



SPECIAL REPORT

ABOUT THE REPORT

On November 6, 1996, in response to growing concerns about the escalating conflict in Afghanistan, the United States Institute of Peace convened a panel of experts and knowledgeable observers in a public forum to consider the sources of the conflict and the prospects for a peace agreement, reconstruction, and state building. The panel consisted of Ambassador Robert Oakley (serving as chair), Ashraf Ghani (World Bank and Johns Hopkins University), Eden Naby (Harvard University), Barnett R. Rubin (Center for Preventive Action, Council on Foreign Relations), and Marvin Weinbaum (United States Institute of Peace and University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana). Richard H. Solomon, president of the Institute, provided introductory comments. More than 150 people attended the discussion, including representatives from the U.S. Department of State; Congressional Research Service; the embassies of Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan; the Voice of America; the Afghanistan Foundation; Executive Intelligence Review; the Associated Press of Pakistan; *The Telegraph* (Calcutta); *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*; and a variety of regional and U.S. media. This report, prepared by Institute Program Officer John T. Crist, summarizes points made by panelists at this conference.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate particular policies.

March 1997

The Future of Afghanistan *The Taliban, Regional Security and U.S. Foreign Policy*

Key Points

The taking of Kabul by the Taliban forces and subsequent military and diplomatic developments signal a new phase in the country's seventeen-year conflict. The Taliban militia—founded in 1994 by Afghan religious refugee students in Pakistan—control about two-thirds of Afghanistan. Since their victory in September 1996, they have imposed an idiosyncratic, strict Islamic rule in Kabul. Battles continue between the Taliban and the forces and allies of the ousted government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

About the Taliban

- Alone, neither the Taliban nor any of the many mobilized communities in Afghanistan can legitimately and effectively claim the authority to rule the politically fragmented country.
- Though the major parties to the conflict in Afghanistan are mobilized along ethnic lines, at the present time ethnicity is not a significant factor in the conflict. If the war continues, however, the conflict is likely to exacerbate ethnic tensions and thus become more difficult to resolve.
- Concerted efforts by leaders of the Islamic world to engage the Taliban constructively about Islamic principles and practices could temper the Taliban's more extreme views and practices.

About other regional actors

- None of the important regional actors (Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) wants Afghanistan to break up—in fact, they prefer Afghanistan remain a single state.
- None of Afghanistan's four major ethnic communities—the Pashtuns in the south (aligned with the Taliban), the Uzbeks in the northwest (aligned with the forces of General Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek), the Tajiks in the northeast (aligned with the forces of General Ahmad Shah Masoud, an ethnic Tajik), and the Hazara Shia community in the central highlands (supporting the Hizb-i-Wahdat)—stands to gain significantly from accession to a neighboring state.

Afghanistan is crucial in the race to develop pipelines to carry oil and gas from the abundant reserves of Central Asia to the economies of the region and the world beyond.

- No single regional power has sufficient authority or neutrality in Afghanistan to negotiate and execute a peace agreement.

About implications for U.S. policy and for the international community:

- If peace is to come to Afghanistan, the solution will require the focused attention and sustained commitment of the international community.
- Any attempt to resolve the political conflict in Afghanistan must work in tandem with state building and reconstruction programs. Without viable state institutions in Afghanistan, the typical UN formula for peace agreements will be difficult to implement.
- While attempting to isolate the rogue state of Iran as an international outlaw, the United States should also consider that negotiations for a durable settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan must involve Iran.
- There will be no quick antidote to the massive—and growing—international drug trade in Afghanistan. A carefully implemented aid program, however, could undermine the country's drug industry by providing viable crop alternatives to producers of opium poppy and other narcotic crops.

There was a difference of views among the panelists about whether intervention by the international community in Afghanistan could be effective in the current crisis. Some believed that the anarchic situation on the ground, coupled with the Taliban's strength and unyielding posture, precludes effective implementation of even the simplest humanitarian assistance program, let alone sustained and complex efforts at reconstruction and peacebuilding. Others cautiously proposed interim measures that might prepare Afghanistan for more substantial efforts at statebuilding and reconstruction later on. The following ideas were proposed by some panelists for consideration by the international community.

- Through financial and technical assistance and with the necessary cooperation of parties to the conflict, the international community could support the building of a network of technocratic expertise in Afghanistan. This body could provide the human resources necessary for a transitional agreement and assist the country in acquiring, distributing and managing international humanitarian and development aid. In order to be effective and respected, those recruited into positions of authority must be selected on the basis of merit more than on patronage. This will present a difficult challenge in Afghanistan, as it would anywhere else in the world.
- Multilateral development institutions could implement humanitarian and development assistance programs to address the immediate and long-term economic difficulties facing Afghanistan today. Careful consultation with the private sector, a key actor in Afghanistan's history, and other institutions of civil society would enhance the effectiveness of an international donor program and the prospects for stable governance.
- Because of Afghanistan's inexperience with oil pipelines, a group of disinterested international representatives from the oil industry could provide technical assistance and consultation during negotiations on pipeline agreements and help ensure that Afghanistan's long-term interests are preserved. Such a mechanism would assist with complex decisions about the most appropriate pipeline routes, environmental impact, and the equitable distribution of transit fees and tariffs.

The prospects for successful implementation of any one of these programs depend first and foremost upon the likelihood that the Taliban and Afghanistan's other warring parties perceive it in their interest to agree to the terms. How ripe Afghanistan is for successful intervention by the international community is still a matter to be explored.

Introduction: Afghanistan's Latest Crisis

The unexpected capture of Kabul by the Taliban on September 27, 1996 caught almost all observers by surprise and revealed just how little attention has been paid to Afghanistan in recent years, particularly by the United States—a stark contrast to the strong U.S. support for Afghanistan in the sustained and successful fight against the Soviet forces during the 1980s. There has not yet been a similar U.S. commitment to serious policy planning and concerted, consistent action in the cause of peace in Afghanistan. Soon, the cameras will undoubtedly switch to some other conflict around the world, but Afghanistan will still require the focused attention and resources of the world's powers if peace is to be secured once again.

Throughout its history, Afghanistan has been at the center of global competitions for power and resources: first as the coveted land bridge to southern Asia during the British and Russian "Great Game" of the nineteenth century, and then as a buffer zone between the borders of superpowers during the Cold War, and most recently as a focus of Cold War conflict during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Today, Afghanistan is crucial in the race to develop pipelines to carry oil and gas from the abundant reserves of Central Asia to the economies of the region and the world beyond.

In contrast to previous competitions, there are a number of new, complicating factors that are exacerbating the conflict in Afghanistan and inhibiting the search for peaceful solutions. The United States has entirely withdrawn from Afghanistan and focused its attention elsewhere. The Russians no longer have strong links to the country, and they are concerned that the neighboring states of Central Asia do not provide an adequate defense against political Islam. At an October 4 meeting in Almaty between Russian prime minister Chernomyrdin and the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the Russians affirmed their interest in a stable border between Afghanistan and the former Soviet Union and indicated that they would increase the number of troops along the border.

The recent independence of Central Asia's former Soviet republics has catapulted them into an unpredictable domestic transition and has forced them to pursue independent foreign policies vis-à-vis the other regional states. The Central Asian states, as well as Pakistan and Iran, have important and differing interests in what happens to Afghanistan. Some hoped initially that the Taliban would stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, providing a measure of security and order against the anarchy that has prevailed. The Taliban has yet to demonstrate its legitimacy across all of Afghanistan, however, and some have argued that its record of human rights violations, especially its abysmal treatment of women, is too costly a price to pay for peace. The United States Institute of Peace panel examined the conflict in Afghanistan along three dimensions—domestic, regional, and international—as it searched for possible ways to ameliorate the worst consequences of the conflict and perhaps resolve it altogether.

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Afghanistan: The Domestic Situation

State building and the legacy of war

The collapse of the state in Afghanistan leaves no single agent or institution upon which a new state can be constructed. In the past, the route to power in Afghanistan typically has been undertaken by a conquering or centralizing ruler who amassed resources for state building from foreign conquests or assistance and used these to conquer or co-opt internal communities in support of a central regime. Such a trajectory is unlikely today because the major constituencies in Afghanistan are well armed and highly organized. Successful centralization by one ruler or faction in the face of multiple, strong competitors is unlikely, if not impossible. In other words, the costs of state building in Afghanistan are higher now than ever before while the availability of external resources is at its lowest in recent decades.

National political parties have ceased to exist in Afghanistan. The only political groups that survived the state's collapse were those that mobilized along ethnic or regional lines. At the core of each of these organizations is an armed force recruited from local patronage networks (through either kinship or elements of a former bureaucracy that now very much resembles a clan—a common pattern in Central Asia). The total number of combatants in these various forces is uncertain, but Ashraf Ghani cites estimates ranging between 25,000 and 100,000. However, as recently as 1992, the number of combatants in Afghanistan was as high as 1 million, which means there is an enormous pool of trained or experienced fighters who may be lured into service by the promise of a stable income. Recently, fighting has spread to areas hitherto safe from combat—and the situation is worsening. Foreign support is essential for maintaining these military organizations since Afghanistan's only significant export commodities are drugs (primarily heroin) and precious stones. Ghani predicts that if the war drags on, drug money is likely to become its primary source of finance.

Ambassador Oakley observed that the Afghan war became for Islamic movements in the 1980s what the Spanish Civil War became for socialism in the 1930s. In coming to Afghanistan's defense, thousands of like-minded Islamists from around the world established lasting links with one another. While most of these volunteers have returned to the Middle East and elsewhere, a group of expatriate former combatants remains in Afghanistan; their home countries are not eager for their return, nor are they interested in returning. Because of their fighting experience and their involvement in international terrorist networks, they constitute a militant and destabilizing force in Afghanistan, across the region, and in their countries of origin.

Ethnicity and the origins of the conflict

The salience of ethnic identity has increased dramatically in Afghanistan in recent years. The most powerful ethnic communities in Afghanistan include the Pashtuns in the south (associated with the Taliban); the Uzbeks in the northwest (aligned with General Dostum); the Tajiks in the northeast (aligned with General Masoud); and the Shia communities, especially the Hazaras, in the central highlands (controlled by Hizb-i-Wahdat and organized into a territorial unit in Bamiyan). Since the Soviet invasion of 1979, the ethnic composition of Afghanistan has become more differentiated, while that of its regions has grown more homogenous. This demographic trend has generally exacerbated the problem of ethnic polarization and pro-

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vides too few precedents for multiethnic cooperation and coexistence. Yet it is not accurate to describe the conflict as primarily ethnic, since ethnic identities in Afghanistan are not avowed; on the contrary, until now they have been overlapping, situational, and quite mutable. However, Ghani fears that the longer the war continues, the more likely the conflict will become ethnic and sectarian in nature, and thus more difficult to resolve.

Among Uzbeks in the northwest, support for General Dostum and his army has more to do with Dostum's personal success and popularity than with his ethnic identity. From his role in setting up trade routes to Central Asia, Dostum has garnered some wealth and international prestige. He has also acquired a favorable reputation as a kingmaker among Uzbeks in Afghanistan.

The relevant force in Afghanistan's ethnic Tajik politics is no longer the Jamiat-i-Islami (Islamic Afghan Association), but the Shur-i-Nazar (Council of the North), which is run by Masoud and his military organization. There is no coherent Tajik nationalist ideology in Afghanistan, and many Persian-speaking Sunni Muslims—Masoud's constituency—have not adopted such a Tajik identity. Some anti-Tajik sentiment arose in Afghanistan as a result of Masoud's monopoly of military force in Kabul.

The Taliban: Mobilization and ideology

At the heart of the Taliban's success in mobilizing support among Afghans has been its ability to deliver on its claims to bring relative order and security to the countryside. Especially in the Pashtun areas of the south (where petty military commanders have brutalized the population under a personalistic rule), endemic violence, a total lack of personal and economic security, and a general profanation of Islamic values have characterized many of the small towns and rural areas. For the time being, the Taliban has provided some semblance of order and security in this region (its success in Qandahar is particularly noteworthy). It is likely to enjoy support as long as it continues to provide an alternative to anarchy. Panelists, however, expressed great skepticism that the Taliban alone would be capable of holding an Afghan state together and noted that they are confronting opposition in Kabul.

Though the Taliban recruits from ethnic networks, its base of support possesses neither a strong ethnic identity nor a coherent set of ethnic principles. While the majority of Taliban recruits are Pashtun, it is not fair to characterize this as a distinctly Pashtun movement. The Taliban is not strictly in keeping with traditional Afghan Islam—nor is it like Hanafi Islam, the Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, or traditional Sufi-influenced Islam. The Taliban's youthful core has never really known traditional Afghan society; rather, these recruits grew up in the Islamic boarding schools of refugee camps during the 1980s (much like the khalqi communists in Afghanistan during the 1970s, most of whom were trained in military boarding schools). Consequently, the Taliban has encountered tremendous difficulty in exporting their ideological legitimacy to other regions in Afghanistan. This weak Pashtun identity and tenuous link to Afghan Islamic traditions compound a vexing problem for state building. Because its leaders do not regard ethnicity as central to its activities, the Taliban does not realize or concede that other communities in Afghanistan have legitimate concerns about their status under a Taliban regime.

Like other political groups in Afghanistan, the Taliban relies heavily on outside support—in this case, from Pakistan—to maintain its operations. But the Taliban cannot be characterized as a puppet of the Pakistanis. Undoubtedly, the Taliban

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attained its current military prowess because of the aid it has received from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and the support it receives from political parties and religious organizations in Pakistan. Nevertheless, Barnett Rubin refers to the Taliban as “an indigenous Afghan social phenomenon that started in Pakistan.” The panel agreed that the Taliban is sufficiently independent to continue to play a role in Afghanistan’s politics should Pakistan suspend military and financial support. It should be noted as well that the panel rejected speculation (especially in Iran) that the United States is secretly backing the Taliban through agents in the Pakistani and Saudi governments.

The Taliban’s policies toward women

Ashraf Ghani suggests that the Taliban’s interpretation of women’s role in Islam does not have a basis in the *shari’u* (Islamic law). To some degree, the Taliban’s treatment of women is consistent with the way women have been treated in rural areas of Afghanistan for centuries. Though Islamic society does not generally accord women the same power and status as men, Barnett Rubin points out that there is no tradition in Afghanistan or in Islam of state officials beating women in public.

During the Afghan war, women suffered tremendously. If they were not killed, arrested or tortured, they became refugees and suffered the loss of family members. In Kabul, some turned to prostitution to support themselves as the economy crumbled. Most shocking to Afghans, though, was the increase in rapes (some called it an epidemic) in Kabul in the years after the 1992 fall of the government, when the country’s urban centers were flooded with young men from the rural areas and members of the mujahideen forces who had grown up in the madrasahs (all-male religious schools). According to Rubin, access to women is a matter of great status in these schools, and women have become symbolic proxies in battles for power, status, and legitimacy among young Afghan men.

There are the beginnings of a political movement among Afghan women in Pakistan, with some strong links to women activists in Kabul. These networks are deserving of support and encouragement from the West. Moreover, on this issue, Ghani suggests that the ulema (Islamic governing councils) and Islamic leaders in such countries as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia could follow a policy of “constructive engagement” with the Taliban regarding its interpretations of Islamic law. This could temper the Taliban’s more extreme views and practices, promote respect for human rights, and enhance the overall prospects for a viable state.

Regional Perspectives on the Conflict

As long-time observers of the region, the panelists have been struck by the unmistakable birth pangs of a new regional state system in Central Asia after 190 years of colonialism and Soviet rule. During the occupation, the Soviets had closed Afghanistan’s northern borders with Central Asia, which are now open with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. For the first time since the Islamic caliphate of the medieval period, a regional economic institution (the Economic Cooperation Organization, or ECO) provides a forum for these states to discuss matters of regional significance, particularly economic and cultural issues. Though the ECO is still a new and relatively weak organization, its very existence—and its inclusion of Afghanistan—is of great importance to the region and eventually may be the key to securing a regional solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Central Asia and the “dismemberment” of Afghanistan

The dissolution of a central government in Afghanistan raises the specter of partitioning the country out of existence—what Eden Naby referred to as the “dismemberment” of Afghanistan. Because of their ethnic homogeneity, the country’s various regions could be partitioned among the appropriate neighboring Central Asian states—the Shia communities transferred to Iran, the Pashtun south to Pakistan, the Uzbek northwest to Uzbekistan, and the Tajik northeast to Tajikistan. However, none of the key regional states in Central Asia currently has a strong or compelling interest in such a scenario, nor are they likely to have one in the near future (though, as we shall see, the Central Asian states have differing positions on this point). It is worth examining these states’ specific political and economic concerns in Afghanistan in order to understand their likely positions in the future.

Iran. Iran’s foreign policy is directed at increasing its regional influence, not just in Afghanistan but among the newly independent Central Asian states. To demonstrate its legitimacy as a regional power, Iran must confront the Afghanistan issue. Iran has sought a role as a broker of regional trade, for example, by developing oil pipeline routes and warehousing cotton. The Iranians have supported General Dostum clearly because he controls one of two major land bridges between Iran and Central Asia (the other is in Turkmenistan).

Unlike the other regions of Afghanistan, which are contiguous with ethnically similar states, the Shia communities are not adjacent to Iran. Thus, a partition would not provide the crucial territorial link to the important markets that Iran seeks in Central Asia or to the only Persian-speaking Central Asian state, Tajikistan, with which Iran would like to establish strong cultural ties. Without a land bridge through Afghanistan, the route from Iran to Tajikistan winds through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, dismemberment would likely work to Iran’s disadvantage, since it would not automatically result in a stable geographic unit and could put the other regional competitors in a position to annex Afghan territory. At the October 27 conference hosted by Iran, the Iranian representatives demonstrated their preference for exploring solutions that would maintain Afghanistan as a stable area through which Iran could conduct economic and cultural activity.

Iran has pursued several policies toward Afghanistan in recent years. Initially, the Iranians backed Hizb-i-Wahdat, the military forces of the Shia community in Afghanistan, a policy largely dictated by the ideological establishment in Iran but also consistent with state interests. The panel agreed, however, that Hizb-i-Wahdat is not a puppet of Iran; the Shia community in Afghanistan is uniquely Afghan in character and not an Iranian agent. Until recently, the Iranians were engaged in an intense diplomatic dialogue with the Taliban, which quickly degenerated into bitter opposition after the fall of Kabul (and Herat), where Hizb-i-Wahdat was crushed between the Taliban and General Masoud’s forces. Since then, Iran has pursued a balance-of-power strategy, backing anyone who fights against the Taliban, including even Masoud for a time (an especially telling move considering that, according to Rubin, Masoud’s forces were responsible for a number of massacres that proved decisive in the expulsion of Hizb-i-Wahdat from Kabul). Like a number of observers in Pakistan, India, and Russia, the Iranians believe that the United States is supporting the Taliban through Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in order to remove Iran from Afghanistan and exclude it from the economic development of Central Asia. The Taliban’s poor record on human rights has given the Iranians unexpected leverage by allowing them to appear as a champion of human rights in Afghanistan.

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Turkmenistan. Afghanistan's dismemberment offers no compelling political benefit to Turkmenistan. The number of Turkmens in Afghanistan is negligible, and though there are strong ethnic and tribal connections across the border, they will not soon become a powerful force in Turkmenistan's foreign policy. The overriding foreign policy concerns for Turkmenistan are economic—it seeks to encourage investment and gain access to the world market in ways other than those its geographic position would allow. Currently, its domestic market is almost wholly dependent on Russian transit and much less so on the Iranian infrastructure, though Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian state with viable access to the outside world through a non-Russian route (that is, through a new railroad link and other overland contacts in Iran). Expansion of Turkmenistan's access to Iranian transit requires stable routes through Afghanistan. Naby argues that the primary economic incentive for dismemberment arises because Turkmens in Afghanistan live adjacent to the countries' border in a region that could provide its plentiful major resources, like natural gas, directly to the international market. It should be noted, however, that most of Afghanistan's natural gas is in the country's Uzbek region. In the judgment of the panel, the utility of Afghanistan as a land bridge far outweighs the value of natural resources in the Turkmen region.

Uzbekistan. Naby notes that among Central Asian states, Uzbekistan has the strongest ethnic and ideological connection to Afghanistan but that, so far, the link has not been stridently nationalist. Large numbers of Uzbeks in Afghanistan provide leverage for Uzbekistan as it seeks to extend its trade routes. The ex-communist bureaucrats who run Uzbekistan have maintained economic viability and stability, which they wish to preserve. More important, Uzbekistan owns the only bridge (at Termez) that permits trade with Afghanistan to the south, a key reason why Uzbekistan has supported General Dostum.

Tajikistan. For a variety of reasons, Tajikistan is the least likely of the Central Asian states to support dismemberment. First, the stability of northern Afghanistan, along with substantial international support, is essential for Tajikistan to secure its most promising route to regional and international markets: a permanent bridge, like the one in Termez, to carry either rail or overland truck traffic across the Amu Darya river. Second, because of its diverse sources, the meaning of Tajik ethnic identity is currently a matter of bitter dispute in Tajikistan; consequently, solidarity with the relatively homogenous Persian-speaking Tajiks in Afghanistan is quite low. (Naby notes that the label "Tajik" for this community suggests far more ethnic affinity with its counterparts in Tajikistan than is warranted.) Finally, as a result of these internal ethnic cleavages and other regional divisions, Tajikistan is highly unstable politically. Without a strong internal identity or domestic consensus, the Tajiks are in no position to push for anything other than stability in Afghanistan.

In summary, most of the region's states share an interest in Afghanistan's territorial integrity and not one has actively sought to dismember it. No sectarian group is likely to improve its influence or power by being absorbed into a neighboring country, which may prove to be a stabilizing factor in the conflict.

Pakistan

According to Marvin Weinbaum, Pakistan's primary interests in Afghanistan are (1) ensuring that Kabul does not ally itself with forces hostile to Pakistan; (2) creating an Afghanistan to which the large community of refugees in Pakistan may someday return; (3) securing a land bridge through Afghanistan for economic, cultural, and

political linkage with Central Asia; and (4) undermining the emergence of Pashtun nationalism in Afghanistan (a goal the Pakistanis have pursued consistently over the years through economic support of pan-Islamic figures in Afghanistan). To meet these objectives, Pakistan requires a reasonably peaceful Afghanistan with a central government and a cohesive state. The idea of federation or economic integration between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been discussed (even at one point by General Zia), but it does not have wide appeal either in Pakistan or in Afghanistan (where there is a widespread fear of Pakistani domination).

Pakistan's goals in Afghanistan are clear, but it has not settled on a single force or means for attaining them. In the past, Pakistan has backed anyone who could provide a minimum of stability in Afghanistan: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar during the attempted coup in 1990, Rabbani and the mujahideen after the Islamabad Agreement, and recently Dostum in an unsuccessful attempt to create a coalition government. According to Weinbaum, the Taliban is the latest and the best opportunity for Pakistan to pursue its agenda in Afghanistan.

Weinbaum believes that Pakistan's support for the Taliban is a very risky strategy that stems from a misjudgment about Pakistan's ability to control Afghanistan's politics. The Pakistanis were successful in bringing the jihad parties together and creating an effective base of resistance during the war, but their influence is very limited otherwise. They have exaggerated what they are likely to get from the Taliban, and they are not carefully considering the unintended consequences of their strategy. For instance, the worst possible outcome for Pakistan would be an incomplete Taliban victory, one that put a de facto Pashtun regime in power and provided a strong impetus to Pashtun separatist sentiments in northwestern Pakistan. Also, any government to emerge in Kabul will sooner or later turn to New Delhi to counterbalance the influence of Pakistan.

To many observers, Pakistan's refusal to attend the October regional conference sponsored by Iran suggests that the Pakistanis are supporting the Taliban to secure commercial routes through Afghanistan to Central Asia and to make sure that Iran does not gain a foothold in Afghanistan. Weinbaum noted other important reasons: Pakistanis did not wish to encourage Iran's efforts to play the role of regional power; they were also displeased that India had been invited to the conference and that the Afghan combatants had not been. The degree of Pakistan's support for the Taliban is not likely to change in the near future, which is of little consequence for the largely independent Taliban. Pakistan will remain preoccupied with internal matters during the next few months.

China

At least since the days of its military support for the Afghans during the war, China has had a strong interest in Central Asia. Currently, it enjoys warm relations with most of the Central Asian states, which for obvious reasons are eager to develop economic ties. However, China has not repudiated its territorial claims in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakstan—a matter of some concern to these states, even if the issues have been put aside for the moment for the sake of prospective stable economic relations. These unresolved disputes will undoubtedly reemerge in the future. China's territorial claims may extend further south than Tajikistan, in which case China has important interests in the settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan.

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U.S. Foreign Policy: Interests and Options

Links between the United States and Afghanistan have been drastically reduced in recent years. Congressional interest in Afghanistan resurfaced in 1996, but Congress has approved no funding (overt or covert) for support. The effect of contributions from Pakistani and Indian interest groups in America has so far been negligible. The CIA no longer has an operations budget for Afghanistan, except for an unsuccessful buyback program for Stinger surface-to-air missiles. The State Department relies on two main sources for information when formulating policy on Afghanistan: the department's Afghanistan desk in Washington and the larger one at the U.S. embassy in Pakistan. This reliance results in what one panelist describes as a "heavy Pakistan filter" on the kind of information the State Department collects about Afghanistan. Ambassador Oakley is not optimistic that U.S. reengagement in Afghanistan will occur in the near future, because the goals of such a program are not clear at the moment.

At the same time, the panel did not give credence to the idea, popular in Iran especially, that the United States has been funneling resources secretly through the Pakistanis (and the Saudis) to the Taliban; there is no evidence to support this link. Panelists remarked that such conspiratorial notions are popular for two reasons. First, there is a dearth of reliable information about the armies, battles, allies, and resources involved in the Afghanistan conflict. Consequently, many actors in the region find it difficult to make sense of what is going on in the conflict and are forced to make decisions based on rumors, which proliferate because of the sophisticated communications technology the conflict's major forces possess. Second, the considerable amount of covert action in Afghanistan during the past two decades lends plausibility to conspiracy theories.

Afghanistan's heroin trade

With striking similarity to the drug trade in Thailand, Burma, and Laos during the Vietnam war, the drug trade in Afghanistan (primarily heroin) emerged during the height of the struggle against Soviet occupation, and it has spiraled out of control in subsequent years. Though precise figures are not available, Ghani characterizes the street value of drugs flowing from Afghanistan as phenomenally high. UN drug enforcement officials estimate that of the 2,300 tons of opium poppy produced in Afghanistan in 1996, 300 were captured by local law-enforcement agencies; 1,000 made their way to markets in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; and 1,000 were converted into morphine and heroin and sold in Europe and the United States. Despite these staggering amounts, the real surprise is not how much heroin is produced in Afghanistan, but why more is not being produced. Afghan producers choose opium poppy as a cash crop because it commands a price far higher than other available crops. Currently, there is nothing to prevent the drug trade in Afghanistan from expanding.

The lion's share of profit in the Afghan drug trade goes to middlemen involved in shipping and distribution, not to direct producers, who see only the smallest percentage of the total profit. Ghani takes some encouragement from this fact because, given international support for aid programs to develop alternative crops, direct producers might be enticed away from poppy cultivation easily. Such programs should be essential components of any reconstruction plan and will undoubtedly require sustained international cooperation. One thing is certain: there will be no quick fix to the drug problem in Afghanistan.

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The United States could serve a constructive role if it is willing to reexamine its antidrug policies. Current policies stipulate that Afghanistan is not cooperating in international antidrug efforts and therefore is not eligible for U.S. aid. Without a functioning state, there is little reason to expect that Afghanistan could cooperate in such efforts, even if there were universal support for the goal. A strategic and proactive aid U.S. aid program is more likely to harm the Afghan drug trade than the withdrawal of aid as a sanction.

Afghanistan and U.S. policy toward Iran

Official statements from the State Department have not supported any one party in the Afghan conflict, and Ambassador Oakley suggested that the United States would be interested in broad-based, intergovernmental talks that include representatives from all important Afghan political groups. Barnett Rubin, however, was not convinced that U.S. policy has been perceived as neutral. The “no contact” rule—the strategy of isolating and containing Iran—will preclude Iran’s involvement in a peace process. Consequently, “certain things that could be negotiated won’t be because Iran is not involved,” according to Rubin. Despite their intense suspicion about U.S. interests and activities, the Iranians have signaled at a very high level that they believe there is a basis for common interests—the United States has not responded thus far. Although the United States is not strongly pushing against Iran’s involvement in Afghanistan, U.S. policy could be inadvertently aggravating the situation by encouraging Iran to view Afghanistan as a strategic zero-sum game over pipelines and regional influence. Rubin observed that this situation runs the risk of “once again making Afghanistan the victim of a proxy war between outsiders.” He argued that active cooperation with Iran is not necessary at this time, but that confidence building could be very productive.

Prospects for a UN Settlement

Commenting from the audience, Donald Camp from the Afghanistan desk at the Department of State pointed out that there are definite reasons to turn to the United Nations for settling the Afghan conflict. The United Nations has appointed a special envoy, has coordinated a humanitarian effort, and will soon sponsor a meeting on Afghanistan in New York. In other words, there are precedents for UN involvement, it has considerable experience with intractable conflicts, and it has the requisite neutrality for brokering a solution. The panel members agreed, however, that even for the minimal goal of demilitarizing Kabul, the prospects for successful UN involvement in a political solution to the Afghan conflict are not promising.

UN political settlements rely on a set of established procedures for resolving conflicts by assembling a coalition of political groups to negotiate power-sharing arrangements. These procedures succeed to the extent that the parties cooperate to manage resources in which all have a stake. The fundamental problem for the United Nations in Afghanistan is that there are no functioning central state institutions around which power sharing may be organized. Under these circumstances, the UN formula is especially difficult to execute because the negotiation becomes decidedly zero-sum; there is little incentive for compromise because there are no state resources that can be divided and traded. A successful state-building strategy in Afghanistan must buttress UN negotiations if they are to have even a remote chance of success.

Despite their intense suspicion about U.S. interests and activities, the Iranians have signaled at a very high level that they believe there is a basis for common interests. . .

The fundamental problem for the United Nations in Afghanistan is that there are no functioning central state institutions around which power sharing may be organized.

... [T]he reluctance of the United States to fund UN operations has seriously hampered the United Nations' capacity to undertake the kind of intervention necessary to save Afghanistan.

The United Nations in Afghanistan has served a supplementary, and not a well-regarded, role. It lacks the resources for a peacekeeping operation or other sustained and forceful intervention, and its activities thus far have not commanded the necessary respect from the internal and external parties to the conflict. In contrast, the United Nations' successful work in Cambodia began as an agreement struck among the five permanent members of the Security Council and the principal parties in Cambodia. Implementation of that agreement was then turned over to UN offices, which worked closely with Prince Sihanouk. Ghani expressed skepticism that the UN special envoy for Afghanistan, a division chief in the German Foreign Ministry, possesses sufficient stature to initiate a comparably serious agreement. Currently, there is little agreement in the Security Council on the urgent necessity of intervention or the prospects for its success. At some point, the United Nations might provide teams of unarmed observers to monitor an agreement secured through a peacekeeping operation under some other auspices, but any more substantial role is highly unlikely at this time. Nevertheless, Ghani noted that the United Nations may be the best hope for intervention since "it is the only game in town."

Finally, the panel agreed that the reluctance of the United States to fund UN operations has seriously hampered the United Nations' capacity to undertake the kind of intervention necessary to save Afghanistan.

Preparing for Reconstruction: Recommendations

In summary, the prospects for a massive and concerted intervention in Afghanistan by the international community—on the order of those in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Haiti—are very dim. The panel agreed that, at the regional level, none of the bordering states is perceived as sufficiently neutral or is in command of sufficient resources to undertake the kind of intervention necessary. Within Afghanistan, none of the regional factions is capable of sustaining a legitimate claim to national power or brokering a political solution.

Given these bleak prospects, the necessity of pursuing effective but less costly measures to improve the situation in Afghanistan is all the more urgent. Though the panel disagreed about the prospects for successful intervention by the international community, they proposed and discussed several interim measures that could prepare the ground for a political agreement and eventual resolution of the conflict:

- Afghanistan has no experience dealing with oil companies in search of oil and natural gas pipeline routes between Turkmenistan and Pakistan through the Afghan countryside. A group of international representatives from disinterested companies could provide technical assistance and consultation about policies for maximizing Afghanistan's long-term interests in such matters as workforce development, safety, and environmental impact. In particular, this group could oversee the equitable distribution of transit fees and tariffs from the eventual pipeline agreements for reconstruction purposes. Unchecked, revenues could end up underwriting an isolationist regime or exacerbating tensions among groups or regions competing for them. The constitutions of Pakistan and the Philippines and certain commercial practices in China provide models for such an equitable distribution of revenue.
- An international program of support for building a transitional, technocratic government could prove very useful as a central authority for establishing order and continuity, especially in Kabul; for managing the procurement procedures for international aid; and for overseeing the transfer of financial assistance from pro-

grams proposed below. The war has driven many of Afghanistan's technocrats and other skilled professionals to Iran and Pakistan, where they are underemployed and struggling. These communities are committed to returning to Afghanistan to play a constructive role in repairing the society. But many of these professionals require remedial training, and resources must go first to identifying the available expertise (in Afghanistan, nongovernmental organizations and the international community), as well as establishing an institutional structure that would allow them to perform the basic duties of government. In addition, there are a large number of officers and recruits who served the government during the last seventeen years of civil war and who would welcome an institutional role in rebuilding Afghanistan. The central authority would have to be technocratic and depoliticized and would not necessarily rule out the retention of district and provincial power by Afghanistan's major factions. The most difficult challenge would be to ensure that expertise is recruited primarily on the basis of merit, not patronage.

- Multilateral development institutions have been very helpful as supplements to the peace process in Bosnia and Haiti. These organizations could implement humanitarian and development assistance programs in Afghanistan to address the immediate and long-term economic difficulties the country faces.
- The private sector in Afghanistan has been crucial in the economic development of the country. An international donor program to enhance the role of the private sector would provide major avenues for consultation and political settlement of the conflict. One model for this program is the Middle East Development Bank, through which the international community supports a bank that provides matching funds to business ventures in the Middle East.
- The institutions of civil society, such as the press and universities, are badly in need of assistance to establish their permanence and autonomy. Perhaps there are higher priorities for reconstruction in Afghanistan, but these institutions will be crucial for stable governance and could be supported by international aid from nongovernmental organizations and the private sector.

The prospects for successful implementation of anyone of these programs depend upon the likelihood that the Taliban and Afghanistan's other warring parties perceive it in their interest to agree to the terms—a matter about which the panelists disagreed. The continued fighting and the apparent intractability of the conflict have engendered in the international community a profound exasperation with Afghanistan and a disinterest in pursuing an active policy of intervention. Still, Rubin reports that many in Afghanistan “believe that as long as they continue to fight with each other, resources will come in from the outside world.” What remains is for someone to give them an indication that if they stop fighting, resources will be forthcoming to rebuild their country.

The prospects for successful implementation of anyone of these programs depend upon the likelihood that the Taliban and Afghanistan's other warring parties perceive it in their interest to agree to the terms. . .

Appendix

Biographies of Speakers (in alphabetical order)

Ashraf Ghani is senior anthropologist with the World Bank and visiting professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. Ghani has written extensively on society and politics in Afghanistan and on Islam. Through his work at the World Bank or under grants from Fulbright and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, he has conducted fieldwork and applied research in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Russia, and throughout Central Asia and the Middle East. He has been interviewed frequently by radio, television, and newspaper journalists, and he has contributed editorial pieces to the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, among other papers. He is currently finishing his manuscript on colonialism and Afghanistan for Columbia University Press. He holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Eden Naby's work has focused on the cultural history and economies of Central Asia, the Turco-Iranian regions of Asia from western China to the Zagros Mountains. She has served on the faculties of Columbia University, Harvard, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Born in Iran, she has lived and conducted research in all parts of Central Asia, including Peace Corps service in Afghanistan and research in Tajikistan (1991-92). She has published extensively on Afghanistan, including a forthcoming book with Ralph Magnus. She holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Robert B. Oakley served as U.S. ambassador to Pakistan between 1988 and 1991. Since that time, he has been White House special envoy for Somalia under Presidents Bush (1992-93) and Clinton (1993-94). For this service, he received the Department of State Distinguished Honor Award and the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service. After his retirement in 1991 from a distinguished career in the Foreign Service, Ambassador Oakley became coordinator of the Special Program in Middle East Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution at the United States Institute of Peace, and he has been a frequent contributor to the Institute's projects. His book *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope* (coauthored with John L. Hirsch) was published by the United States Institute of Peace Press last year. Currently, Ambassador Oakley is visiting distinguished fellow with the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.

Barnett R. Rubin is director of the Center for Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Rubin is author and editor of several books, including *Toward Comprehensive Peace in Southeast Europe: Conflict Prevention in the South Balkans* (1996), *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (1995), and *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (1995). Rubin was a senior fellow in the Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace with the United States Institute of Peace in 1989-90. He has written numerous articles and book reviews on conflict resolution, state formation, and human rights. His articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Orbis*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Review of Books*, and elsewhere. He has taught at Yale and Columbia and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

Richard H. Solomon has been president of the Institute since September 1993. As assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs from 1989 to 1992, he negotiated the first UN "permanent five" peacemaking agreement for Cambodia;

had a leading role in the dialogue on nuclear issues among the United States and South and North Korea; helped establish the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) initiative; and led U.S. negotiations with Japan, Mongolia, and Vietnam on important bilateral matters. From 1992 to 1993, Solomon served as U.S. ambassador to the Philippines. In that capacity, he coordinated the closure of U.S. naval bases and developed a new framework for bilateral and regional security cooperation. Solomon previously served as director of policy planning at the Department of State (1986-89) and senior staff member of the National Security Council (1971-76), where he was involved in the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. From 1976 to 1986, he was head of the Social Science Department at the RAND Corporation. In 1995, Solomon was awarded the State Department's Foreign Affairs Award for Public Service for his role in obtaining international agreement for—and fostering implementation of—the UN peace plan for Cambodia. He has contributed articles to a variety of professional journals, including *Foreign Affairs* and the *China Quarterly*, and has published six books on China and Asian security. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Marvin Weinbaum is senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and professor of political science at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where he is director of the Program in South and West Asian Studies. Weinbaum has written extensively on Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and regional security in South Asia. He is author of *Pakistan and Afghanistan: Resistance and Reconstruction* (1994) and coeditor (with Chetan Kumar) of *South Asia Approaches the Millennium: Reexamining National Security* (1995). Weinbaum has been a Fulbright fellow and has received grants from the Social Science Research Council, the Council on American Overseas Research Centers, and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, among others. His current research is a comparative analysis of the impact of market formation on society and politics in Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan. He holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University.