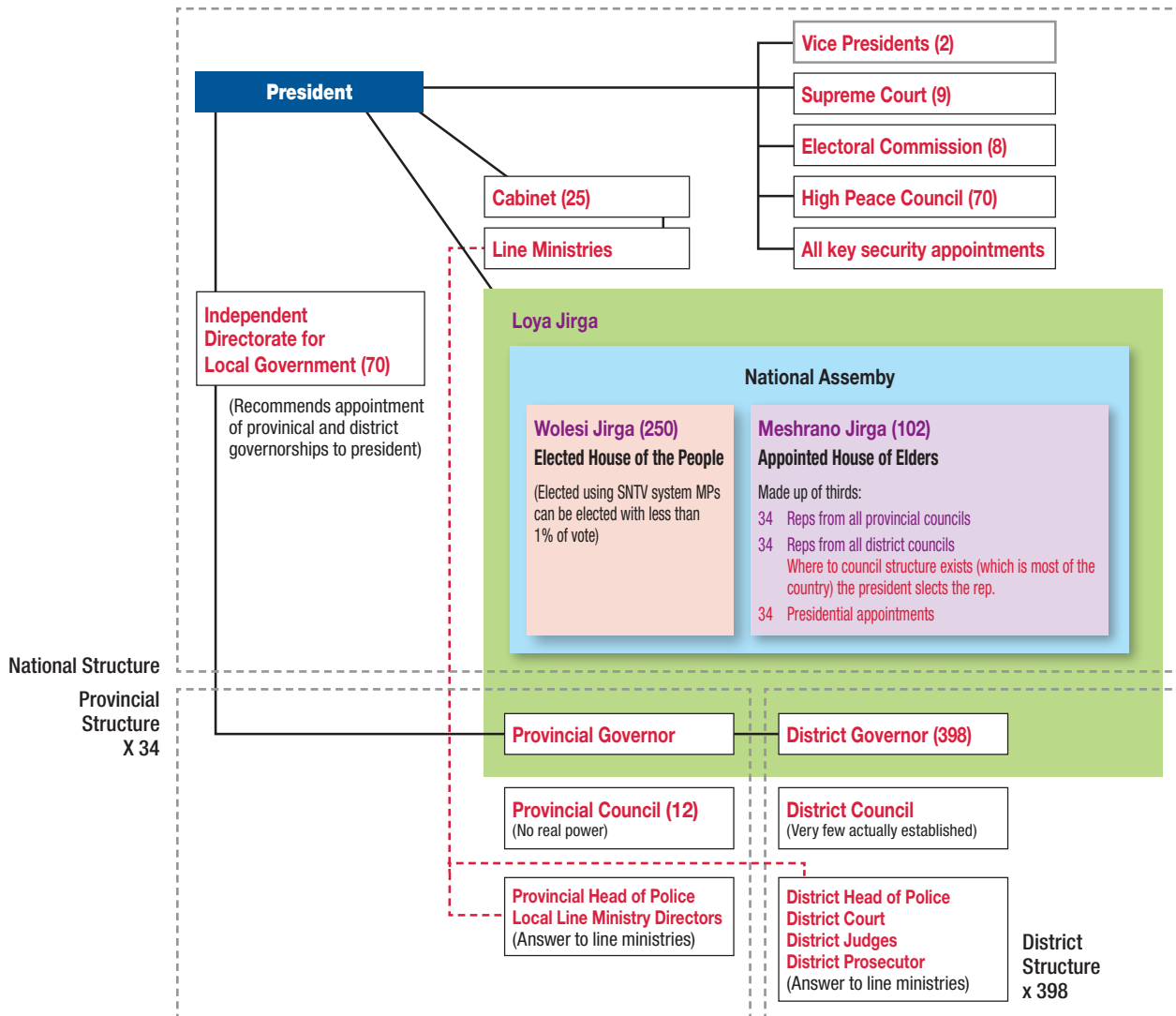
Placed into context, steps toward a compromise political structure could include:

- Acknowledgement by stakeholders (including the executive) that the governance structure needs addressing if long-term peace and prosperity is to be achieved.
- With the debate about governance now opened, re-engagement with the Taliban is being pursued.
- Launch of a comprehensive review of political strategy managed by a small group of UN and Afghan-approved international representatives established to act as moderators and interlocutors with all key Afghan stakeholders. Obvious candidates might include representatives from Turkey, Russia, Pakistan, the US, and Britain, with an independent Afghan facilitator.
- Drafting of a new political model (not a constitution), which builds on the results of the review and encompasses agreed countrywide values and standards. Critically, it will recommend a new, less-centralized political structure introducing a new tier of government with a number (seven to ten) of new regions.
- An agreement brokered with the Taliban for the cessation of violence for the remainder of the transition period. The Taliban would need to publicly suspend their military campaign, with appropriate provisions for monitoring and dealing with ceasefire violations. ISAF operations (including black ops and kinetic drone activity) would also be put on hold.
- Establishment of a small council of senior Afghan representatives, where appropriate including the Taliban, reflecting the major political and ethnic groupings across the country. Taking forward the recommendations of the new political model, the council would be tasked to:
 - Agree upon, in principle, the boundaries of the new regions.
 - Recommend the relationship and divisions of responsibility between central government and the region.
 - Recommend a timetable for replacement of ISAF forces by a UN monitoring force, transition to the new political structure and timetable for eventual elections.
 - Determine the universal standards that must apply across the country and in every region—freedom of movement, access to and provision of healthcare and education, human and women's rights, and a break from any sponsors of terrorism such as Al Qaeda.
- A Loya Jirga convened (as required by Article 111 of the constitution) to confirm the basic proposals of reform.
- This would be followed by an international conference organized and attended by Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, Russia, Tajikistan, Iran, Britain, and the United States with the objective of agreeing to a comprehensive package of support for the country.
- The Constitution amended and presented to the Loya Jirga for confirmation that reduces the powers of the president, introduces the elected position of prime minister, and allows the formation of political parties.
- Local economic plans developed for each region. Consideration given to direct support being provided by two outside countries, one of which must have no direct interest in that region.
- Transition to new structure.

Annex 1: Current Political Structure

The diagram below illustrates the vast power of patronage bestowed on the president under the current political structure, allowing the occupant's power to 'cascade' through the public service, thus hindering any serious accountability of the voice of scrutiny.

RED: positions directly appointed by the president **PURPLE:** positions prone to indirect influence by the president





Annex 2: Summary of the Afghan Constitution

The Afghan constitution was approved by consensus in January 2004 after the 2003 Loya Jirga. It evolved out of the Afghan Constitution Commission mandated by the Bonn Agreement.

It contains twelve chapters and is made up of one-hundred-sixty articles, but is more remarkable for its omissions than its contents. It reads as an off-the-shelf ‘starter’ Constitution for any new Muslim state, but without the localized detail that reflects Afghanistan’s history and countrywide influences.

Key observations include:

- Over-centralized political structure
- Too much power placed in the hands of the president
- Absence of the necessary checks and balances to hold the government to account and tackle corruption
- Omission of any process for the development of political parties
- Absence of any regional responsibility

Chapter 1 – The State

Defines Afghanistan as an Islamic republic, unitary and indivisible state, and sets out a number of general obligations to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes and to provide for balanced development in all areas of the country.

Chapter 2 – Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

Determines the basic rights of citizens to own property, work, receive free education and healthcare, and to vote. It confirms the right of the state to levy taxes and duties. It prohibits the formation of political parties based on ethnicity, language, Islamic school of thought, and region.

Chapter 3 – The President

Defines who may stand as a candidate and the process to elect the president of Afghanistan. The president, as head of state, is elected directly by the people for a five-year term and can only be reelected once. The president appoints two vice presidents, one first and one second.

Presidential responsibilities include: determining policies [subject to approval of the National Assembly (NA)], appointing the senior positions of office including ministers, the attorney general, the director of the central bank and the justices of the Supreme Court (again with the approval of the NA).

Chapter 4 – The Government

Confirms the power granted to the president to appoint ministers (which are introduced for approval to the NA). It sets out a number of general duties of government to protect independence, defend the territorial integrity of Afghanistan, prepare budgets, and protect public wealth. It must report to the NA at the end of the fiscal year.

Chapter 5 – The National Assembly

Describes the makeup of the NA, which consists of two houses:

- **The Wolesi Jirga**, consisting of a maximum of two-hundred-fifty delegates directly elected for five-year terms by PR. At least two females must be elected from each province. It has the primary responsibility for making and ratifying laws, and approving the actions of the president.
- **The Meshrano Jirga**, consisting of members elected from provincial councils, district councils, and the remaining one third appointed by the president. At least 50 percent of these people must be women. Its responsibility is to pass laws, approve budgets, and ratify treaties.

Chapter 6 – Loya Jirga

Confirms the Loya Jirga to be the highest manifestation of the people of Afghanistan. It consists of members of the NA and chairpersons of the provincial and district councils. It is convened in to deal with serious matters of state such as issues related to independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, amendments to the constitution, and to handle prosecutions directed toward the president.

Chapter 7 – The Judiciary

Defines the judicial branch as an independent organ of the state, which consists of the Stera Mahkama (Supreme Court), high courts and appeals courts. It confirms the president's authority to appoint members of the Supreme Court (subject to the approval of the Wolesi Jirga). It states that courts shall apply Shia school of law in cases dealing with personal matters involving the followers of the Shia sect in accordance with the provisions of law.

Chapter 8 – The Administration

Outlines the administration of Afghanistan, which is based on central and local administrative units. The central administration is divided into a number of units, each of which is headed by a minister, while the local administrative unit is a province, each of which has a provincial council.

Chapter 9 – The State of Emergency

Describes what would happen if due to war, the threat of war, serious rebellion, or natural disasters protecting independence, or the nation's survival becomes impossible, by following the provision of the constitution, the president in confirmation of NA declares a state of emergency.

Chapter 10 – Amendments

Describes the areas of the constitution that can be amended and the procedure that needs to be followed in order to make the amendments. The amendment of the fundamental rights of the people is permitted only in order to make them more effective. Considering new experiences and requirements of the time, other contents of the constitution can be amended by the proposal of the president or by the majority of the NA in accordance with the provisions of articles 67 and 146 of the constitution.

Chapter 11 – The Miscellaneous Provisions

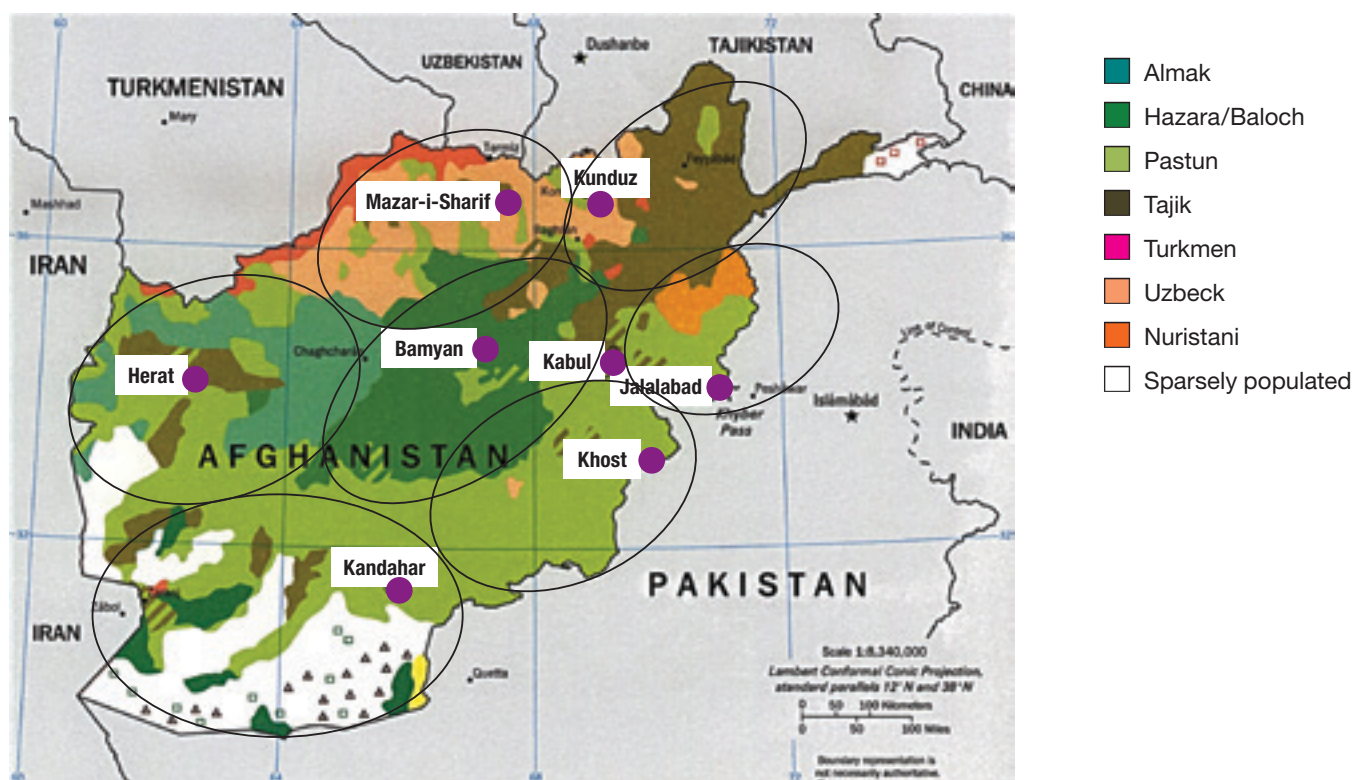
Confirms the rules applicable to key offices of state including the president, vice presidents, ministers, head and members of the Supreme Court, head of the Central Bank, National Security Directorate, governors, mayors, and judges must abide by while holding their positions.

Also included in this chapter is the mandate for the **Independent Electoral Commission** to be established to organize and supervise any election and to hold a referendum within the country based on the provisions of the law.

Chapter 12 – The Transitional Provisions

Describes a series of objectives and decrees related to the period following the adoption of the constitution until the date of inauguration of the NA.

Annex 3: Outline of Regional Areas and Potential Economic Hubs



Source: US Army Operation Enduring Freedom 2003.

Capital Kabul (1,930,000)²⁸

- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Kandahar (468,200) | 3 Mazar-i-Sharif (375,181) | 5 Jalalabad (205,423) | 7 Bamyan (101,000) |
| 2 Herat (397,456) | 4 Kunduz (247,450) | 6 Khost (160,214) | |

²⁸ Estimated populations: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/>



Annex 4: Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-------|--|--------|---|
| ALP | Afghan Local Police | ISI | Internal Security Intelligence (service to the government of Pakistan) |
| ANA | Afghan National Army | MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| ANP | Afghan National Police | NA | National Assembly |
| ANSF | Afghan National Security Forces | NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| CERP | Commander's Emergency Response Program | NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| DFID | Department for International Development | NSC | National Security Council (UK government) |
| FATA | Federally Administrated Territorial Areas (Pakistan) | NTM-A | NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan |
| FDDP | Focused District Delivery Programs | ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| GIRoA | Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan | PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| HIG | Hezb-e-Islami Group | SACEUR | Supreme Allied Commander Europe |
| JCMB | Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board | SDSR | Strategic and Defense Security Review |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device | UNAMA | United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan |
| IJC | International Security and Assistance Force Joint Commander | USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| ISAF | International Security and Assistance Force | | |

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