

AFGHANISTAN

FOUR YEARS AFTER THE INVASION

PROGRESS, PROBLEMS,
AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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OCTOBER 2005

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AFGHANISTAN - Four Years After the Invasion
Progress, Problems, and Prospects for the Future
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Four years after the United States invaded Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government, Afghanistan faces an uncertain and fragile future.

The government of Afghanistan has overseen progress in building government institutions, creating security forces, and improving access to education and health. Terrorist leaders have been arrested, and the economy has grown. On September 18, 2005, Afghanistan held its first legislative elections in more than 30 years for the National Assembly and Provincial Councils.

At the same time, critical challenges remain. Security has deteriorated over the past year. The Taliban, which once harbored Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, is resurgent. The central government has not been able to establish its authority outside Kabul, and the economy is in dismal shape. Reconstruction has faltered, and the drug trade is thriving as never before.

In the United States, Afghanistan's importance and the overall fight against global terrorist networks has been lost in the debate over the war in Iraq. In a recent poll of Americans, "rebuilding Afghanistan" was ranked dead last on a list of 30 potential national security priorities, with only 11 percent of respondents saying it is an important foreign policy goal.¹

Getting Afghanistan right is critical to preventing it from becoming a safe haven once again for terrorists. The vast number of small arms that pervade Afghanistan combined with the country's strategic location—surrounded by Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia—mandate urgent action. Allowing Afghanistan to fail again would be reckless and would ultimately create a new threat to the United States. Yet, the Bush administration has sent mixed signals about its commitment, indicating recently that it may withdraw 20 percent of U.S. troops. The United States must devote more attention and resources to establishing a secure and democratic Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Bonn Accord is expiring, and the international community has an opportunity to reassess its priorities and to create strategies for assisting the government of Afghanistan.

Success in Afghanistan requires significant progress in four areas: improving security, strengthening governance, curtailing the drug trade, and building the economy. This report assesses progress in Afghanistan and offers a set of recommendations.

I. Establishment of Security

Establishing security must be the first priority. Without it, a power vacuum could occur again in Afghanistan, enabling terrorists to find safe haven. A lack of security also prevents economic development, impedes the establishment of effective government, and perpetuates the suffering of the Afghan people. Afghanistan remains in political transition, with the potential to unleash even greater violence.

The United States has approximately 18,000 troops in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and has spent at least \$53.8 billion on security.² In addition, 19 coalition countries are contributing 2,000 combat troops to the U.S.-led OEF effort there. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has approximately 9,000 troops in Afghanistan.³

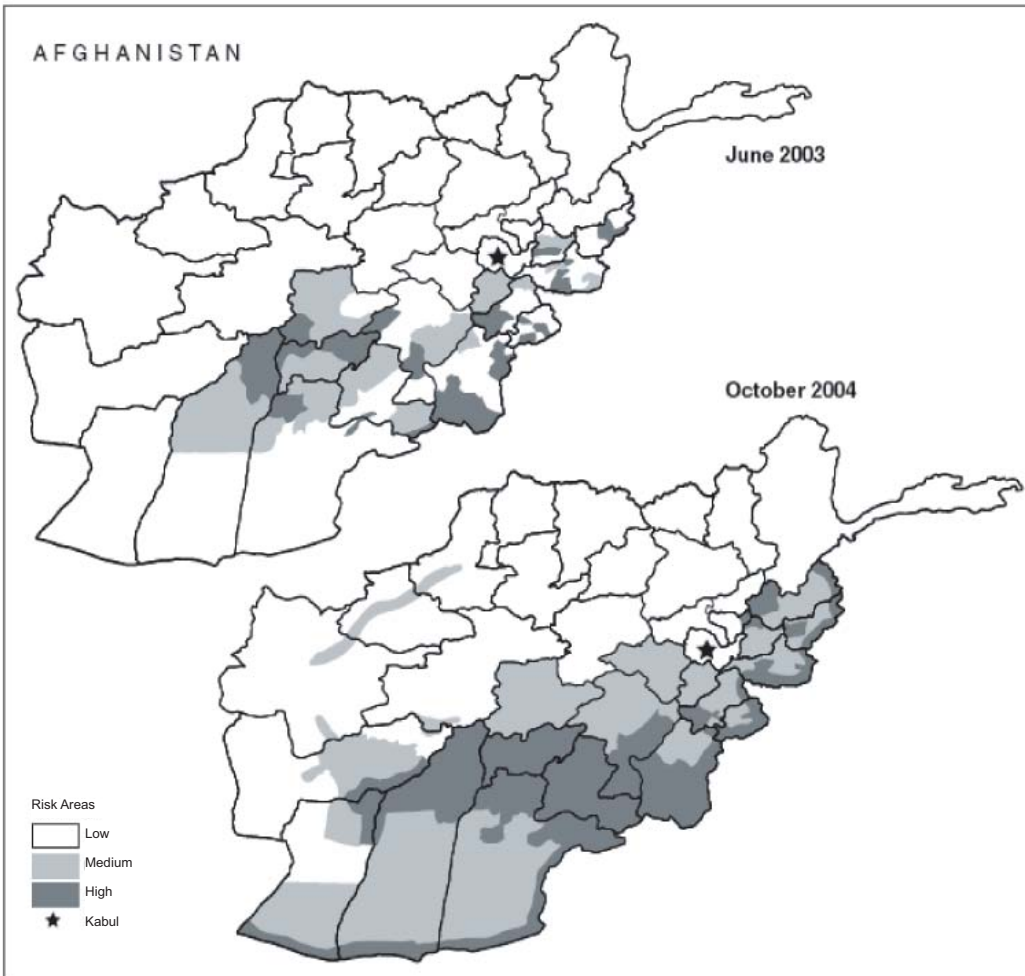
The United States and other ISAF countries have established 22 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) outside of Kabul (12 are U.S. run) — much like a system of forts throughout the country. These are joint international civilian-military partnerships deployed to the provinces and tasked to improve security, assist reconstruction, and help the central government increase its influence. They carry out disarmament programs, coordinate reconstruction programs, and assist in training the Afghan army and police.

Security has deteriorated rapidly over the past six months, and insurgent activities have increased in the southern and southeastern provinces bordering Pakistan.⁴ Crime is the Afghan people's greatest concern, as kidnapping, murder and robbery are rampant.⁵ The anti-government insurgency has strengthened, and cross-border attacks from Pakistan have increased.⁶ More than 1,200 people were killed in the six months leading up to the election on September 18, 2005, including six candidates and five election workers.⁷

Attacks have focused on U.S. and Afghan soldiers and police, aid workers, and pro-Karzai clerics. Thirty percent of total coalition casualties have occurred in the past three months since the invasion of 2001.⁸ Eighty-four U.S. service members have been killed this year, compared to 52 U.S. service members in 2004, marking the highest death toll since the troops arrived four years ago.⁹ One non-governmental organization, Doctors Without Borders, left Afghanistan in 2004 after five of its employees were killed; it had been in Afghanistan for nearly 30 years.

The U.S.-led coalition and ISAF have identified and pursued a number of objectives in order to establish security. These include defeating the Taliban, al Qaeda and their allies; capturing Osama bin Laden and other terrorist leaders; eliminating local militias and reducing warlord power; and developing the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. The status of achieving these objectives is as follows:

UN Security Risk Maps, June 2003 and October 2004



Source: United Nations
Note: As of June 2005, the total area designated as high or medium risk was approximately the same as in October 2004.

- ***Defeat of Taliban, al Qaeda and their allies***

Despite the capture and killing of a number of key Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, as well as the co-opting of some leaders into the political process, the insurgency is far from defeated. The insurgency is primarily made up of Taliban and the Hekmatyar faction, which is loyal to Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who has been designated a global terrorist by the United States.

Al Qaeda is believed to be providing training and equipment to the Taliban and its allies. The Taliban have become increasingly sophisticated, employing new warfare tactics. They are now using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombs, tactics that appear to have been imported from Iraq.¹⁰ They are also attacking soft targets, such as schools, clinics, and government offices, rather than coalition forces. Following the September 18, 2005 elections, the Taliban has vowed to intensify its attacks against international troops and aid workers.

Raids across the border from Pakistan have increased. Pakistan's links to al Qaeda and the Taliban remain a serious concern. Pakistan continues to harbor members of the Afghan insurgency; training camps have reopened there, producing a seemingly endless supply of recruits to launch attacks across the border into Afghanistan. Many believe that President Musharraf is not doing enough to curb Taliban activity in his country.

- *Elimination of Osama bin Laden and terrorist leaders*

Some key leaders of al Qaeda have been killed or captured since the U.S. invasion. Muhammad Atef, a senior al Qaeda military commander, was killed in U.S. air strikes in Afghanistan. Abu Zubaydah, one of Bin Laden's most powerful deputies, was captured in Pakistan in March 2002.¹¹ In March 2003, the alleged mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and al-Qaeda's treasurer, Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi, were also captured in Pakistan.

Osama bin Laden, however, remains on the loose. U.S. Special Operation forces continue to hunt for him and his close ally, Ayman al-Zawahiri. They are believed to be hiding along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, but it is unclear whether the coalition is close to finding them.

- *Elimination of independent militias and reduction of warlord power*

Regional and factional militias continue to seriously threaten the stability of Afghanistan. When coalition forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, five large armies, commanded by powerful warlords, existed alongside numerous militias. These five armies have been demobilized, but their commanders continue to exert influence in the country.

Of equal if not greater concern outside of Kabul, where government presence is weak or nonexistent, local strongmen and their independent militias continue to rule over much of the country. According to the United Nations, approximately 1,800 local commanders maintain "self-defense" militias in remote areas.¹² Some of these militias have been accused of the same activities that occurred before the Taliban took power: human rights violations, coercion, corruption, demanding tribute from Afghans, and generally running roughshod over citizens within their regions. Human Rights Watch has documented that numerous individuals, who were commanders prior to the U.S. invasion and implicated in human rights abuses and major war crimes, now have positions in the Ministries of Interior and Defense of the Afghanistan government and serve as advisors to President Hamid Karzai.¹³ Some of these same alleged criminals ran for National Assembly and Provincial Council elections in September. Until the government of Afghanistan establishes a monopoly on the use of force, local militias will present a significant threat to the fragile government.

Serious concerns exist regarding the status of disarmament, including that disarmed individuals are rearming; fighters are surrendering only low-quality weapons; some warlords are maintaining weapons caches; the fact that it is consent based for fighters; and finally, that a lack of employment opportunities is making reintegrating former

combatants difficult. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) completed its original Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program this summer. Only 63,400 militia fighters were disarmed by the end of July 2005, two-thirds of the original goal of 100,000 fighters.¹⁴ A subsequent program to disarm illegal armed groups has lagged.

- *Building of Afghan National Army*

Since 2002, the United States and coalition countries have built the Afghan National Army (ANA) from a force of zero to approximately 25,000 troops. The international community has set a goal of having 43,000 troops by the end of 2007.¹⁵ The United States has spent more than \$2.5 billion in the past two years on training, equipping and paying all Afghan security forces. Despite this progress, equipment shortages and low literacy—as well as the fact that Afghanistan has never had a professional army—have slowed training.¹⁶

U.S. and Afghan military officials continue to state that the ANA is a long way from being able to fight without American assistance.¹⁷ Desertions are frequent. Discipline is poor, and fatal accidents are very common.¹⁸ General Eikenberry, the top American commander in Afghanistan, recently stated that the United States has decided to halve its training objectives—creating one new battalion a month instead of two.¹⁹

The Afghan Ministry of Finance has also reported that there are insufficient revenues available to pay for the ANA. If the ANA were able to reach its objective of 70,000 troops, it would require 17 percent of Afghanistan's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to pay for it.²⁰ Experts argue that this figure is unsustainable in the long term. Most countries aim to spend no more than 4 percent of their GDP on military expenditures.

- *Development of Afghan National Police*

The United States and Germany have trained 40,000 of the 50,000 officers on duty in the Afghan National Police (ANP). The international community hopes to reach its objective of training and positioning 62,000 police by the end of 2005.²¹

The ANP is wracked with corruption and incompetence. Many police officers gain their positions through patronage rather than professional qualifications, and many are known to have direct connections to lawless commanders, governors and other officials.²² These connections raise the obvious question as to whether the police will be used as militia at the behest of local strongmen, which the international community has worked to neutralize.

Finally, many of the police are under-equipped. News reports have described police recruits training with wooden rifles.²³ U.S. and Afghan officials have stated that the police force will not be fully trained and outfitted until late 2009.²⁴

Recommendations for the Establishment of Security:

- The U.S.-led coalition should establish a standby force in the region ready to deploy to Afghanistan if necessary.
- More pressure should be placed on the government of Pakistan to seal its borders against the two-way flow of militants. The U.S. must not give unconditional support to Pakistan. There has been too little return in that relationship to date.
- The international community, and specifically the United States, should lead a diplomatic initiative in the region to create a cooperative security and intelligence network aimed at securing Afghanistan's borders and taking down terrorist networks. Afghanistan's neighbors should play a more active role in supporting stability and efforts to fight terrorist extremists.
- The United States should state that it will not establish permanent military bases in Afghanistan in order to relieve local anxiety and further empower Afghans to take responsibility for their own security.
- The United States should signal its firm commitment to remain engaged in Afghanistan for the long term (more than a decade).
- Private military contractors should be held to the same standards as foreign forces and follow the tenets of the Geneva Conventions.
- More monitoring and more mentoring of Afghan National Police should occur, as has been done with the Afghan National Army.
- The civilian aspect of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) should be strengthened with more political officers. The PRTs should focus more on the security of aid workers and the communities rather than development work.

II. Strong Governance

For years, Afghanistan has had a weak central government. Such weakness allowed the emergence of the Taliban, which gained initial support by promising security to the Afghan people in a climate of uncertainty and fear. Progress has been made in building political institutions and in holding elections. Following the presidential elections in October 2004, Afghanistan held elections for the National Assembly and the Provincial Councils on September 18, 2005. While turnout was lower than the presidential election a year earlier, which garnered 70 percent, approximately 53 percent of eligible voters turned out. Many saw it as a positive step toward the creation of a more complete system of checks and balances.²⁵ Furthermore, Afghans have given a clear mandate to President Karzai and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through elections. Serious challenges remain, however, in the extension of government authority outside of Kabul, the reduction of corruption, and the achievement of financial independence for the government.

- *Extension of government presence outside of Kabul*

The central government continues to lack capacity. President Karzai's government has been unable to extend its authority outside of Kabul, and the poorest provinces receive little, if any, public funding. There is concern that Afghanistan is repeating old patterns—creating a highly centralized government in theory, while actually leaving localities to the rule of local strongmen. Regional warlords continue to exert local control outside of Kabul, using violence, intimidation, and extortion while rejecting central government authority.

It remains to be seen what affect the parliamentary and provincial elections will have on the ability of the central government to extend its mandate. The opposition may gain greater influence in the governance of the country. Furthermore, the entrenched power of regional commanders, now legitimized in a legislature, may also place more pressure on President Karzai to meet their demands.

- *Curbing of corruption*

President Hamid Karzai recently declared that, along with the drug trade, corruption has become his country's biggest problem.²⁶ A 2004 Freedom House report ranked Afghanistan as the third most corrupt of 30 developing countries surveyed.²⁷

Ordinary Afghans largely distrust local officials, who are believed to be corrupt. Indeed, criminal figures have frequently been appointed to government positions, becoming governors, police chiefs and district officers, where many profit from illicit involvement in the heroin trade. Drug revenues are also believed to be influencing politics and government procurement processes, and several accusations of vote tampering and box stuffing have emerged from the September nationwide parliamentary elections.²⁸

Corruption in the courts is also viewed as widespread, as many mid-to-high-level judicial appointments have been made on the basis of personal connections to current Supreme Court justices and without any regard for qualifications or competence.²⁹ Even international non-governmental aid agencies have fallen into disrepute for alleged corruption in bidding on contracts for reconstruction.³⁰

Ending corruption is a long-term battle. One well-regarded campaigner against corruption, the former Interior Minister Ali Jalali, resigned in frustration in late September, dealing a blow to top-down efforts to purge the government of corrupt officials.³¹ Jalali had long lamented that, while the Afghan government has lists of officials suspected of involvement in drug trafficking and other corrupt activities, it does not yet have sufficient evidence or resources to try them.³²

- *Financial self-sufficiency*

Afghanistan continues to be virtually dependent on foreign aid. A withdrawal by the international community would create an immediate collapse of its institutions, including the ANP, ANA and other government agencies. International aid accounts for 90 percent of Afghanistan's total budget, with the United States leading the way with approximately \$15 billion per year.³³ Until the government of Afghanistan possesses more financial independence, it will be difficult for Afghans to direct long-term strategies for providing services to citizens.

International assistance is largely channeled through international organizations and non-governmental organizations, not the government of Afghanistan. This is creating parallel structures of service distribution in Afghanistan, which weakens the government of Afghanistan. Through March 2004, only 34 percent of all assistance was funneled through government accounts; the rest went directly to the United Nations, NGOs, or private contractors.³⁴

Carl Robichaud from the Century Foundation estimates that even if Afghan government revenues increased many times over, it could not afford the expensive institutions, suitable to a middle income developing country that donors have set in motion.³⁵ Through 2004, the government of Afghanistan was only able to raise 22 percent of its expenditure needs.³⁶ Afghanistan only collects taxes on 5 percent of the country's legal Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³⁷

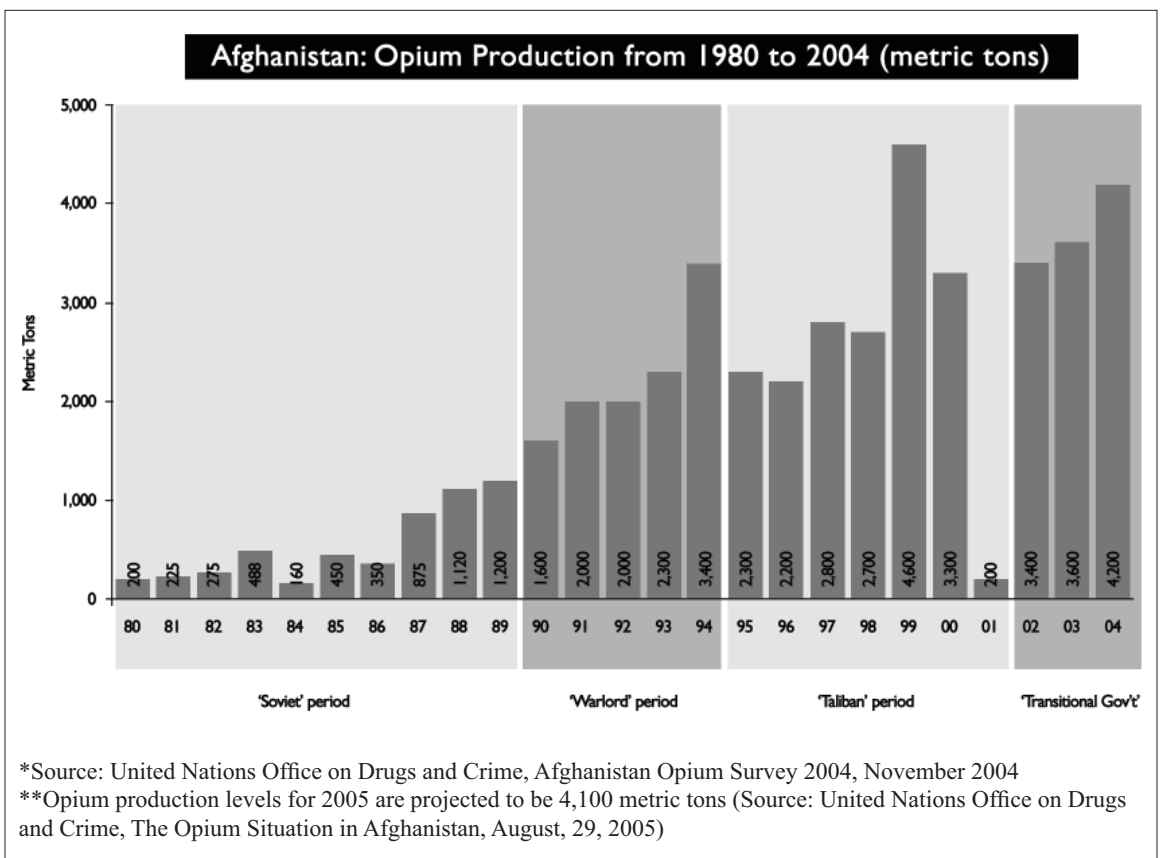
Recommendations for the Creation of Strong Governance:

- The international community should build a consensus on an accountability and anti-corruption strategy for the distribution of foreign aid.
- Afghanistan and the international community should implement timetables and benchmarks to achieve goals in security, governance, the drug trade and the economy in order to clarify the needs of Afghanistan and the commitments by all actors.
- The United States and the international community should focus on creating a strategy for integrating provincial and local governance with the national government. They should provide adequate resources for building the capacity of the government of Afghanistan both in and outside of Kabul. Parallel institutions to the government should not be created.
- The international community must support the budget as the central instrument of policy and the arena for determining priorities and building consensus on the use of resources to meet national priorities. Mechanisms of accountability, including in procurement, financial management and auditing, that would result in donor and citizen confidence, should be created.

III. Curtailment of Drug Trade

While drugs have been a central component of the Afghan economy since the Soviet invasion of 1979, the drug trade has significantly expanded in the past four years. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs stated in March 2004 that Afghanistan was “on the verge of becoming a narcotics state.”³⁸ In 2004, Afghanistan was estimated by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) to have supplied 87 percent of the world’s illicit opium, up from 76 percent.³⁹ The drug economy in Afghanistan has moved beyond poppy cultivation and now includes heroin production.

In 2005, despite an estimated 21 percent decline in hectares used for poppy cultivation, opium production will decrease only slightly due to high crop yields.⁴⁰ This trade is not only hurting Afghanistan. It is creating resources for illegal groups, terrorists and others, who have the potential and desire to destabilize the country. Such criminal elements pose a threat far beyond Afghanistan’s borders.



Afghanistan’s economy is deeply dependent on drug revenues. The UNODC has estimated that 60 percent of the economy in 2004-05 was the output of the opium sector; over \$2.8 billion in value.⁴¹ Afghanistan receives more revenues from the drug trade than from foreign aid. Not surprisingly, approximately 70 percent of revenues realized in Afghanistan go to traffickers. While earnings for farmers are small relative to traffickers’ profits, they are more attractive than the alternatives.⁴²

In addition to the problems related to the illegitimacy of the drug trade itself, experts believe that revenues from drug production are going into the hands of the warlords and are being used to influence the political process through bribes. President Karzai has continued to condemn drug trafficking, but with the dearth of economic opportunities, there are few alternatives encouraging people to leave narcotrafficking.

Last year, the Bush administration began tasking the U.S. military to play a greater role in drug eradication and in attacking traffickers and their installations.⁴³ However, it is clear that eradication and interdiction are not going to solve Afghanistan's drug problem. It will require economic development and the creation of alternative livelihoods. As the UNODC recommends, "The international community must have the wisdom to fight drugs and poverty simultaneously, to eliminate both the causes and effects of these twin afflictions."⁴⁴

Recommendations for the Curtailment of Drug Trade:

- The international community and the government of Afghanistan should focus on alternative development strategies that make rural development a more important priority.
- Afghanistan's counter-drug strategy will need to focus on building infrastructure, providing rural microfinance, creating a social safety net, and engaging in anti-corruption efforts. The focus should not fall disproportionately on crop eradication, which would affect the farmers and not the traffickers or the cost of opium.
- The United States and the international community should help Afghans establish and strengthen institutions of the rule of law.

IV. Functioning Economy

The government of Afghanistan has taken many steps to jumpstart the economy, which has been devastated by decades of conflict and mismanagement. Such measures include introducing a new currency; beginning private commercial banking; and implementing a structure for managing national revenue.

While GDP in Afghanistan grew almost 30 percent in 2002, almost 16 percent in 2003, 7.5 percent in 2004, and is expected to grow 13.6 percent in 2005, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world.⁴⁵ Afghanistan's National Human Development Report ranks Afghanistan at 173 out of 178 countries worldwide in 2004. Seventy percent of the population lives below the poverty line.⁴⁶

Forty percent of people in rural areas go hungry, and Afghanistan has the highest level of malnutrition in the world at 70 percent.⁴⁷ In certain regions, Afghanistan has the highest rate of maternal mortality ever recorded in the world. Infant mortality remains at 163 per 1,000 babies, and life expectancy is approximately 43 years for both males and females,

which is at least 20 years lower than all of its neighboring countries.⁴⁸ Only 14 percent of Afghan women are literate; in rural areas, only 8 percent are literate.⁴⁹

The Soviet invasion in 1979 destroyed Afghanistan's infrastructure. Power and water and dependable communications are inadequate. Afghanistan is a landlocked country with no railroads and few paved roads. One bright spot has been the construction of the Kabul-Kandahar highway, which is essential to Afghanistan's development. But transport costs remain high.

Only 23 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water while only 12 percent of the population has access to adequate sanitation.⁵⁰ Due to Afghanistan's power grid being severely damaged by years of war, only about 6 percent of Afghanistan's population has access to electricity.⁵¹

Some progress has been made in improving the living standards of Afghans. The number of children going to school has quadrupled, and the number of girls enrolled in school has increased dramatically — to the highest percentage in Afghanistan's history.⁵² The international community has completed more than 5,300 projects to rebuild Afghanistan's essential water and sanitation systems, health care, transportation infrastructure and schools. However, health clinics and schools have not been built at the level planned. For example, the United States was supposed to build 286 schools by the end of 2004, but it had completed only eight schools as of September 2004.⁵³

Reconstruction efforts have been slowed due to a deteriorating security situation, a flawed judicial system, delayed funding and opium production. The reconstruction that has occurred has been unable to create sufficient economic opportunities and jobs.⁵⁴ The Afghan government estimated that total unemployment in 2004 was approximately 32 percent.⁵⁵

Furthermore, reconstruction has not received the same priority or critical funding as military endeavors, and there remains no comprehensive reconstruction strategy.⁵⁶ One senior Western advisor to the Karzai government stated that the international community had no coherent approach.⁵⁷ Some experts argue that the international community is providing an inadequate amount of assistance and resources as compared to the goals set for Afghanistan by the international community.

In surveys, Afghans have criticized the international community and non-governmental organizations in particular for squandering aid money on international staff and for hiring foreigners from neighboring countries to implement projects. Afghans have expressed frustration that many projects could be carried out at a much smaller cost than the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) subcontractors.⁵⁸ Furthermore, foreign NGOs and contractors have greater difficulty monitoring the contracts because they are vulnerable targets.

Recommendations for a Functioning Economy:

- The international community needs to commit to a well-funded and well-managed effort of economic development for the long term (ten years or more). The United States must provide assistance to Afghanistan (economic, governance, and security) through a multilateral framework. It should be an international effort, not just an American one.
- The government of Afghanistan should lead the reconstruction process with assistance from the international community, not vice versa.
- Efforts should be made to combat corruption and increase transparency and accountability in the allocation of resources. Funding should be directed through the Law and Order Trust Fund and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which are monitored by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and provide support to the priorities of the government of Afghanistan.
- Employment generation programs should be a key priority. Donors should also use more local services and buy more goods locally.
- Infrastructure investment monies should come through multi-year grants and not loans.
- The Afghan government and international donors should find partners in local government and civil society for reconstruction projects.
- Donors should make it a priority to build and improve communications, roads, and irrigation.
- More foreign assistance should be funneled through the Afghan government to build capacity within the government rather than create parallel institutions, especially by the United States (which has rejected providing budgetary support). Building sustainable Afghan governmental institutions should be prioritized in providing assistance.

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