> **"Unlike Iraq, in Afghanistan an international consensus supports common goals for the entire operation, providing a test of whether the 'international community' is capable of effective joint action to make societies secure, even when their insecurity threatens the whole world. So far the results indicate that governments and international institutions are not up to the job."**

(Re)Building Afghanistan: The Folly of Stateless Democracy

BARNETT R. RUBIN

Is it possible to turn Afghanistan into a stable democracy by June 2004, the date set for the "free and fair elections" that are to end Afghanistan's official transitional period under the Bonn Agreement of December 5, 2001? Would it have been possible to do so if everyone had done exactly the right thing from Bonn onward? The answer is no, it never was possible. But that does not mean that substantial achievements are not possible.

It is important to bear in mind what Afghanistan is actually like. Afghanistan is not Sweden with bad roads, or the United States with lower per capita income. Nor is it a country that does not want democracy because its citizens are conservative Muslims. The people of Afghanistan, like people in every country, have a variety of ideas regarding their country's political future. Many of them want democracy, and some of them simultaneously want that which might contradict democracy.

But that is not the problem. Afghanistan is a territory that is legally a state, part of the international system; in fact, it was one of the few Muslim states that signed on as a founding member of the United Nations. Afghanistan, however, does not have functioning state institutions. It has no genuine army or effective police. Its ramshackle provincial administration is barely in contact with, let alone obedient to, the central government. Most of the country's meager tax revenue has been illegally taken over by local officials who are little more than warlords with official titles.

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THE STATE OF THE WEAKENED STATE

Afghanistan's state institutions more or less functioned until the Soviet invasion in 1978, but they were very weak. Government expenditures in Afghanistan never amounted to more than 10 percent of gross domestic product (in most developed countries it is around 30 percent); tax revenues were never more than 6 percent of GDP. The gap between taxes and expenditures was covered by foreign assistance or by the sale of natural gas. This means Afghanistan was one of the world's weakest states before the series of wars that broke out in 1978. And the Afghan state maintained its power by making Afghan society into one of the world's weakest societies, which therefore had low capacity for resistance.

What has happened over the past 20 to 30 years is that the society's capacity for resistance has increased, at least militarily, as the capacity of the already weak state decreased. The Taliban led an effort to rebuild state institutions in Afghanistan, which 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 composed entirely of peaceful, social democracy.

The process of state formation is often quite violent and messy. During the destruction of weak state institutions, people have 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—which is where the warlords come in. A personalized network means that cer-

tain individuals build relationships with other individuals through their access to resources. These resources might be legitimate political power, access to weapons from foreign aid, profits from the drug trade or some other type of smuggling, the ability to raise legitimate taxes, or wealth from ownership of property. These individuals redistribute this wealth, or these assets—military, economic, whatever—to other people, with whom they have a personal relationship, who then use the resources to raise their own assets and redistribute them to others.

In the modern period, this means there is an interrelationship between the patronage connections in Afghanistan (which are partly based on so-called tribalism or clan relations, which themselves are not static but are constantly re-formed in various ways) and the international system. The patronage relations have become internationalized because resources are imported into the networks through global and transnational 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, too, is part of the process of globalization. But it is the other side of globalization.

How is this important politically? It means that it is not entirely true that the United States invented or created these warlords when it armed and funded commanders from the Northern Alliance and other groups to fight the Taliban after September 11, 2001. The United States invigorated and strengthened Afghanistan's warlords, but there is a reason why these are the same people who were in power from 1992 to 1996. The warlords built up their networks during the previous war against the Soviet Union. The networks allowed the United States to create a fighting force out of them and recruit other commanders.

THE POWER OF PATRONAGE

This is important for understanding the current obstacles to security, democratization, human rights, and all the other positive changes desirable for Afghanistan. It is not simply a case of removing individuals—picking, for example, a good minister instead of a bad one. Some analyses give the impression that dismissing five or six people would solve Afghanistan's problems. But being ministers in the government of President Hamid Karzai did not initially give the incumbents any power in and of itself.

Consider the best-known case: Marshall Muhammad Qasim 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 was the commander of the military forces that occupied Kabul when the Taliban abandoned the capital in the face of the US bombing. He inherited from mujahideen leader Ahmad Shah Massoud a set of relationships with commanders and a supply line that was less broken than that of others. When the CIA contacted him, he was thus able to take American money and use it. Also, because of his regional background, he happened to be the commander closest to Kabul. He did not enter the capital, take over the chair in the ministry of defense, and then issue a different set of orders to the same army. He brought his army with him.

When one talks about reforming the ministry of defense, it is important to realize that the ministry of defense in Afghanistan is just a building. It is not the same ministry in terms of personnel that was there before Marshall Fahim took over the job of running it. The Taliban brought their own ministry of defense. They left, and Marshall Fahim replaced it with his own. Ahmad Shah Massoud did the same when his forces captured Kabul in 1992. Reforming the ministry of defense will need much more than changing the people who are in certain positions. That kind of reform does not automatically change power, because power is still based on personal networks. What is required is a long-term process of institutional change.

The networks at work in Afghanistan are not national, or subnational, but transnational. Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has written about the networks of the Taliban in Pakistan and their relationship to the drug trade. Regional networks of smuggling emerge from Dubai, go through Iran into Afghanistan and then into Pakistan. The drug trade, of course, constitutes a global network. And the drug trade is profitable only because drugs are illegal in the developed world. Legal prohibition raises prices in the market, so Afghan farmers can make super-profits by producing opium in unpoliced areas. The same dynamic can be seen at work with cocaine elsewhere, or with the timber mafia in eastern Afghanistan. These transnational networks undermine attempts to build a territorial nation-state, which is the framework for self-governance in the current international system.

BONN'S DEFICIENCIES

The reality of Afghanistan today is very dangerous, not only for the Afghans who are suffering

directly from it, but also for the rest of the world—as was convincingly demonstrated on 9-11. And so it must be asked: are international actors bringing to bear on this problem the military, political, and economic resources that can transform it? I think it is quite clear the answer is no. The international community is failing to provide enough security or reconstruction aid, and its strategy is not sufficiently focused on the central goal of building an effective and accountable state.

The Bonn Agreement of 2001, as beneficial as it may have been, was deficient in several respects. It obliged the Afghan government to carry out a series of actions, all of which required international support for their success, but it did not impose any obligation on those whose assistance was essential. Bonn also is lacking in that it was not a peace agreement in the normal sense of the word—that is, an agreement negotiated among the parties to a conflict. The major party to the conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban movement, was not represented. Bonn took place only because of 9-11 and because the US government decided to react to Al Qaeda's threat by removing the Taliban regime from power militarily. If the United States had not done that, there would not have been any Bonn talks, there would not be any interim or transitional administration, and the Taliban would have remained in control of Afghanistan. These peculiar circumstances created some serious birth defects in the interim administration and its successor, which only now are being addressed.

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 the United States had wanted to do that, it could have done it much more easily and more cheaply earlier. The goal instead was to get rid of the terrorist threat against America, as understood by the Bush administration. The United States removed this threat by funding Afghan fighters to wage war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda because that was less expensive, involved a smaller loss of American lives, and was more feasible logistically. It is difficult to supply a modern Western military on the Afghan territory, which requires a military force to import all of its drinking water, generate all of its electrical power, build its own roads and airfields, and set up its own air traffic control systems. In fact, the US military 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 US military objectives within the time frame originally planned.

The result was an Afghan government created at Bonn that rested on a power base of warlords. Because of the nature of the struggle in Afghanistan before the US invasion, the warlords employed by America were primarily from the non-Pashtun areas, including Tajiks (like Fahim and Massoud), Uzbeks, and Hazaras, who, unlike the rest of Afghanistan's Muslims, are Shiite rather than Sunni. These were the main groups battling the Taliban. This fait accompli resulting from the political background and the US military strategy is the origin of the feeling among many Pashtuns, at least until the constitutional assembly from December 2003 to January 2004, that they lacked adequate representation in the government.

Free and fair elections are impossible if a large number of unaccountable people with guns are intimidating citizens.

Sometimes when I used to say to people in the Northern Alliance—the coalition of mainly non-Pashtun groups resisting the Taliban that formed the core of power in the initial Karzai administration—that Pashtuns felt excluded from power, they would respond: "That's ridiculous, look at the number of Pashtuns in the cabinet!" And they were right, if you just looked at the percentage of Pashtuns with portfolios. Since the fall of 2002, two very powerful Pashtuns have sat in the cabinet, Ashraf Ghani, minister of finance, and Ali Ahmad Jalali, minister of the interior. They hold 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. Neither man has hundreds of people outside his 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. Although they are Pashtuns, and they are leaders, they are not leaders of Pashtuns. They do not have those networks that the commanders who came into power have. That is what people mean when they say they do not have a political base. Determining the size or viability of a political base in Afghanistan does not mean taking a poll and seeing what percentage of people supports which leader: a patronage network's magnitude is based on its capacity to redistribute resources and

mobilize people. This is because, in Afghanistan, there is no effective administration; there is no effective tax base.

GOVERNMENT WITHOUT INSTITUTIONS

The Bonn Agreement created a government, but it did not create a state. It set up timetables and benchmarks for political processes. The emergency Loya Jirga (grand council of elders), the election of a new government, the establishment of a constitutional commission, the drafting of a constitution, the holding of elections to the constitutional Loya Jirga, the constitutional Loya Jirga, and then the national elections all had explicit deadlines. By February 2004, all of these deadlines but the last, for elections, had been met. The government so far also seems determined to meet the deadline for elections by June 2004, though many observers doubt it will be possible to do so.

But for those political processes to accomplish the purposes for which they were launched, there must be a state. Free and fair elections are impossible if a large number of unaccountable people with guns are intimidating citizens. A government cannot hold free and fair elections if it cannot even gain access to the people living in the country. It is very difficult to register voters if few people have an address or an identity card. To hold direct elections, there has to be a relationship between each voting citizen and the state, based on some kind of registration or identity. And the institutional framework for that does not yet exist in Afghanistan, let alone the institutional framework to provide security and a significant degree of rule of law.

The Bonn Agreement did not contain any timetables or benchmarks for creating these institutions. When the agreement was first being drafted, it contained a clause about disarmament. This was almost a form of boilerplate text for peace agreements. The drafters believed that, since this was a peace agreement, it had to contain something about disarming militias. But the delegates would not accept it. They said it is dishonorable to take weapons away from the mujahideen. Commanders in the field nearly started a revolt when they were given a distorted picture of what was happening. In the end, the Bonn Agreement says only that, "Upon the official transfer of power, all mujahideen, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces." This was understood to mean that there should be fewer armed forces. But there is no modality, no agreement on international monitoring or support for that, no timetable. And yet there is a timetable for political events.

Similarly, a civil service commission is mandated to reform the administration and oversee appointments. But it took a considerable amount of time to set it up, and for more than a year it did very little. The Bonn Agreement also says nothing about establishing a police force. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), mandated by the UN Security Council to provide security in Kabul and its environs, is extremely important. Its principal purpose, as the Bonn Agreement makes clear, was to demilitarize the capital, not to reduce crime. Some have described the ISAF as a force that is supposed to make Kabul secure, apparently from street crime and burglaries. But that was not the point. The ISAF was designed to remove factional military forces so the capital could be seen as a politically neutral national space, not one dominated by one faction that could use its military force to intimidate residents.

Until very recently, when it started pressuring Marshall Fahim to remove his forces and heavy weapons from Kabul, the ISAF had done only half its job. It made it somewhat possible to hold meetings in Kabul. But people, especially Pashtuns, who are not from the militarily dominant groups (that is, Panjshiris and their allies) still sometimes feel insulted and intimidated on the streets of Kabul. The presence of these factional forces, even if rehatted as Afghan soldiers, has provided a base for commanders in the city to create a wholly new war economy, a parallel economy of seizing land, taking over businesses, shaking down business owners, and burglarizing homes. The street crime eventually becomes linked to the criminalized political presence in the city. And this reinforces the point that demilitarizing Kabul is key to making it credible as a national capital. Expanding the ISAF will then be critical to making the rest of the country credibly subject to a national administration.

DEFRAGMENTING AFGHANISTAN

Lack of security has made reconstruction much slower and more expensive, even as the slowness of reconstruction has blocked government efforts to increase security. Lack of reconstruction means that illicit activities—mainly opium production, processing, and export—continue to dominate the economy. Hence, economic policies and aid that make it possible to draw people out of the criminalized economy are a precondition for security.

The Bonn Agreement does not specifically address Afghanistan's reconstruction. (An annex to the agreement does call on the international community to provide various forms of assistance, in particular to eradicate opium production and disarm militias.) Indeed, there is a misunderstanding about what reconstruction is in Afghanistan. "Reconstruction" is really the wrong term: it might be appropriate to describe what needs to be done after limited fighting that lasts, say, six months—when the job is to rebuild what was destroyed. But no one is trying to rebuild whatever was in Afghanistan in 1978. That is not reconstruction's purpose. Nor is it primarily to relieve suffering or help people go to school or rebuild their houses. These changes are absolutely necessary, of course, and I am not denigrating them. But reconstruction has to be part of a political effort, because if people do not have legal livelihoods, they will turn to criminalized livelihoods. If they have criminalized livelihoods, they will have criminal protectors. And if they have criminal protectors, these protectors—the warlords—will become a permanent interest against stability and the rule of law, and hence perpetuate the anarchy in which terrorists can operate. To build a legitimate army and a police and a government that is sustainable, the government must have a tax base. It has to have an economy from which it can legally derive revenue. (Even if it gets aid, it still must have a tax base, because aid rarely if ever covers a government's recurrent expenses.)

Many nations consider provincial Afghanistan too dangerous for their military, and propose instead that the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations continue to send civilians there without any protection.

In Afghanistan, the government has therefore defined the purpose of the reconstruction effort as laying the basis for a secure, stable nation of citizens, living in dignified poverty rather than desperation. Achieving this goal requires growth that can outpace the drug economy and establish a tax base for the state, including law enforcement. Creating livelihoods and a sustainable economy for Afghanistan requires building institutions such as a banking system. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and the Asian Development Bank presented estimates of the cost of so-called reconstruction at the Tokyo donor conference in January 2002. They generated three estimates: low, middle, and high. The middle estimate was $10.3 billion for reconstruction over five years. They did not report what the goals were. The needs assessment was not based on any study of Afghanistan, since the donors had not had access to the country.

It is true that donors have, in a sense, largely met their Tokyo pledges. But reconstruction should not be judged by how well donors have delivered on their pledges from the January 2002 conference. The pledges should be judged by how close they are to the real need.

Even claiming that pledges have been met requires some legerdemain with figures. The Tokyo pledges were based on assessments of Afghanistan's needs for reconstruction. Donors pledged less than half the estimated cost. The needs assessments explicitly said that they did not include humanitarian assistance—emergency aid to provide food and shelter. Nevertheless, donors have counted humanitarian aid—as much as half the total provided in the first year—against their reconstruction pledges. The Afghan government, in collaboration with the same institutions that prepared the 2002 assessments, has now recalculated the cost of achieving its goals. It thinks the cost is closer to $28 billion over seven years.

Afghanistan does not need countries to fulfill their pledges. It needs enough assistance—of the right kind—to establish a workable, legal economy. And the world needs Afghanistan to establish a workable, legal economy. But the resources that have been made available so far are not anywhere near what is needed to create or jumpstart that workable economy, and now the funds have mostly been disbursed. The term "disbursement," for that matter, is misleading as well. "Disbursement" only means that the money is now in a bank account belonging to an organization that might implement a project. Over half the money that has been disbursed for reconstruction is for projects that have not started yet. And only a small number of projects has been completed. Implementation is difficult, and governments tend to pat themselves on their backs simply for meeting pledges. But meeting pledges is not a valid criterion. Achievement of the goals should be the criterion. Unfortunately, a government is individually responsible only for meeting its pledges. No one is responsible for meeting the goals, which is the general problem with international efforts of this sort: there is no clear accountability.

TEST TIME

What is the prognosis for Afghanistan? The Karzai government has been reinvigorated by its success at the constitutional Loya Jirga, but it also has become deeply divided—between those with a background as part of the resistance in the country, and the professional Afghans returned from abroad. I do not expect the government to crumble in the immediate future. I do not expect timetables to be violated, though it will be extremely difficult to hold meaningful elections on time. But I have a sense that, even if formal timetables are respected, these political activities are still in danger of becoming more and more devoid of the meaning that they are supposed to have.

That would be particularly true of the presidential election if it is held in June under security conditions like those at present. The United States, partly to improve security for elections, has changed its policy and is now supporting the government in some conflicts with warlords. It is accelerating assistance, and has supported the ISAF's expansion outside of Kabul—although, until NATO defense ministers met in Munich in early February, few countries seemed willing to commit troops. Apparently many nations consider provincial Afghanistan too dangerous for their military, and propose instead that the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations continue to send civilians there without any protection.

The Afghan government will attempt to place all of these concerns on the table at a donors conference scheduled for March 31 and April 1, 2004, in Berlin. At that conference, international actors will be asked to pledge both financial and security assistance. If they are serious about accomplishing the goals defined in the UN Security Council resolution for Afghanistan, they will need to coordinate state building, political development, including protection of human rights, and reconstruction. They are all interlinked.

Are the donors committed to accomplishing the goals set by the Afghan government, which are identical to those set forth in Security Council resolutions? Are the donors committed to accomplishing the goals that they claim to have set for themselves? If they are, they cannot set up a framework for democracy without a state, and then give Afghans lectures about how they are not living up to international standards of human rights, even though they do not have roads, communication, food, and alternative livelihoods. Afghan farmers are growing record amounts of opium poppy, which is profitable only because other nations both generate demand for drugs and outlaw them in their own countries, yet do not give the Afghans alternatives to poppy farming.

Unlike Iraq, in Afghanistan an international consensus supports common goals for the entire operation, providing a test of whether the "international community" is capable of effective joint action to make societies secure, even when their insecurity threatens the whole world. So far the results indicate that governments and international institutions are not up to the job. If the Afghan government succeeds in mobilizing them for the goals it has outlined, it may do a service for more than just the Afghans. ■

A *Current History* Snapshot . . .

"Gorbachev's choices can be influenced significantly by the Pakistanis, the Iranians, the Chinese, and the Americans, among others. Should the Soviet Union win in Afghanistan, its ability to threaten Iran and Pakistan will increase significantly. Moscow will learn that its expectation that in time other nations will accept its terms is justified. . . . However, in the long run, the security of the region will be undermined. Therefore, it serves the best interests of these states and other states with significant interests to prevent a Soviet military victory in Afghanistan. This means that they will have to support the partisans."

"The Soviet Dilemma in Afghanistan"
Current History, October 1985
Zalmay Khalilzad, Columbia University