

Edited Transcript of Remarks Delivered at Seminar Sponsored by the Swedish Committee for
Afghanistan
Stockholm, Riksdagshuset, Rikspan
November 20, 2003

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Most people who deal with Afghanistan have contradictory roles. Whatever our professional role may be, we eventually find ourselves sliding into advocacy for Afghanistan, sometimes bordering on the unprofessional. I was a professional practitioner, a diplomat, only during the Bonn negotiations, for a very brief period of time, and I never quite mastered the mores of that profession – which was one reason that I was a diplomat for only a short time. But I have been an activist and advocate for quite some time. On the other hand, I am also a social scientist, and I find a contradiction between those two roles, because sometimes I find myself working very hard, and advocating very passionately, for things that, in my capacity as a social scientist, appear to me virtually impossible.

The Bonn Agreement and the Institutions of Afghanistan

The Bonn Agreement reads as if it were a plan to turn Afghanistan into a stable democracy by June 2004. Is it possible to turn Afghanistan into a stable democracy by June 2004? Would it have been possible to do so if everyone had done exactly the right thing, starting on December 5th, 2001? The answer is: no, it is not possible. Let us bear in mind what Afghanistan is actually like. I am not saying that the people of Afghanistan do not want democracy because they are conservative Muslims. People of Afghanistan, like people in every other country, want all kinds of contradictory things. Many of them want democracy, and some of them simultaneously want other things that might be contradictory to democracy. But that is not the problem. Afghanistan is not Sweden with bad roads, or the US with a lower income. Afghanistan is a territory which is legally a state, part of the international system; in fact it was one of the few Muslim states that were founding members of the UN. But it does not have functioning state institutions. There were institutions up to 1978, very weak institutions. The expenditure of the government in Afghanistan was never more than 10 percent of the gross domestic product, as far as we can tell from the existing data. In most countries it is around 30 percent. In Sweden I believe it is quite a bit higher. The tax collection of the government of Afghanistan was never more than 6 percent of the gross domestic product by the best data available. And that gap between taxes and expenditure was covered by foreign assistance or by the sale of natural gas. So we are talking about a state that was one of the weakest states in the world before this war broke out.

It maintained its power by making its society into one of the weakest societies in the world, which therefore had low capacity for resistance. What has happened over the past 20-30 years is that the capacity for resistance has increased, at least militarily. But the capacity of the state has decreased. The Taliban led an effort to rebuild state institutions in Afghanistan, which just shows that building state institutions is not an unmixed good. But if you look historically at how most states were built in the world, the process is not entirely composed of peaceful, social democracy either. I remember once in 1988 when some of the Mujahidin rushed into the town of Kunduz after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, and killed some people and raped some women. I was talking to Anders Fänge¹ about it, and he said it reminded him of what happened during some Swedish peasant revolts in the Middle Ages when the peasants

¹ Former Country Director of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, former UNAMA Director.

grabbed their axes and came to town. The process of state-formation is often quite violent and messy.

During the destruction of those weak state institutions people still had to protect themselves. They still sought wealth, power, and security in some way, maybe a second or third best way. And the way they did that was to rely on personalized networks. This is important to understand, because this is what we are talking about when talking about warlords. A personalized network means that certain individuals build up relationships with other individuals through their access to resources. These resources might be legitimate political power, access to weapons from foreign aid, ability to profit from the drug trade or some other type of smuggling, ability to raise legitimate taxes, or wealth from ownership of property. And they redistribute this wealth, or these assets – military, economic, whatever – to other people, with whom they have a personal relationship, who then use those resources to raise their own assets and redistribute them to others.

That means, in the modern period, that there is an interrelationship between these patronage relations in Afghanistan, which are partly based on so-called tribalism or clan relations, which are not something that are static at all but are constantly re-formed in various ways. And these relations have become internationalized, because resources are imported into the networks through global and trans-national political, military, and economic networks. We should not think that Afghanistan is backward or pre-modern, and we are modern. No, Afghanistan is part of the modern world, it is part of globalization. Only it is the other side of globalization.

Now, how is this important politically? It means that it is not exactly true, as some say, that the US invented or created these warlords. The US invigorated and strengthened these warlords, but there is a reason that these are the same people who were in power from 1992 to 1996. These people built up their networks during the previous war. So using these networks they could take these resources and build a fighting force out of them and recruit other commanders.

This is very important for understanding the obstacles to security, democratization, human rights, and all these other things that we would like for Afghanistan. It is not so simple as just to change an individual, like picking a good minister instead of a bad one. Sometimes people give you the impression that Afghanistan's problems could be solved by getting rid of five or six people. Being a minister does not give you any power in and of itself. Let us take the best-known case – Marshall Fahim, the Minister of Defense. Is Marshall Fahim the commander of military forces because he is the Minister of Defense? No. He is the Minister of Defense because he is the commander of these military forces. He inherited from Ahmad Shah Massoud a set of relationships with commanders and a supply line that was less broken for them than for others. And therefore, he could take the Americans' money and make something out of it. Also, because of his regional background, he happened to be the commander closest to Kabul. He did not enter into Kabul, take over the chair in the Ministry of Defense and then issue a different set of orders to the same army. No, he brought his army with him. When you are talking about reforming the Ministry of Defense – the Ministry of Defense is just a building. It is not the same Ministry of Defense in terms of personnel that was there before he got there. The Taliban brought their own Ministry of Defense. They left, and Marshall Fahim brought his own Ministry of Defense. And the others did the same. The reform of the Ministry of Defense will need much more than changing the people who are in certain positions – that does not automatically change power, because the power is still based on these personal networks. So we are talking about a long-term process of institutional change.

These networks are not national, not sub-national, but trans-national. Ahmed Rashid talked about the networks of the Taliban in Pakistan and the relationship to the drug trade. There are

region-wide networks of smuggling coming out of Dubai, going through Iran into Afghanistan and into Pakistan. The drug trade of course is a global network. There is also the gem trade, the emerald trade, which is linked to a Polish marketing joint venture. Mainly Panjshiris benefit from the emerald trade. The drug trade is of course only profitable because drugs are illegal in the developed world. This raises prices on the market, and farmers can make super-profits by growing drugs in un-policed areas. It is the same thing that is happening with cocaine elsewhere. There is a timber mafia. And all these trans-national networks undermine the attempts to build a territorial national state, which is the framework for self-governance in our current international system.

Now, if you take this analysis as the base line of what the reality is, and we also assume this reality is very dangerous, not only for the Afghans who are suffering directly from it, but also for the whole rest of the world, which was convincingly demonstrated on September 11th, you have an analytical framework to ask: are international actors bringing to bear on this problem, military, political and economic resources that are capable of transforming it? The answer is no. I think that is quite clear. We should not judge reconstruction by how well donors have delivered on pledges. We should judge pledges by how close they are to the need. I should also add that, claiming that pledges have been met requires some legerdemain with figures, since it requires counting humanitarian assistance as reconstruction aid.

So what was Bonn? Bonn was not a peace agreement in the normal sense of the word, because a peace agreement is an agreement negotiated among the parties to the conflict. The major party to the conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban movement, the Islamic Emirate, was not there. Bonn took place only because of September 11th, only because the US government, the Bush administration, decided to react militarily to al-Qaeda by removing the Taliban regime from power militarily. If the US had not done that, there would not have been any Bonn, there would not be any interim or transitional administration, and the Taliban would have remained in control of Afghanistan.

That means, of course, that the very strategy that made Bonn possible also in a sense contradicted it, because the main goal of US policy in Afghanistan was not to set up a better regime for the Afghan people. If they wanted to do that they could have done it much more easily and cheaply earlier. The goal was to get rid of the terrorist threat against the US as understood by the Bush administration, which they did by funding Afghan fighters to fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, because it was cheaper, it involved less loss of American lives, and it was logistically more feasible. It is quite difficult to supply a modern western military on the territory of Afghanistan, where you have to import all your own drinking water, create all your own electrical power, build your own roads, build your own air fields, set up your own air traffic control systems, and so on and so forth. They had quite a bit of trouble getting in a few hundred Special Forces within a couple of weeks, let alone tens or hundreds of thousands of troops. Maybe it was the only feasible way to pursue their military objectives within the time frame that they wanted.

That process resulted in an Afghan government created in Bonn, which rested on the power base of these warlords. Because of the nature of the struggle in Afghanistan before that, these warlords were primarily from the non-Pashtun areas. This is the origin of the problem of Pashtun representation. Sometimes when you say to people in the Northern Alliance that Pashtuns feel excluded from power, they say: "That's ridiculous, look at the number of Pashtuns in the cabinet!" And they are right, if you just look at the percentage of Pashtuns there. There are two very powerful Pashtuns in the cabinet, Ashraf Ghani, Minister of Finance and Ali Ahmad Jalali, Minister of the Interior. Those are two core state-building jobs. But neither Ali Jalali nor Ashraf Ghani is the head of a patronage network that can mobilize support and redistribute benefits to people. Neither of them have hundreds of people outside

their door every morning asking for jobs in the administration as do the leaders of the Northern Alliance, because they are not the traditional type of leaders. Though they are Pashtuns, and they are leaders, they are not leaders of Pashtuns. They don't have those networks that the commanders who came into power have. That is what people mean when they say they don't have a political base. Talking about a political base in Afghanistan does not mean you take a poll and see what percentage of people supports you. It means you have a patronage network through which you redistribute resources and from which you can then mobilize people. And that is because there is no effective administration; there is no effective tax base.

Bonn created a government, but it did not create a state. It set up timetables and benchmarks for political processes. The Emergency Loya Jirga, election of a new government, constitutional commission, drafting of the constitution, holding of the elections to the constitutional Loya Jirga, the constitutional Loya Jirga, and then the national elections all have explicit deadlines. But for those political processes to make sense, you have to have a state. You can't have free and fair elections if numbers of people are running around with guns intimidating people. You can't have free and fair elections if you can't even have access to the people living in the country. You can't register voters if nobody has an address or an identity card, and so on and so forth. To have direct elections there has to be a relationship of each voting citizen with the state based on some kind of registration, identity. And the institutional framework for that does not yet exist in Afghanistan, let alone the institutional framework for providing security and some degree of rule of law.

Bonn did not contain any timetables and benchmarks for creating those institutions. When we first drafted the agreement, it had some clause about disarmament and, as I recall it, we did not even think about it very much. It was almost like boiler plate for peace agreements. We thought, of course, since it is a peace agreement, something has to be put in about disarming people. But the delegates wouldn't accept it. They said it is dishonorable to take weapons away from Mujahidin. There was also a kind of revolt by commanders in the field, who were given a distorted picture of what was happening. And so all the Bonn agreement says is that, as of the coming into force of the agreement, all existing armed forces come under the authority of the interim administration, and shall be reorganized according to need, which was understood to mean that there should be fewer of them. But there is no modality, no agreement on international monitoring or support for that, no timetable. And yet there is a timetable for these political events.

Similarly, there is a civil service commission that is mandated to reform the administration and oversee appointments. It took a long time to set it up, and it has done very little. There is nothing in the Bonn Agreement about setting up the police. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was extremely important, mainly for demilitarizing the capital, not so that there would be less crime in the capital. I often hear people talking about ISAF as a force that is supposed to make Kabul secure, apparently from street crime and burglaries. That was not the point. The point of ISAF was to remove the factional military forces so that the capital could be seen as a politically neutral national space, not one dominated by one faction, which can use its military force to intimidate people. ISAF has done half its job. It has made it somewhat possible to hold meetings there. But people, particularly Pashtuns who are not from the dominant groups i.e. Panjshiris and their allies, still sometimes feel insulted and intimidated on the streets of Kabul. The presence of these military forces has provided the base for the commanders in the city to create a wholly new war economy, a parallel economy of seizing land, taking over businesses, shake-downs, mafias, burglaries and so on. The street crime eventually becomes linked to the criminalized political presence in the city. So as we

have said earlier, demilitarizing Kabul is key to making it credible as a national capital, and expanding ISAF will then be critical to making the rest of the country credible as parts of a national administration.

A few words about reconstruction

There is also nothing about reconstruction in the Bonn Agreement except for an annex that called on the international community to provide various forms of assistance. I think there is a misunderstanding about what reconstruction is. Actually, “reconstruction” is the wrong term. Reconstruction might be appropriate after a little battle for six months, when you want to rebuild what was destroyed. But no one is trying to rebuild whatever was in Afghanistan in 1978. That is not the purpose of it. The purpose is also not primarily to relieve suffering and help people go to school and rebuild their houses. Of course, those things are absolutely necessary, and I am not denigrating them. But reconstruction is part of the political effort, because if people don’t have legal livelihoods, they will turn to criminalized livelihoods. If they have criminalized livelihoods, they will have criminal protectors. If they have criminal protectors, you have the basis for a terrorist state. If you want to have a legitimate army and a police and a government that is sustainable, it has to have a tax base. It has to have an economy from which it can legally derive revenue. Even if it gets aid, it still has to have a tax base. So, what so-called reconstruction is about is creating livelihoods and a sustainable economy for Afghanistan. It requires a banking system, all these macroeconomic things, plus the short-term impact projects.

The World Bank, UNDP, and the Asian Development Bank made estimates for the Tokyo donor conference in January 2002. They had three estimates: low, middle and high. The middle one was 10.3 billion USD for reconstruction over five years. They did not say what the goals were. The needs assessment was hardly based on any study of Afghanistan at all, since they had not had access to Afghanistan. The Afghan government is now recalculating the assessment. They think the cost is maybe closer to 30 billion USD over the same period of time. The pledges at Tokyo were 5 billion USD, and the needs assessment said specifically that the estimates were for reconstruction, and that humanitarian assistance would have to be calculated separately. But countries have counted their humanitarian assistance as delivery on their reconstruction pledges.

Afghanistan does not need countries to fulfill their pledges. Afghanistan needs a workable economy. And the world needs Afghanistan to have a workable economy, if this analysis is accurate. But the resources that have been made available so far are not anywhere near what is needed to create or jumpstart that workable economy. I would also like to add that the term “disbursement” is also misleading. “Disbursement” means that the money is now in a bank account belonging to an organization that might implement a project. Over half of the money that has been disbursed for reconstruction is for projects that have not started yet. And a very small number of those projects have been completed. Implementation is very difficult, and there is a tendency of governments to pat themselves on their backs for meeting their pledges. Meeting pledges is not a valid criterion. The criterion must be the achievement of the goals. The trouble is that a government is individually responsible for meeting its pledges. Nobody is responsible for meeting the goals, which is the general problem with international efforts of this sort – there is no clear accountability.

Finally, some words about prognoses. At the moment I am feeling much more pessimistic than I did any time during the past two years. I don’t expect the government to crumble in the immediate future. I don’t expect timetables not to be respected. But I have a sense that, even if formal timetables are respected, these political activities are becoming more and more devoid of the meaning that they are supposed to have. That would particularly be true of presidential elections, if they are held under conditions like those likely to be present in June

2004. I don't know what exactly would reverse the rise of the Taliban. The US has a policy now, trying to reverse a lot of these things. It has changed its policy on warlords, it is accelerating assistance, it stopped opposing the expansion of ISAF, though we don't see too many people rush in to go to those places. Apparently it is too dangerous for the military, so the UN should continue to send civilians there without any protection, as well as NGOs, of course, like the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.

So, it would require a major effort. I think the idea behind the new Bonn Conference and the new Tokyo Conference. Just to confuse you a little more, I understand from a phone call I had yesterday that the new Tokyo conference will probably be held in Bonn. But really, there should be one conference, because I think the burden of the argument is that if international actors are serious about accomplishing the goals defined in the UN Security Council resolution for Afghanistan, they have to coordinate state-building, political development, including protection of human rights, and reconstruction. They are all interlinked.

To get those agreements on politics and state-building, you need the absent actors - first of all as many representatives as possible from the Taliban. You need the regional actors. So a new conference has to be very well-prepared. You can't just bring everyone together and say: "OK, now finally make up your minds and settle." It would be quite a lengthy process and it would rather be the kind of conference which would convene, disperse, and reconvene over a period of time. That is normally how real peace processes, as opposed to emergency slap-up jobs, are run. And it would in turn have to be integrated with a new donor conference. Now, again, the donors are not ready for Tokyo. Are the donors committed to accomplish the goals? I think that is the crucial question - are the donors committed to accomplish the goals that they have set for themselves? If they are, they cannot set up a framework for democracy and not have a state, and then give people lectures about how they are not living up to our standards of human rights, even though they don't have roads, communication, food, and alternative livelihoods. They are growing all this poppy, which is profitable only because we have social problems in our own countries, and we are not giving them alternatives. And the police have bicycles and pistols, while the drug traders have 4x4s and machine guns, but somehow they are not suppressing drugs.

It is pretty meaningless to make up these agreements and goals and not fund them. All these things have to be coordinated. So in my view, in my analysis as a social scientist, that is what would be required for success. My analysis as a different kind of social scientist, as a student of international affairs, would say that international institutions, governments and so on, are hardly capable of producing such a result and are not likely to produce such a result. But nonetheless I think all of us in this room hope very much that, despite that, we will achieve such a result, and we will continue to work for it. Thank you.