



U.S. Afghanistan Policy: It's Working

S. Frederick Starr

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
The Johns Hopkins University

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Tel.: 1 202 663 7723

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, U.S.A.
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785
E-mail: caci2@jhuaig.admin.jhu.edu

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The Silk Road Studies Program
Uppsala University
Box 514, SE-75120 Uppsala
Sweden
Tel. +46-18-471-2217; Fax. +46-18-106397
E-mail: info@silkroadstudies.org

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I. A Litany Of Misplaced Criticism *

Even before Afghanistan completed its first elections in more than a generation the balloting was awash with controversy. Thirteen of the opposition candidates pulled out, claiming the ink used to mark voter's thumbs could be washed off, thus opening the way to double voting. Was this problem sufficient to invalidate the elections, or was this merely a ploy by losers to undermine Karzai's victory? By contrast, the vice chair of the UN's electoral panel, while admitting "some technical problems," concluded that overall the process was "safe and orderly." Other observers termed the elections "a triumph," citing the high turnout and failure of Taliban forces to disrupt them.

At least this controversy has two sides. On most other issues the western press has painted a relentlessly bleak picture of Afghan affairs. The litany of errors is long. The US has not committed enough troops because the money to pay them goes to Iraq. The US is too cozy with warlords and too ham-fisted on its own, undercutting support for the Karzai government and scaring off would-be NATO supporters. The US was too slow to develop the Afghan army and police, allowing corrupt elements and drug lords to take over and, worse, fanning a Taliban revival.

Plenty of experts confirm this grim picture. UN staff threatened to leave the country, citing mounting physical danger. Pierre Lellouche, a French member of the EU Parliament, announced after a recent visit that "There is no security in Afghanistan." The US government's own General Accounting Office reported in June on "Deteriorating Security and Limited Resources" for the US forces in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO, warned that its Afghan mission was "flirting with failure," while Amnesty International characterized the situation as "slipping into chaos."

II. Core Problems

If one were to speak only of the early days of the US presence in Afghanistan, each piece of this litany of errors has an element of truth. Others, as we will see, are by now out of date. More important, the exclusive focus on these issues has obscured more serious shortcomings, problems of a strategic rather than tactical nature. In

* This policy paper draws heavily on extensive interviews with persons directly involved in the coalition effort in Afghanistan, with senior Afghan officials, and with U.S. policymakers. Specific data are derived from readily available open sources, including published Congressional hearings, reports by international financial and aid institutions, and the national press of many countries. All opinions and judgments included herein are purely the author's unless otherwise indicated.

spite of his own earlier cautions against “nation building,” President Bush, speaking at the Virginia Military Institute in the spring of 2002, proposed a Marshall Plan” for Afghanistan and its neighbors that added up to state-building on a regional scale. But the post 9-11 Pentagon long stuck with a “narrow”, or “sharp” (depending on your point of view) focus on wiping out Al Qaeda and the Taliban, with a corresponding under-focus on long-term development. Other agencies of the US Government struggled to advance their programs with little coordination either with the Pentagon or with one other, and with much micro-managing by e-mail from offices in Washington.

But even had the Pentagon “gotten it right” or the other agencies been better coordinated, the program would still not have worked, for US’ policy (and UN policy as well) suffered from a birth defect. When the US finally toppled the Taliban, Tajiks from the Northern Alliance took control of Kabul. In a winner-take-all move, they immediately packed the government with their own supporters and relatives, to the exclusion both of Pashtuns, the largest group in the population, and minority Shi’a Hazaras. Eager to sidestep all dissension, the UN’s Bonn meetings in December, 2001, ratified this dangerous status quo, while the “Emergency Loya Jirga,” held in June, 2002, then ratified the Bonn conference’s mistakes.

While U.S. officials talked bravely of “working the situation,” Northern Alliance leaders in Kabul effectively consolidated their hold on power. Marshall Fahim, confirmed in Bonn as Afghanistan’s Minister of Defense, kept his own militia lodged in the capital and cut personal deals with like-minded warlords elsewhere, greatly complicating the task of building a national army. Worse, he and his family seized control of key markets and other assets to create their own income stream, independent of Karzai and the Americans. Many Pashtuns, as they watched this unfold and noted their fellow-Pashtun Karzai’s inability to counteract it, went into a sullen opposition. A few resorted to armed opposition. Since most Taliban leaders had been Pashtun, this gave the appearance of a Taliban revival. In fact, it was worse: a new movement of Pashtuns and other groups aggrieved over having been excluded from the post-Taliban order. Because the US backed Karzai, they blamed their own marginalization on America. This bitter mood gave rise to a new opposition and new insecurity.

In defense of US planners, the Karzai government was still an extremely weak reed to lean on. Charged with rooting out remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, the US worked with whatever forces were at hand, including warlords, postponing to a later phase the achievement of balance within the Kabul government and the consolidation of state institutions.

However understandable, this approach jeopardized efforts in this impoverished land by other US agencies. USAID was effective in providing emergency humanitarian relief, but continuing security problems and neglect of governance issues (not to mention serious under-funding) complicated its efforts to rebuild schools and clinics, print and distribute millions of textbooks, reconstruct irrigation systems and introduce high-yield seeds that could, and eventually did, boost wheat harvests to record levels. NGOs used US taxpayer money and grants from other countries and agencies to dig wells, open medical clinics, and meet other basic needs, but continuing insecurity put this, too, at risk.

III. Facing the Music

By the end of 2002 it was no secret that something was amiss.¹ Critics within and outside the government pointed out that the current approach set two equally important goals in conflict with one another. But this exchange quickly assumed the character of one of those inter-agency dust-ups, common in Washington, that eventually bog down in surly bickering.

With no visible progress by the first months of 2003, concern began to mount in many quarters. But not all. The destabilizing effect of regional and ethnic imbalances in the new Kabul government largely escaped the attention of the CIA. Fortunately, research conducted in various quarters, both within and outside the government, suggested that neglect of this issue could undermine not only the interim Kabul government put in place by the UN but the entire American project in Afghanistan. Unbalanced staffing in the Kabul administration, its overall weakness, delays in setting up new civil and military institutions, and the undiminished power of warlords in the provinces and of the Tajik-Northern Alliance clique in the capital, could bring down an already weakened regime.

In April, 2003, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld went to Afghanistan to see for himself what was happening there. He concluded that US efforts there were not on track, and called for new initiatives to revive them. The National Security Council's staff also had been looking into Afghan policy with an eye towards revitalizing it. Impelled by a mounting sense of urgency, all the relevant branches of government engaged in a complex interagency process of consultation in order to coordinate their thinking and planning.

¹ This essay is based on extensive interviews with U.S. official personnel involved with Afghanistan, all on a "not for attribution" basis. With this exception, all specific information and data are derived from readily available open sources.

The spirit of inter-agency cooperation that pervaded the drafting process bears special notice. Everyone knew that finger-pointing could kill the effort, so instead of engaging in the usual inter-agency bickering they sought means to enable others to change their positions without losing face. In a graceful euphemism, they declared that the new policy was not a strategic about-face but the series of changes made possible by the start of a “new phase.” Indeed, this was not even a new policy but merely an *acceleration* of the old. It did not hurt that while all this was going forward, the press was filled with reports on a “Taliban resurgence,” which gave urgency to the effort to address the fundamental military and political weaknesses of the Karzai government and the UN and US policies that had contributed to those weaknesses. All in all, it was one of the most effective inter-agency collaborations that Washington had seen in decades.

IV. A New Tune

In June, 2003, following intensive work to get all relevant departments fully on board, the National Security Council convened a meeting at which President Bush endorsed a new US policy on accelerating US programs in Afghanistan. But nothing could yet be announced because there was no one to implement the program. The government’s top Afghan hand and Presidential Envoy, Afghanistan-born Zalmay Khalilzad, was at that time still busy with issues of post-war organization in Iraq. He was now deployed to work on Afghan affairs full time and sent off to Kabul as ambassador.

In July and August, 2003, he made several trips to Afghanistan in order to coordinate the new US thinking with the government in Kabul. Happily, Hamid Karzai had already been moving in the same direction. In early 2003 he had appointed the experienced and sophisticated Ali Jalali, then head of Voice of America’s Afghan Service, to be Minister of the Interior. Jalali, working through Karzai, immediately began replacing governors who themselves were warlords or were in league with local warlords.

A few months after appointing Jalali, Karzai asked the highly regarded economist and Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani, to hammer out an agreement with governors requiring them to turn over customs money to Kabul, increasing the central government’s resources by a quarter. While this was going on, Jalali’s efforts were bearing fruit in a highly visible manner, with the removal of Gul Agha Sherzai, the flagrantly disloyal governor of the Taliban’s former capital, Kandahar. With the

appointment in August, 2003, of a successor, Yusuf Pashtun, who acknowledged the government in Kabul, aid money began to flow to this key province from many sides. Finally, in a further effort to modernize and strengthen his team, Karzai appointed the urbane and practical former Afghan General Abdul Rahim Wardak as First Deputy Minister of Defense, to be a voice of responsibility under the corrupt and intractable Marshall Mohammad Fahim.

Karzai, keenly aware that time was running out, eagerly embraced the new program and proposed to accelerate it still more. The US goal was to identify those steps that would enable the Afghans to move ahead faster, but without risking the whole enterprise. In the course of intensive consultations Karzai and his reformist colleagues reshaped to the new initiatives, and in the process, took ownership of them. Increasingly, the role of the US side was to back up the legitimate government in Kabul, yet without handing them one-sided control over what had to be a joint endeavor if it was to succeed.

Finally, the new program, entitled “Accelerating Success,” was announced to the public in September, 2003. The announcement was modest and passed virtually unnoticed in the American and international press. Two months later Ambassador-designate Khalilzad presented a comprehensive report on the new policy in his confirmation hearings. But Khalilzad’s testimony was lost in the pre-Thanksgiving crush of other news.

Why did the Bush Administration underplay the importance of this basic new policy initiative? Why did it fail to publicize “Accelerating Success” down to the present, when its silence has directly contributed to the public’s deepening despair over America’s role in Afghanistan? The reasons for its silence are quite understandable, even if the effects of silence were regrettable. First, it was important that this fresh approach be seen as what it actually was in fact, Karzai’s policy, and not simply the latest Washington scheme that arrogant Americans were foisting on the Afghans. Second, an ever more skeptical western public wanted deeds, not promises, and the new policy was as yet unproven on the ground. Third, there was still no money to pay for the new program. Only late in October, 2003 was the \$87 billion supplemental budget passed that would fund US activities in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The fact that the Iraq appropriation was to cover the entire period of US involvement there while the Afghan budget was for one year only made the 18:1 ratio between them appear grossly unbalanced in favor of Iraq. But if it is continued over the likely period of US involvement, estimated variously as five to ten years, the \$2.4 billion earmarked in the regular and supplemental budgets for Afghanistan in 2004 turns out to be very favorable.

Even if the new approach passed unnoticed in the American and western press, it was not ignored in Afghanistan. Both President Karzai and Ambassador Khalilzad used press conferences, meetings, and speeches to publicize it. Many of the country's 38 radio stations and 200 publications reported on it, some in detail. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Those most affected by the new approach saw it at once as an important, if as yet untested, turning point.

V. What Is The New Program?

When US forces attacked the Taliban in December, 2001, they did so with deep respect for the dangers and difficulties that country has always posed to outside forces. With the fatal examples of Great Britain and the Soviet Union before their eyes, they wanted nothing so much as to accomplish their mission and leave. In spite of President Bush's unexpected call to nation-building there, the US military felt it was operating in incomprehensible and therefore perilous territory and welcomed help from any Afghans who would collaborate with them, including the suspect Northern Alliance (a mixture of former Communists and Islamists) and other warlords from elsewhere in the country.

Over time America's knowledge and understanding increased. Contact on the ground revealed that a solid core of Afghanistan's political class wanted a modern state, one that respected Islamic realities but could also create conditions that would enable people to live decent lives. Such people welcomed help from the outside if it strengthened Afghan sovereignty and institutions rather than undermining them. Experience with humanitarian relief and early development projects confirmed this view.

By the end of 2003 many key US officials on both sides of the Potomac and in Congress had embraced this more optimistic view of Afghanistan's future and America's role in it. Such a perspective informs the program "Accelerating Success." The initiative consists of four core objectives: first, to achieve a reasonable ethnic/regional balance in the staffing of all ministries of the central government, beginning with the ministers themselves, and also in provincial and district offices; second, on this basis, to build up a new Afghan National Army (A.N.A.) and other security forces that will serve a united and unitary state; third, to strengthen the capacities of governance at all levels, including both administrative divisions and elective bodies at the central and local levels; and, fourth, to speed the pace of economic and social reconstruction throughout the country and in the broader region of which it is the heart.

A fifth goal concerns process, namely, to achieve these objectives by lending support to the Afghan government, and to do so from a central coordination point in Kabul rather than from Washington, with the closest possible cooperation among US governmental agencies. Heading the execution of these policies is Ambassador and Presidential Envoy Khalilzad, with all other key US figures in Kabul, including the able Lieutenant General David W. Barno, chief of US forces in Afghanistan, working through a council chaired by him.

“There’s a great distance between the cup and the lip,” runs the old adage. It is one thing to declare a new policy and quite another to implement it effectively. In order to determine whether “Accelerating Success” is living up to its self-congratulatory name, let us examine progress to date in achieving each of the four main goals.

1) Achieve Ethnic and Regional Balance in All Levels of Government.

Back in 2002, when the Tajiks of the Northern Alliance in Kabul proposed Hamid Karzai as a concession to the Pashtuns, of which he was one, the head of the Provisional Government was seen as benign but politically untested, and with no longer any troops under his command. But in redressing the ethnic and regional imbalances put in place by the Northern Alliance, Karzai has shown a hand that is both strong and deft.

The strength showed when, with the backing of US military and civilian leaders, Karzai went straight to the greatest force for disunity and corruption in his government, Marshall Mohammed Fahim, and let him know he had no choice but to yield the total control of the Ministry of Defense that he and other Tajiks had forged. The deftness showed when, after installing a rank of competent and ethnically diverse deputies just under Fahim, he let Fahim remain as Minister. It showed again when he held before Fahim the prospect of a symbolic post as his vice presidential candidate in the October 2004 elections and then, at just the right moment, he dumped him in favor of a brother of the late Tajik hero, Ahmad Khan Massoud. It did not hurt that Khalilzad had earlier sat both Karzai and Fahim down and told them they had to work together, in short, that Fahim had to start functioning more responsibly.

Karzai began redressing the ethnic balance simultaneously at the level of ministers and deputy ministers. His early appointment of Jalali as Minister of Interior meant that Jalali could begin appointing ethnically diverse governors and police chiefs at the same time that Karzai was working at the top.

To succeed, the new policy had to convince alienated Pashtuns and Hazaras that their voice, too, was audible in the halls of government. In practice, this meant reaching out to moderate former Taliban. This presented no problem for Karzai, as he himself had backed the Taliban early on. With US backing, Karzai reached out to former Taliban figures, going so far as to extend a hand to more intransigent émigré mullahs across the Pakistan border in Peshawar.

A maximalist approach to this ethnic, regional, and political balancing would not have worked and Karzai wisely abjured it. In February 2004 he replaced the chief of the National Security Directorate, the sinister Tajik from the Panjshir Valley, Mohammad Arif Sarwari. Because the new man, Amrullah Saleh, is also a Panjshiri and part of Mohammed Fahim's Tajik network, his appointment seemed to many as a step sideways. But he is younger, better educated, and has a more national perspective than his predecessor and thus fits in better with the reshaped cabinet.

Even Karzai's gradualism in achieving ethnic, regional, and political balance in the governmental bureaucracy was too fast for some. When late last autumn he briefly left the country on business, several key figures from the old

Northern Alliance bloc conspired to form an opposition bloc designed to fence in Karzai politically and thwart his powers. By then there were countervailing forces that could mobilize against this cabal. Together with Karzai's American backers they quickly neutralized the threat.

2) Developing The Afghan National Army And Police.

American critics of US policy complain that the Pentagon erred in assigning a low priority at first to the formation of the Afghan National Army. The delay was certainly regrettable but also inevitable, given the domination of the governmental apparatus by Tajiks from the Northern Alliance, and especially those from the Panjshir Valley. Early efforts to organize the ANA were hobbled when Fahim and his acolytes simply filled the ranks of the new force with loyalists sent by warlords, most of them Tajiks. These were very poor material for a modern national army. Thousands collected their first paychecks and left. At the same time, Pashtuns and Hazaras, fearing their marginalization in the new force, also began quitting the ANA in droves. This in turn further polarized ethnic relations and deepened Pashtun distrust of Kabul.

As the Northern Alliance and Tajiks ceased to dominate the Ministry of Defense, it was possible to move forward with the ANA. Once more the government launched

an appeal for volunteers and this time they came forward in large numbers, not just Tajiks and Uzbeks, but also Pashtuns and Hazaras, who had not failed to note that “their kind” were no represented in the new force and its leadership. Today, attrition rates have plummeted and the ANA is oversubscribed with genuine volunteers.

The reconstituted ANA did not exist in isolation, however, and until several other problems were addressed its effectiveness would remain narrowly circumscribed. Above all, it was necessary to lay down a marker with the main warlords. Both Karzai and U.S. administrators approached this task warily, no wonder since the accepted number of troops under the warlords’ command was 100,000. The first step in this process was declaratory, with Karzai and his American supporters telling warlords that unless they began cooperating with the government on key issues they would be isolated and marginalized.

A critical tactical change by the US army reinforced this threat in the hotly contested southeastern borderlands with Pakistan. The old policy kept American soldiers in safe encampments, venturing out only sporadically for cordon and sweep operations. Warlords and “Taliban” units moved back as soon as the Americans left, intimidating the locals and assuring their own continued control locally. The new approach called for an enduring US presence in contested areas.

Not only did this produce an outpouring of local support but it elicited tips that have led to the discovery of large caches of weapons. A year ago warlord/Taliban forces roamed freely in heavily armed groups of 150-200; now they are reduced to small lightly armed bands that must stay on the move merely to survive. The fact that they can still launch deadly attacks from time to time does not hide the fact that the initiative has shifted away from the anti-US warlords and Taliban die-hards even in the border zones.

Threats against the warlords had to be backed up by credible force from international military units in Afghanistan. This meant, first, expanding the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) and other international forces in Afghanistan and getting them to operate beyond the confines of Kabul. This change, begun by the end of 2003, proceeded more slowly than the situation required. Fortunately, the US contingent was being significantly expanded at the same time. Beginning with an inadequate 12,000 troops at the end of 2003, the US forces in Afghanistan reached 17,000 today, bringing the total Coalition ranks to almost 20,000 troops, of whom 15% are from US allies. This number still falls short of the need. But their ability to show up on short notice anywhere in the country, often accompanied by a growing number units of the ANA, throws remaining warlords on the defensive and sends a powerful signal to all who would back them.

Closely coordinated with these developments is the steady expansion of the ANA, which now boasts 13,700 soldiers and will double that number by the end of 2005.

President Karzai and others have set the goal of 70,000 trained troops by 2009 but this target will be reached earlier. The ANA cannot yet operate fully on its own. But when ANA contingents showed up at face-offs between warlords in northern Faryab province in October, 2003, and then in Herat this August, they were a significant factor in achieving positive outcomes.

The emergence of a well-trained ANA force, backed by Coalition troops, is tipping the scales against the warlords and making demobilization of the latter an attainable goal. A national agreement on "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration" that Karzai worked out in April, 2004, went nowhere at first. But then the pace of demobilization quickened, with the result that the 2004 goal of 18,000 demobilized warlord troops will be met ahead of schedule. In September General Wardak, Deputy Minister of Defense, announced that all heavy weapons controlled by warlords (chief among them Minister of Defense Fahim's own troops) had been removed from Kabul.

International planning for demobilization has produced some surprises. Japanese studies revealed that the number of warlord forces had been grossly exaggerated, the actual total being closer to 50,000 than 100,000. Coalition and Afghan leaders both confidently predict that all Afghan military units not part of the ANA will be demobilized by next June. As that happens, there remains only the practical question of whether the UN will be able to fulfill its assigned task of actually collecting the weapons and, more urgently, reintegrating the former irregular troops into the civilian economy.

The transition from warlordism to a national army depends on the Afghans' success in making deals with the former warlords themselves. With a general amnesty in force for all who are not guilty of criminal acts, Karzai's government must find honorable and face-saving roles for every militia commander it demobilizes. Two recent clashes, mentioned above, indicate the subtlety required in this work.

Both Karzai and Khalilzad were negotiating with Uzbek warlord and former Northern Alliance leader Abdul Rashid Dostam to get him to disband his private forces and take a positive role in the new order of things. In the midst of this, in October, 2003, Dostam called his forces out against a rival warlord, the Tajik Atta Mohammad, and defied Karzai to stop him. In the end Karzai, with US, UN, and British backing, succeeded in forcing both leaders to turn over heavy weapons, including some 28 tanks and 265 armored personnel carriers, and to demobilize several thousand troops each. Both retain some forces today, and can use them to enforce their continuing personal influence in the northern provinces in which their power is

based. But the usefulness is increasingly limited to helping Dostam and Mohammad save face as they play out their respective end-games as independent warlords.

A similar opera buffo was recently played out this August in the western city of Herat, where a Pashtun warlord nominally loyal to Karzai, Amanula Shah, attacked the stubborn old anti-Soviet warrior, boss of Herat and bitter foe of the US, Ismail Khan. The US sent Coalition forces to the area, backed up by some 1,000-1,500 ANA troops. Both warlords got the message. Karzai ordered Amanula Shah to Kabul, where he remains a "guest" under house arrest, while Khan, his weakness and vulnerability exposed, swallowed his pride and petitioned the ANA and Coalition for support. When Khan used the first opportunity to renew his resistance to Kabul, Karzai summarily sacked him. After an initial day of rioting, there was scarcely a murmur.

Even when a major warlord remains intransigent, the existence of a credible ANA will often cause his subordinates to rethink their own positions. Thus, while Dostam was making his show of independence from Kabul, one of his top commanders, Juma Hamdard, switched to Karzai's side, pledging that 149 of Dostam's field commanders would join him.

The ANA is the major bulwark of Afghanistan's future security but the police are scarcely less important. The UN had assigned Germany the task of forming and training new police forces for the country's thirty-two provinces. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer came to Afghanistan to dedicate a new police academy but otherwise progress was slow at best. In 2004, the US stepped in to fill this vacuum. Working closely with Interior Minister Jalali, it championed the concept of an Afghan National Police Force and promptly built and staffed seven regional training centers for the new force. 20,000 new police have already gone through short training programs, with the total force of 62,000 expected to complete similar training by the end of 2005. Significantly, these include all future highway and border police, i.e., those who will address the problem of contraband and drug trafficking. The new police have already reduced the number of illegal checkpoints in eastern Jalalabad province from 75 to four.

The mood of seriousness in both military and police reform has not escaped the notice of Afghanistan's neighbors, nor has strong US support for these initiatives. Thanks to this, a Tripartite Commission of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US set up in the summer of 2003 is increasingly active as a kind of regional strategic forum. As a consequence, Pakistan's army has begun active operations in the tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan, the first time since Pakistan's creation in 1947 that its army has entered this heretofore closed zone.

None of these promising changes alone will forge Afghanistan's future security, nor do they together mean that all former militia leaders will forever abstain from opportunistic and violent acts of defiance. But combined with the achievement of reasonable parity among the ethnic, regional, and political forces in Afghanistan, they mark an important stage in the transition from an era in which all disagreements are settled through armed combat to one in which tough political struggle is the order of the day.

3) Strengthening Government and Improving Administration.

Across Central Asia, of which Afghanistan is a part, family, clan, and tribal networks have proven the key to survival through times of foreign rule or fragmentation. Now they have become an impediment to modern governance. The reason is obvious: when clan ties prevail in hiring decisions they force merit and professionalism to take a back seat and all but guarantee incompetent rule by amateurs, not to mention endless corruption.

In reversing this process the key person has proven to be the intrepid Minister of the Interior, Ali Jalali. Confident in the backing of President Karzai and the US, he moved boldly to replace over half the governors and two-thirds of the provincial chiefs of police. In a stroke he undercut the financial base of clan solidarity and the foundations of the warlords' reward system. Equally important, he opened the way for national-minded professionals to fill these posts.

As we have seen, the same process carried out deftly by Minister of Finance Ashraf Ghani led to an immediate leap in funds going to Kabul in 2003 and what is expected to be a further 50% increase this year. The new administrators will soon introduce an income tax that will be extended, among others, to the thousands of NGO workers in the country.

Professionalizing the civil service sounds easy but is actually fraught with danger. Every person dismissed deprives a family, clan, or local network of a lever of influence or source of money. To soften the effects of change, Karzai and his ministers must adroitly work the very networks of families and clans they are seeking to weaken. Usually, this means offering alternative positions to many of those put out of jobs. Only Afghans have the knowledge to do this effectively, but without steady backing from the Americans, UN, and other international forces in Afghanistan, they would be unable to prevail.

At the UN-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2002, responsibility for rebuilding the Afghan state machinery was parceled out among various nations, with Germany taking the lead on the police, Italians on the judiciary, etc. Throughout 2002 and 2003 much of the work done under these initiatives was more form than substance, mainly because countries were unwilling to commit the personnel and money needed to do the job. There was progress, to be sure, as when the World Bank successfully defined the legal basis and responsibilities of each unit of the Afghan government. But the successes tended to be on issues that could be pursued from the safety of offices rather than on the provincial front lines.

During the past year the US has taken the bull by the horns. Before last winter's Constitutional Loya Jirga it staunchly backed Karzai in resisting calls by Germany and others to federalize Afghanistan, a move that would have flown in the face of 200 years of Afghan tradition and opened the entire apparatus of state to "colonization" by tribes and clans. Since then, America has lent support to ministers seeking to replace political appointees with professionals and has funded hundreds of advisors to assist the new ministry staffs as they introduce competence-based practices. Taking a long view, the US is now working to establish in Kabul a Civil Service Academy, the first anywhere in Central Asia, to prepare new generations of qualified managers and administrators.

Vice-President Hidayat Amin Arsala has recently drawn up a "Guide to the Government of Afghanistan" and published it in local languages and English. For the first time Afghans themselves can learn who is responsible for what, and how they can best interact with the government to which they pay taxes. Neither this nor any of the other recent initiatives means that Afghanistan is no longer a weak state or that it does not still suffer from a debilitating under-governance.

But, together, these initiatives are gradually putting the legitimate, UN-mandated government in Kabul in charge of the country. Centripetal forces are beginning to prevail over the centrifugal forces that have held sway in Afghanistan for a quarter century. Step by step, the government is starting to look serious, not only in Kabul but in the provinces as well.

Many important initiatives in the strengthening of government have been devised and carried through by the Afghans themselves, without outside help. Among these, its controversial decision to empower the government to channel and coordinate all activity by international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is of particular importance.

The several thousand NGOs operating in Afghanistan can take pride in having played a key role in averting the humanitarian crisis that was widely predicted after

the fall of the Taliban. The US government, and also the EU, can take equal pride in having been the largest funders of these groups. But this achievement also has a negative side that has largely gone unnoticed abroad.

Committed to rendering assistance to desperately poor Afghans in the shortest possible time, many NGOs moved ahead on their own, with little or no consultation with the Afghan government. It was all too easy for them to view Kabul as an impediment to their work, and therefore set up what became in effect a parallel structure to the administration at every level. Not only did they hire away the most capable locals but they paid them salaries far higher than those received by any local provincial civil servant. By so doing, NGOs undermined the very processes of upgrading Afghan governance that were essential if the country was ever to be able to handle problems on its own.

Minister of Finance Ghani resolved to address this problem, not by cutting back the activity of NGOs but by channeling their efforts in such a way as to assure that they meshed with the government's own strategic goals. At the December 2003 Tokyo meeting of donors Ghani demanded that all NGOs register with the government and provide information on their activities in Afghanistan. Those refusing to do so would be asked to leave. He also announced the formation of an Afghanistan Assistance Coordination Authority to oversee the flow of external funds into the country. A few NGOs objected but most understood that there was no other way to bring coherence to the massive NGO undertaking and to prevent groups with religious or political agendas from operating under the NGO umbrella. Convinced that this step would help rather than hurt Afghanistan's overall development, all the donor countries agreed.

The Other Side of Governance: Participation And Democracy

Even the most efficient state administration will fail unless there exist effective and trusted channels for citizen participation. By ratifying the Northern Alliance's swift and thoroughgoing post-Taliban power grab, the Bonn conference convinced many excluded Afghans that their voices would never be heard in the councils of government. As noted above, the Emergency Loya Jirga, held in June, 2002, worsened the situation by ratifying Bonn's misstep. Against this background, the Constitutional Loya Jirga, convened in December, 2003, marked what may have been the last chance to correct the "birth defect" from which the Karzai government suffered.

This second Loya Jirga succeeded in correcting all the mistakes that had been committed in Bonn. Its achievement was to bring the Pashtuns and Hazaras back into the national polity. Germany may have provided the tent, but it was the steady, behind-the-scenes backing from Ambassador Khalilzad and other American representatives that in the end enabled the provisional Afghan government to bring excluded groups back into the national polity and gave them grounds for feeling themselves fully vested in the new Afghanistan.

Skeptics had predicted that impoverished Afghans would take no interest in elections to the Loya Jirga, but 85% of eligible voters chose to participate. Now the same skeptics predicted that Pashtuns and others would turn the tables on those who were formerly dominant and carry out their own purge of Tajiks and Uzbeks. But this did not happen. Moderate Pashtuns and Hazaras prevailed over those seeking primitive vengeance. This show of moderation by leaders of these groups convinced many Afghans, as well as foreign governments, that Afghans were quite capable of self-governance, and that democratic institutions were an essential building block for effective government in this complex society.

Buoyed up by the renewed national self-confidence that flowed from the Loya Jirga's success, the Afghan government moved to establish elective councils (*jirgas*) at the provincial and district levels. American assistance will now enable the Kabul government to set up in every section of the country a massive program of five-day training courses for the elected members of these councils.

Meanwhile, national elections loomed. Twice postponed because of the logistical and operational problems of registering millions of illiterate voters in a country with no census records, the elections were finally set for October 9. When "Taliban" forces killed twelve election workers many abroad became convinced that the elections were doomed. But fully 10.3 million Afghans registered to vote, more than the UN's estimate of the total of those eligible. And if there were double-registrations, as doubtless happened, this was a minor and probably inevitable flaw. The UN, which oversaw the work of registration, can claim credit for an overwhelmingly successful process. It would not have succeeded, however, without the security provided by the Afghan government and its American partners, and without the new spirit of balance created through that same teamwork.

The high politics of the pre-election period threw further fuel onto the skeptics' fire. Some charged that there were too many candidates (eighteen) for a fair vote while others claimed that Karzai had effectively removed all viable opponents and was running unchallenged. Neither accusation was warranted.

The large number of aspirants was, if anything, a credit to Afghans' readiness to engage in elective politics rather than shoot one another. And any field that included the likes of former Minister of Education Yunos Qanooni, a qualified professional, a Tajik, and once an aide to Ahmad Shah Massoud, was not to be taken lightly.

For Karzai, the challenge was to keep former Northern Alliance members, mainly Tajiks and Uzbeks, close enough to his administration that they would continue to feel themselves part of it but not so close that they could dominate it. This is one reason for his keeping Marshall Fahim as head of the Ministry of Defense and for including him on his electoral ticket as a vice presidential candidate. But when Fahim threatened to overplay his hand by mounting new threats to the President, Karzai, with strong backing from the EU and United States, removed him from the ticket and replaced him with Ahmad Zia Massoud, a brother of the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. Fahim and a cabal that included Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah, responded by throwing their weight behind Qanooni. But the presence on Karzai's team of a certified Massoud, a close relative of the "Lion of the Panjshir" whom al Qaeda murdered on the eve of 9-11, helped divide the northern vote and strengthened Karzai's chances of victory.

The main challenges facing participants in the Afghan elections, and the electorate as a whole, were the normal problems of politics in a new democratic system. Even the unfortunate deaths of election workers may hide a deeper truth. Besides the fact that six of the thirteen killed had refused the protection of security forces, election workers as a group managed successfully to register virtually all eligible men and women. This provides further evidence that Afghanistan has turned the corner from an era of military confrontation to one of normal, albeit fierce, politics.

4) Speeding The Pace Of Reconstruction.

The holding of successful elections is by no means a foregone conclusion. If large segments of the electorate are convinced that conditions in Afghanistan are deteriorating, it is unlikely they will validate the elections through their participation. This was well understood by both Karzai and his American friends as they conceived operation "Accelerating Success." It is no exaggeration to say that the entire exercise was planned with the timetable of impending elections in mind.

As late as the end of 2003 few of the impressive projects of economic and social development had yielded results that were convincing to average Afghans. All Afghans were gratefully aware of the massive humanitarian relief effort that had saved them from starvation in 2001 and 2002. But the real money for reconstruction

only began to flow in mid-2003, with the largest part coming in only in late spring of 2004. The Afghan government and its American backers faced a potential crisis in meeting the public's growing expectations.

An important step towards addressing this problem is the Pentagon's innovative notion of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), small to mid-sized units that provide highly visible security but also carry out a range of critically important development projects. Initially, many NGOs criticized the concept for mixing security and development. Several Coalition partners shared these doubts and were slow to lend their support to the PRTs. But beginning in the spring of 2004, PRTs appeared in Mazar-i-Sharif (Great Britain), Kunduz (Germany), Parwan (Korea and the US). Most, and especially those in regions perceived as dangerous, were staffed solely by American troops. Without exception, local Afghans greeted them warmly. Nineteen PRTs are now in operation.

Equally important was the reopening of bombed out roads and bridges. The most powerful engine for economic development in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole is regional trade. Recognizing this, the US Department of Commerce and Treasury Department and the Asia Development Bank strongly promoted the renewal of transportation infrastructure. Beginning in early 2003 the US and Japan redoubled work on the Kabul-Kandahar highway, which cut travel time between those two centers by two thirds. The US also engaged Japan and Saudi Arabia to rebuild the long section of the national "Ring Road" extending from Kandahar to Herat in the West. More recently, America committed to rebuilding a crucial bridge over the Panj River between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, which will reopen North-South trade.

Other nations rushed in to build links between the Ring Road and adjacent countries. Uzbekistan came forward with a road connecting its southern border with Herat, India committed \$84 million to reconnect Herat and the Iranian border, and Iran is spending \$7 million to link its highway system with the Indian road.

In the process, big-power competition arose over who would link the Ring Road with the Arabian Sea to the south. An informal coalition of Russia, India, and Iran is investing heavily in a new Iranian terminal at Chabahar, near Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf, that will enable India to import gas and products from Central Asia and Afghanistan via Herat without crossing Pakistan. China and Pakistan meanwhile are focusing on the construction of a major new port at Gwadar, west of Karachi, with links to Kandahar and Kabul. The latter project holds better long-term prospects, but both can play a valuable role for Afghanistan. Either way, Afghanistan wins.

Besides the PRTs and “cornerstone” projects in transportation, eight agencies of the US government are working on several hundred other projects in Afghanistan. A sampling of this bewildering array suggests its extent and breadth. USAID, for example, is training classroom teachers, 30,000 of whom will have completed its courses by the end of 2005. Other experts are helping overhaul the judicial system while still others are developing a functioning land title system and rebuilding agricultural markets, both of which are essential to the development of normal agriculture, as opposed to poppy cultivation. Hundreds of clinics, power generating stations, and even industrial parks are being put in place. An American University will soon rise in Kabul. It should be noted that while the USAID office in Kabul is one of the largest and most active on earth, it remains understaffed.

No less important than the sheer quantity of such projects is the fact that Afghans figure prominently in the design and management of nearly all of them. Thus, the PRTs are overseen by a council chaired by Minister of Interior Jalali, with two international co-chairs. The Afghan government is organizing local councils to guide development in every one of the country's 20,000 villages. Women figure prominently in those already functioning. Further, as mentioned above, the Afghan government exercises active oversight of the work of the thousands of NGOs operating on its territory.

All this activity is developing a normal market-based economy in a country that has not known one for two generations. The improving economic climate is reflected in such developments as the emergence of a consortium of local investors in Mazar-i-Sharif who have raised \$35 million to build a ghee factory in their city. Still to be answered is the critical question of whether E.U. and the United States will provide preferential market access for Afghan goods, as both did for goods from Bangladesh and Jordan.

VI. The Balance Sheet: For Afghanistan and for the U.S.

This overview of recent developments in Afghanistan has traced the development and implementation of a major new phase of US policy in that country. It has been presented here as an American initiative, which it was in fact, but Afghans were involved with it at every stage from conception to implementation. It would therefore be more appropriate to refer to it as a new phase of Afghan and American policy. And since in due course the UN, NATO, and America's coalition partners all fell in with it, one might call it a new phase of state building in Afghanistan. This

policy was announced at the end of 2003 and began in earnest only in the spring of 2004, when money to implement it finally became available. As of this writing it has been in effect for barely seven months.

The newness of this departure makes it difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate. This, plus the fact that the US government announced its new direction *sotto voce*, makes a curious paradox of American political discourse in 2004 more comprehensible. For at the very time the new policy was first being implemented, criticism of America's policy in Afghanistan reached a shrill crescendo. Even after the new direction was announced, *Time* magazine, in a cover story, characterized the struggle in Afghanistan as "the forgotten war." As late as May-June of this year the journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article on "Afghanistan Unbound" which warned darkly of a surging Taliban resurgence and concluded that U.S. policy there was a dead letter.

Notwithstanding these doomsayers, a process of military, social, political, and economic stabilization is well underway in Afghanistan. Increasingly, the country's security is being protected by Afghans themselves. New institutions are beginning to function and lend strength to the unitary state that long existed in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion. Elective principles are gaining adherents at the local, provincial and national levels. Declining levels of political violence have enabled Afghans to focus more attention on the economy, which grew by 30% in 2003 (albeit from an abysmally low base) and will reach a growth rate of 24% this year. All of this suggests that Afghanistan has successfully weathered its crisis; it has passed the critical turning point of its post-Taliban evolution and now has a reasonable chance of becoming, over time, a normal and prosperous country.

Evidence gleaned from more than a half year of the new direction has engendered confidence in the international community. When donor countries promised \$4.5 billion over three to five years at the Tokyo meeting of funders, they did so because they could not allow post-Taliban Afghanistan to fail. When in March-April, 2004, they convened in Berlin and promised the same amount for a single year they did so as investors, encouraged at the progress of the fledgling enterprise.

This does not change the fact that Afghanistan remains a land of misery. The world's poorest country after Sierra Leone, it endures the highest infant mortality rate anywhere, with only 13% of those who survive infancy having access to potable water. It also remains a dangerous place, in which politically motivated bombings kill far more Afghans than foreigners, in which rockets can still be launched against senior officials, and in which even a walk in one's apricot orchard can end in bloodshed caused by an unknown land mine.

Notwithstanding these grim realities, most Afghans themselves are convinced their country has found a new, positive direction, and one that should improve their lives over the coming years. This is affirmed by the most reliable gauge of opinion possible, the decision of millions of Afghan refugees to return to their homes in a country battered by three decades of violence. Nearly two million have now returned from Pakistan and another 1.2 million from Iran. In 2004 alone some 400,000 Afghans have repatriated from Iran. The U.N. assists them, but it does so with such frugality (from \$3 to \$30 for travel and no more than \$8 for expenses) that one can be sure that no one goes home for the money. Rather, these many Afghans have concluded, on the basis of evidence gleaned from family and neighborhood information networks, that prospects for their families' safety and future well-being are better today in Afghanistan than in any other place open to them.

What Is This Costing the U.S.?

Until the American mission in Afghanistan is done, which may be another five years or more, it is not possible to say precisely how much the Afghanistan project will cost the US. Down to the beginning of the present phase of operations in late spring 2003, 121 American troops had lost their lives in Afghanistan, of whom 53 perished in combat. Other losses, both military and civilian, since the end of major combat add up to some two dozen persons.

The cost in money is also considerable. The price tag for the 2004-2005 phase of the new policy course "Accelerating Success" is about \$ 2.4 billion, with a further \$10 billion per year devoted to the military, for a total of \$12.4 billion per annum. The high figure for the military will decline as the ANA begins to function. And while it is true that other countries have contributed to reconstruction, the US is still providing more than 31 of the other donors combined. After America, Japan has proven to be the most generous, with 12% of the total, while the EU provides 10%. In addition, Great Britain and Germany have each provided 5% on their own, as compared with France, which has contributed next to nothing, and Russia, which presented Karzai with an old Soviet bill for "services" rendered.

What Is the US Getting in Return?

Even though "Accelerating Success" will continue for several more years, it is already possible to speak with some confidence about the gains that flow from the US activity

in Afghanistan since 2001, as they are clearly evident on the ground. First, by hitting Bin Laden in what had become his home base, the US splintered the Al Qaeda organization he had built up over many years. And by destroying the Taliban and working with the UN to build a more solid new state on Afghan soil, the US is removing that country from the list of “weak states” that have provided the safest havens for groups like Al Qaeda and other terrorists.

Second, the crushing of the Taliban removed one of the most heartless and retrograde regimes anywhere, lifting a monstrous burden from twenty-five million people. And since this oppressive state had enjoyed financial backing and diplomatic recognition from both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, its destruction sent the clearest possible signal to those countries that their support for brutal Islamist regimes would no longer be tolerated---a fundamental shift in the war on terrorism.

Third, the US’ resolve to take the lead in rebuilding Afghanistan and assisting its reintegration into the community of nations and the global economy directly attacks one of the preconditions of most extremist regimes today, poverty. It is true, of course, that many Islamist leaders come from the upper middle and even upper classes, with engineers and doctors prominent among them. But the source of the desperation that impels many of those to whom they pitch their appeal is poverty. Such poverty is especially prevalent in the world’s mountain regions, and is readily exploited by many extremist movements, of which Islamists are but one. Mountain-bound Afghanistan is becoming a laboratory of “best practices” for the reduction of extreme poverty in remote mountain zones. Success there will show the way to progress in embattled regions as diverse as Kashmir, Chechnya, Karabakh, Nepal, the Balkans, and Colombia.

Fourth, what happens in Afghanistan affects the entire region of which it is the traditional heart. To its east lies Pakistan, long isolated from the larger world by wars in Afghanistan and by US neglect for a decade following the collapse of the USSR. To the north of Afghanistan lie the new states of Central Asia, for whom the Taliban and associated extremism posed a serious threat that Russia was able to exploit in ways that curtailed their sovereignty. For both Pakistan and the five new states of Central Asia, the transformations wrought by American initiatives in Afghanistan constitute the greatest opportunity for positive change since they gained independence.

This actually understates the achievement. Barely noticed by either US military or civil authorities, the transformation of Afghanistan is calling back into being an important world region, the true, larger Central Asia. Split down the middle by the tsarist Russian and later Soviet border and then wracked by fighting for a generation,

this ancient cultural and economic region disappeared from the world's consciousness for more than a century. Now, for the first time since the nineteenth century, Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia are independent.

By reopening the great East-West and North-South trade routes connecting these promising new states with each other and with larger economies further afield, the US and its partners are calling into being a great new Eurasian economic zone. Afghan trade with Pakistan has grown six-fold in three years, and has quadrupled across Iran to the Middle East and Turkey. If the Asia Development Bank succeeds in its plan to build rail and road links between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan at a cost of \$2 billion, this new economic zone will extend to South Asia, providing an alternative to strife in such places as Kashmir that sit astride its main routes.

What, then, does the US gain from its investment in Afghanistan? In addition to the more immediate and obvious benefits, listed above, it gains the security that arises from turning a war-torn, impoverished, and economically stagnant zone of Inner Asia into a peaceful, stable, and economically dynamic region ruled by governments that have seen the dangers of extremism and have chosen openness and moderation instead. No less important, it will have given each of these moderate Muslim states reason to view America as an ally in time of need and a friend of its overall transformation.

VII. But What About All Those Drugs in Afghanistan?

All well and good, a skeptic might argue, but what about all the drug trafficking? Afghanistan has gone from virtually no opium production during the last growing season (2001) under Taliban rule to being the world's chief producer of opium and premier processor of heroin. The UN reports that 3,600 metric tons of opium were produced in 2003 and that production in 2004 will likely increase. It is estimated that the equivalent of fully half of Afghanistan's \$4.5 billion GDP derives from opium culture and drug trafficking, with \$1 billion going to farmers and \$1.3 billion to the processors and traffickers. Warlords thrive off this boom and terrorist groups are believed to collect up to 15% of the traffickers' profits to finance their activities.

Do these depressing facts not undermine the claims made above? It is pointless to counter that President Karzai has called for a "jihad" against opium cultivation, or that Great Britain, charged by the UN to be the lead country in addressing this issue,

has set up an Interdiction Force. Few, if any, Afghans heed Karzai's call and, as the US has tactlessly pointed out, the British force is woefully inadequate to the task.

Afghan narcotics are undeniably a serious problem. This cancer has reemerged in part due to the US' failure to allocate money for dealing with the issue. For the struggle against the narco-business in Afghanistan it allocated a mere \$23 million in 2002 and nothing at all in 2003. But even had money been available, there was no policy to assure that it would be expended effectively. Only now is a consortium of US government offices drafting an action program for eradicating drugs in Afghanistan and preparing to allocate the resources needed to implement it. Obviously, this is far too late, and could also turn out to be too little as well. But it still represents a sea change for the better from the situation a year ago.

Will the new program prove effective? There has been talk of an expanded eradication force, which is necessary but not sufficient. Any successful initiative will have to go further, addressing the economics of poppy cultivation. And it must allow time for projects already in place to have an effect. The extension of trade deeper into the countryside, the renewal of irrigation systems, the improvement of internationally marketable crops other than poppies, and the economic empowerment of women all hold great promise for narcotics reduction. The further development of the Afghan National Army and police is also an essential step.

Even more important is the international dimensions of heroin distribution and consumption. Afghans produce opium and heroin because there is an unquenchable demand for them in Europe, which gets 80-90% of its heroin from Afghanistan. It is pointless and cynical to beat up on Afghan farmers, for even if they cease production, farmers in some other backward land will step in to satisfy the demand. Nor are Afghans wallowing in the profits of this illegal traffic: the UN Drug Control Program estimates that less than a tenth of profits on Afghan heroin end up in Afghan hands, the rest going to drug lords in Russia, Turkey, the Balkans, Europe, and even Nigeria and Colombia. The Russian mafia alone banks tens of millions of its profits from the European sale of Afghan heroin in banks as far away as the pacific islands of Samoa and Vanuatu.

In one important respect the problem of Afghan drugs is comparable to that of cocaine production in Colombia, which exists to satisfy US demand. Whether or not one agrees with American anti-drug programs in Colombia, the US at least accepts a degree of responsibility for Colombia's problem and backs that acceptance with money—fully \$7.5 billion to fund "Plan Colombia." By contrast, Europe, with the partial acceptance of Britain, does not acknowledge its culpability in the rise of Afghan drug production. It even leaves to the USD the work and expense of setting

up and funding the governmental Drug Control Agencies of neighboring Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. Serious progress against drug production in Afghanistan will begin only when the European Union admits that the problem traces directly to its own citizens' demand for heroin and that this places on Europe the obligation to provide the kind of massive help to the Afghans that the US has extended to Colombia.

In other words, the narco-business in Afghanistan, while stands as grim testimony above all to the failure of Europe's conscience and will. The US waited far too long to address this issue but seems finally to be doing so, with results that remain to be seen. Will the European Union now step up to accept its proper share of the responsibility?

If it does, prospects for reducing production in Afghanistan are good. Notwithstanding Kabul's reputation among traveling hippies of the 1960s as a drug center, opium production in Afghanistan was insignificant prior to the Soviet invasion and definitely not an accepted part of the local culture. Even today, in spite of the large amount of money involved in the trade, barely five to ten percent of Afghans derive their income from drugs. Now, with production up, the price of raw opium has fallen, making it a less attractive crop than two or three years ago. Prudent policies that extend short term agricultural credit for other crops will doubtless enable thousands of today's producers to return to more normal pursuits.

VIII. How Did this Dramatic and Positive Shift Happen?

The new pace and direction of American policy, announced in October, 2003, has been applied on the ground in Afghanistan only since spring of this year. More time must pass before a definitive evaluation is possible. However, on this basis of evidence presented here it appears that this mid-course correction is achieving what it was designed to do. Many early signs herald a shift from military to political conflict, the strengthening of national institutions at the expense of warlords, and a quickening pace and breadth of economic and social development. The success of the recent elections provides early evidence that participatory institutions are possible in this war-torn land. They also suggest that the age of winner-take-all politics may be passing in Afghanistan, bringing an end to the gross and destabilizing regional and ethnic imbalances that characterized the Kabul government between 2002 and 2004.

How did this apparently successful shift in US policy occur? The question is important, not only to an understanding of Afghanistan but also, by implication, in planning what the US should do in other situations, including Iraq. At least seven conclusions can be drawn from this history.

First, from an international perspective it is clear that the new pace and direction of policy in Afghanistan arose mainly as a *unilateral* move by the American government. This is not to say that there were not UN and other officials, especially from Britain, who advanced approaches something like those actually adopted. But only the US both had the willingness to take such decisions and the capacity to implement them. Unilateralism is not always a bad thing.

Second, though initially a solo initiative by the United States, American officials moved quickly to engage Coalition members and UN officials in the project. Thanks to this, international partners are closely coordinated as they implement the program, giving leverage to America's input of personnel, equipment, and money.

Third, the mid-course correction that is changing the Afghan scene for the better would never have happened had key individuals not brought to the project their insights, decisiveness in taking decisions, and credibility. Specific analysts in several governmental offices and others working outside the government tenaciously promoted the key ideas for fully a year before they found champions at the top. Among decision makers, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld deserves particular credit, and among administrators the skills of Ambassador Khalilzad and of Lieutenant General Barno have proven indispensable.

Fourth, the new pace and direction was worked out not by the Pentagon, State Department, or National Security Council acting alone, but through a complex interagency process involving all three entities and others as well. Several participants who have lived through decades of inter-agency squabbles say that they have never before seen the degree of cooperation that was attained in this case by individually proud agencies working together. Needless to say, they all lived by the motto "Change has a hundred fathers (and mothers)."

Fifth, America's new approach to Afghanistan is solidly based not on *nation -building*, for the Afghan nation already existed, but *state-building*. Perhaps it was necessary to go through the protracted period of single-minded focus on crushing al Qaeda and eliminating the Taliban before this new phase could be reached. But in the end, President Bush's V.M.I. speech about a new Marshall Plan for Afghanistan and all Central Asia laid out a strategy to which the rest of the government eventually came around. This strategy is one of state-building.

Sixth, and arguably most important of all, every aspect of America's new policy towards Afghanistan has been worked out and executed *with* the Afghans, rather than being done *to* them. President Karzai and leading figures of his administrations provided such significant input into the drafting process that it is fair to say that the final document is as much *their* policy as America's. During the execution phase this

fact casts the US in the role of *backing and supporting* Afghans rather than *leading* them. On this important issue American policy in Afghanistan since 9-11 has been utterly consistent: at no point has the United States aspired or allowed itself to try to *govern* Afghanistan.

Finally, the successes achieved to date in the implementation of the new policy are due significantly to the fact that all those involved in this delicate process have wherever possible avoided turning temporary opponents into permanent enemies. Thus, the Kabul government is welcoming former Taliban moderates and inviting them to take civil service jobs and enter the political system. In the same spirit, even as the government is putting warlords out of business, it is offering them face-saving positions, often at surprisingly high levels of status and pay. Thus, when Karzai pushed out the warlord and governor of Kandahar he immediately offered him the post of Minister of Urban Affairs in Kabul. And when he dumped the KGB-trained Mohammad Sawrari from the top post in the National Security Directorate, he invited him to become an advisor to the President without portfolio.

To some extent this marks the reemergence of adroit old Afghan skills that enabled the monarchy to survive for two centuries. It certainly attests to Hamid Karzai's unique combination of political astuteness and simple decency. The fact that American officials on the ground and in Washington have come to support so subtle and culturally specific a process also says worlds about their ability to master new approaches when faced with the need to do so.