

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 31
Number 1 *Parameters Spring 2001*

Article 11

2-15-2001

Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict

Ali A. Jalali

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict," *Parameters* 31, no. 1 (2001), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2024.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict

ALI A. JALALI

© 2001 Ali A. Jalali

From *Parameters*, Spring 2001, pp. 85-98.

The civil war in Afghanistan is a microcosm of the post-Cold War multilateral competition for influence in unsettled regions. The Afghan conflict involves internal armed factions with extensive foreign links, neighboring states that pursue competing strategic interests, and ultra-regional players who have ideological, security, or economic stakes in the chaos. With no central authority in Afghanistan, neighboring countries further their policies by engaging and supporting rival Afghan factions, thus fueling the internal strife and blocking the emergence of a broad-based legitimate government in Afghanistan. The turmoil is both the cause and consequence of state failure in the war-torn country.

The result is an attempt to impose a military solution. Armed struggle is not an instrument of a clearly defined policy but a means for open-ended gains in a volatile environment. The trend defies classic norms of warfare and widely accepted military concepts. Instead of war being a "continuation of politics by other means," militarized politics is an extension of war through other channels. Nor does the conceptual paradox end there. The structure of opposing forces and methods of their tactical and operational employment are in stark contrast with conventional models. Militia formations tailored for guerrilla warfare fight conventional battles. Traditional practices regulate the use of new weapons instead of modern technology reshaping outdated procedures. The new follows the old; the past governs the present.

This article looks at the dynamics of the Afghan battlefield with an emphasis on the military potential of the major players and their capacity to force peace through military action. It also examines the interplay of political and military aspects of the conflict to identify conceptual frameworks for restoring peace in Afghanistan.

Background

Militarization of politics in Afghanistan in the fourth quarter of the last century opened a bloody chapter in the country's history that is yet to be closed. Traditionally an internal security force, the Afghan army became heavily politicized in the 1970s as a result of two military coups that eventually brought the communists to power in 1978. Armed resistance to the "Saur Revolution" plunged the country into the grips of a devastating civil war leading to the Soviet military intervention (1979-89) and increased Western support of Islamic-led anti-regime resistance forces, the mujahideen. Political polarization of the county intensified as the war developed into a bloody Cold War battlefield throughout the 1980s. No previous war in Afghanistan caused so much social change as this one, ripping society apart vertically and horizontally.

Traditionally, the regular army was augmented by civilian militias in dealing with major domestic disturbances and foreign threats. During foreign invasions integrated contingents of civilian militias and elements of fragmented state armies had fought foreign invaders. But this war split the nation in two. Each side had extensive foreign backing. The troops of the Moscow-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and its successor the Republic of Afghanistan (ROA) more than tripled in less than ten years to a total of 329,000.[1] Increases in military hardware, particularly after the Soviet pullout, were even greater.[2] The size of the ground forces expanded from 10 divisions to 22. In an effort to "popularize" the defense of the revolution and improve the force-to-space ratio, the regime recruited a large number of tribal and local militias. In addition, 14 Border Guard brigades and the elite National Guard Corps[3] were created.

On the other side, the mujahideen forces grew from local militias to a nationwide guerrilla force composed of numerous factions united by a common enemy but divided along political, ethnic, and regional lines. The mujahideen--backed by millions of armed and unarmed people who were opposed to the communist regime and Soviet military occupation--fielded about 200,000 active fighters[4] equipped with sophisticated weapons including Stinger and Blowpipe anti-aircraft missiles, the MILAN anti-tank system, and surface-to-surface rockets.

Simultaneous, rapid, and large-scale arming of opposing forces brought a major portion of the population under arms in the 1980s.[5] The process, compounding the turmoil and collapse of 1979-80, gradually de-professionalized the armed forces and gave power to a variety of ethnic-regional factions, self-serving warlords, and criminal freebooters. Internal division within the opposing camps caused more fragmentation than a simple pro/anti-Soviet dichotomy once common threats disappeared. As the Soviets withdrew from direct military involvement in the conflict in 1989, ethnic and regional elements on both sides of the waning ideological line forged coalitions in a new struggle for power. In March 1990 a Pashtun-led alliance involving ROA Minister of Defense Shahnawaz Tani and Golbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of a fundamentalist mujahideen faction, Hezb-e Islami, staged an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the government. Two years later, collaboration between the regime's non-Pashtun militia forces, a Tajik-led mujahideen faction under Ahmad Shah Masoud, and the Shiite Hezb-e Wahdat party engineered the downfall of the Najibullah government. This move, which frustrated a UN plan for peaceful transfer of power from the communist regime to a transitional government, led to an intense power struggle among the mujahideen groups who had taken over different parts of the country and seized or looted weapons and heavy equipment from the deserted or surrendered military bases. Except for the formations linked to the anti-regime collaborators, no military unit maintained its organizational integrity.[6] The state and the army both collapsed.

The failure of foreign (largely Pakistani) influenced mujahideen groups to rise above factional interests blocked reunification of the country and restoration of peace. A Pakistan-mediated power-sharing arrangement failed to coalesce the competing parties into a national government. The deal merely apportioned the cabinet posts among power contenders without dissolving the factional militias. The 1992-96 Tajik-led Kabul administration under Borhanuddin Rabbani and his military chief Ahmad Shah Masoud did not succeed in its attempts to broaden its base. Nor did it, in more than nominal terms, organize a united army that could support reunification of the state. Opposition leaders, and those former mujahideen nominally supporting the government, were reluctant to disarm their followers and join a weak government, which was politically and militarily controlled by the Rabbani-Masoud group.

The situation fostered an intense competition for enlargement of factional militias through indiscriminate recruitment from their respective ethnic constituencies or, in the case of some parties, increased reliance on non-Afghans. The process not only ethnicized the warring militias but also brought large numbers of bandits, thugs, and criminal elements to the ranks of the competing factions, much as the expansion of DRA/ROA forces had done in the 1980s. Factional--and nominally national--leaders were reluctant to prevent their allies from criminal acts, fearing their defection to a rival party. This gave a free hand to armed groups that had carved the country into fiefdoms and were involved in narcotics, plundering public and private property, extortion, corruption, and violence.[7]

The Taliban movement in 1994 came as a turning point in the Afghan civil war. Emerging as a popular reaction to prevailing chaos in a broken state, the puritanical Sunni militia found extensive support among the masses that had been victimized by continued infighting and lawlessness. As a predominantly Pashtun movement, the Taliban received extensive support from Pakistan and from Pashtuns across the country who thought the movement might restore their national dominance, bruised by the occupation of Kabul by the Tajik-led government. The radical Islamic Taliban established control over 90 percent of the country in less than four years by breaking up three warring factions[8] and cornering the fourth.[9]

However, the Taliban failed to stabilize the country and create an effective government. The Taliban's extensive links to Pakistan (especially to the Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] and Deobandi religious schools ["madrassas"]), to foreign extremist networks, and to wanted terrorists, along with its condoning of massive drug production and its poor human rights record, resulted in international isolation of the movement. Taliban imposition of far-reaching social restrictions and economic failure also caused increasing domestic disapproval.





Afghanistan

Driven by competing interests in Afghanistan and the region, neighboring countries and other foreign states and non-state players support rival factions in the Afghan civil war. While Pakistan's ISI has, since 1989, campaigned for the emergence of a pro-Islamabad government in Afghanistan, Iran has been struggling to secure a balanced role for the Shiite minority in Afghan politics to avert the establishment of a hostile regime in Kabul. The two neighbors' distinct strategic aspirations stem from their varying level of influence over Afghan developments, their political priorities, and the geopolitics of the region. Fearing the spread of religious extremism to Central Asia, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have long been supporting the anti-Taliban opposition to block the militia's dominance of border areas.

The Taliban's military gains last summer near Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan sharpened the fears of Taliban-inspired religious extremism in Central Asia. However, differing perceptions about potential security threats and competing national interests have hindered a coordinated response. While Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, and India side with the Tajik-led anti-Taliban opposition, other countries in the region, including Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan which view Russia's involvement in Central Asia with suspicion, favor a nonpartisan stance. Uzbekistan hopes that through a dialogue with the Taliban it will gain the militia's support in stopping the cross-border attacks by Uzbek insurgents based in the Taliban-controlled areas. Turkmenistan, looking to trade with Pakistan, is more favorable to the Taliban. The Taliban's militancy and support of extremist movements from neighboring countries has caused increasing international hostility toward them. The United States and Russia recently led a successful campaign to impose new UN sanctions including an arms embargo on the Taliban, to pressure the militia to hand over suspected terrorist Osama Bin Laden.

Military Structure of Factional Militias

The current two-way military conflict in Afghanistan pits the Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement, which controls most of the country, against the Tajik-led Northern United Front (UF) headed by former President Borhanuddin Rabbani and his military chief Ahmad Shah Masoud. The Taliban's stated policy is to disarm the opposition and unify the country in a strong central government under its leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, the self-styled "Amir-ul-Momenin." The United Front wants to force the Taliban into a vaguely defined power-sharing arrangement that stresses regional autonomy. The opposing forces are locked in seesaw battles in two major areas and along several smaller fronts in remote mountainous districts. The United Front's control of the key Salang highway north of Kabul blocks direct communication between the rival militia's military groupings on the two sides of the Hindu Kush mountains. In

the north, the Taliban struggles to cut off the UF's last major ground access to the outside world by seizing control of areas on the Tajikistan border.

The army (as a state institution, organized, armed, and commanded by the state) does not exist in Afghanistan today. Neither the Taliban-led "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" nor the "Islamic State of Afghanistan" headed by the ousted President Rabbani has the political legitimacy or administrative efficiency of a state. The militia formations they command are composed of odd assortments of armed groups with varying level of loyalties, political commitment, professional skills, and organizational integrity. Many of them feel free to switch sides, shift loyalties, and join or leave the group spontaneously. The country suffers from the absence of a top political layer capable of controlling individual and group violence. Force is not a state monopoly.[10]

Although both sides identify their units with military formations of the old regime, there is hardly any organizational or professional continuity from the past. The Taliban army's order of battle includes the Central Army Corps of Kabul, the 2d Army Corps of Kandahar, the 3d Army Corps of Paktia, the 4th Army Corps of Herat, and other formations of the Afghan army once located in the areas now controlled by the religious militia. But these units really exist in name only or at least do not subsist in their original form. In fact only their military bases still exist, accommodating and supporting an assortment of militia groups. Although the core of Ahmad Shah Masoud's army has some elements of the former 5th Corps in Parwan-Kapisa and the 6th Corps in the north, it is essentially a heterogeneous militia force, though it retains the original designations.

Elite militia units clustered around factional leaderships play pivotal roles in the combat. On the Taliban side, these troops are mostly recruited from the religious schools (the madrassas) and are led by veterans of the previous wars waged by the Taliban. These units usually spearhead the Taliban's military actions. The size of a unit, ranging from a few dozen troops to several hundred, depends on the political influence of its leader and available resources. Some larger units have organic artillery, armored vehicles, and other support elements. Several units are grouped into task forces for major combat actions under temporary commands. Hundreds of former army officers and pilots (mostly ethnic Pashtuns who joined the Taliban) operate the militia's complex aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery, and air defense systems. Some former officers are advisors to higher military commanders and staffs. Senior positions are held exclusively by the mullahs. Almost no former military officer has an important command position. Other officers are assigned to the remnants of former army units and air force bases. The militia also includes formations led by former mujahideen commanders, tribal contingents, seasonal conscripts, and foreign "volunteers."

Most of the foreign "volunteers" come from Pakistani religious parties and militant groups. The number of Pakistani fighters varies depending on the intensity of military activity in Afghanistan. Some estimates put the number of Pakistanis trained and fought in Afghanistan between 1994 and 1999 at 80,000 to 100,000.[11] The number of Pakistani militants who joined the Taliban in their July 1999 offensive north of Kabul was estimated at 3,000 to 8,000.[12] Some of them were below the age of 14.[13] While most of the Pakistanis are madrasa students sympathetic to the Taliban's "jihad" and receive no pay, a small number of them are trained and paid ex-military personnel serving in key specialist positions.[14] Foreign recruits are trained in Kabul at the "Special Training Center" in the former 7th Infantry Division's military post at Rishkhor, southwest of the capital. The center trains up to one thousand recruits at any one time in intensive courses lasting up to six weeks. The training includes the use of small arms and demolitions and instruction in leading small group combat. Trained foreign recruits operate in platoon-sized units separate from Afghan formations.[15]

The Arab "volunteers" are concentrated in the 55th Brigade. There has been a lot of exaggeration about the number and military significance of these fighters. Most eyewitness accounts put their number between 400 and 600 at any one time. However, it is not the size but the political impact of the unit that affects the Afghan battlefield. Affiliation of these fighters with international militant groups and Usama Bin Laden's al-Qa'eda organization has opened many underground channels of financial support to the Taliban. Afghanistan is in fact a training ground for the "volunteers" and a place to acquire political stature and combat experience for their own wars back home. This also draws to Afghanistan dozens of non-Arab militants including Kashmiris, Chechens, Uzbeks, Uighurs, and others.[16]

The military forces of the United Front are also a confused assortment of armed groups, yet in a different way. The UF combines heterogeneous militias, semi-professional leftovers of the old regime, former mujahideen groups, and ethnic-

regional contingents into a loosely unified opposition to the Taliban. The UF leadership makes a better use of former military personnel, mostly non-Pashtuns, in command and staff positions. The dominant faction in the alliance is the armed forces of former defense minister Ahmad Shah Masoud, who is affiliated with the ousted President Borhanuddin Rabbani's Jam'iat-e Islami faction. The Guard formation, mostly composed of Panjshiri fighters and some Badakhshani and Takhari Tajiks,[17] is the central element of Masoud's military machine. This distinctly uniformed unit of about 800 fighters is well trained, well equipped, and highly disciplined. It fought against the Soviet forces in 1980s and later was organized into a Guard Division under Commander Gaddah following the mujahideen victory in 1992.

Combat formations of Masoud's militia are grouped in two regional commands, called "corps" or "zones." The Parwan-Kapisa Command is the successor to the former 5th Corps[18] and responsible for the areas south of the Salang pass and northern approaches to Salang (including Andarab and Dasht-e Kilagai). Military formations of the Northeastern Zone are organized in the 6th Corps. It is composed of three divisions deployed in Takhar, Konduz, and Badakhshan provinces.[19] Before being ousted from the capital in 1996, Ahmad Shah Masoud transferred a great number of weapons to his base in the Panjsher Valley,[20] where they remain out of action because of fuel and ammunition shortages. There are reports that they are under control of a largely inactive "artillery division."

The size of the military forces of the opposing militias has been subject to exaggeration. The number of their troops is not stable but changes with the operational situation. Neither faction can afford to maintain a large force constantly. Both sides recruit additional fighters for main operations. Massive recruitment, which increasingly means conscription drives, precedes the Taliban's major military campaigns. Students from religious schools in Pakistan and young Afghan fighters from areas under Taliban control swell the ranks of combat formations. In the summer of 1999, the Taliban recruited thousands of troops in Nangrahar and other provinces[21] near Kabul, while thousands of Pakistani "volunteers" and Arab militants joined them for the Shamali operation. The Taliban mobilized thousands of Afghan and Pakistani religious student fighters for the summer 2000 campaign that led to the fall of the UF headquarters, in Taleqan, in September. In noncontested areas, the Taliban government relies on local forces to hold the areas while saving its combat units for the war fronts. The strength of its militia is about 25,000 fighters, increasing to 40,000 during military operations. The United Front commands 10,000 to 12,000 combat troops in addition to its local armed groups.

Diverging Operational Concepts

The structure and operation of the opposing forces are governed by divergent conceptual trends. Mostly a product of the jihad era and guerrilla warfare, the military establishment under Ahmad Shah Masoud is conceptually oriented toward a war of attrition. It is, in essence, a guerrilla force despite efforts to reorganize it into a conventional army in 1992-96. This orientation shapes the underlying principles of its tactical and operational maneuver: elusiveness is considered the key to survival in drawn-out combat; the fight for survival calls for survival to fight; and trading territory for time constitutes the basis of operational resilience. The UF is skilled in establishing fortified defensive lines but reluctant to defend them at all costs. It has no illusions about the tactical weight of the enemy's offensive momentum nor any doubt about the effectiveness of the counteroffensive against an overstretched enemy.

The Taliban militia has emerged as a motorized light force tailored to fast-paced military action against a patchwork of fragmented armed groups. Relying heavily on ethnic participation, bribery, and popular support, the social movement acted as a law (Shari'a) enforcement body before it entangled in full-fledged fighting. Fascinated by the cross-country performance of pickup trucks during the war with Soviet forces in southwestern Afghanistan, the militia chose the pickup truck as an all-purpose vehicle for both combat and combat support roles.[22] Suitable to fire from while on the move, the customized pickup serves as an efficient combat vehicle having tactical "lightness" and a great deal of cross-country maneuverability. It is the principal troop carrier, transporting ten or more militiamen who can fight in mounted or dismounted formations. The result has been the creation of a unique force of pickup truck cavalry, a mounted force of ideologically motivated and disciplined fighters. This formation has been extremely effective in exploiting tactical success achieved through combat and non-combat actions.

However, the turbaned "Hussars" also have the limitations of a light force. They are hardly a match for well-organized and deliberate defensive lines, and their mobility suffers in mountainous terrain. It is notable that the Taliban overran about 65 percent of the country in two years (1994-96) and captured the capital, Kabul. But in the last four years they

have been able to add only 25 percent more territory to their real estate holdings.

Even where the Taliban forces do enjoy a high level of offensive mobility, they lack the experience, discipline, and organizational skills to penetrate prepared defenses or consolidate positions. In the spring of 1995, for example, the Taliban advance stalled near Kabul for a year after it suffered heavy losses.[23] Further, the advance on Shindand was stopped and turned into a major defeat for the Taliban, forcing its retreat to Kandahar in May 1995.

Poor discipline has often threatened tactical success. In major offensives, fighters have rushed to the front line to share the glory and spoils of war, leaving their tactical formations unbalanced--a front-heavy and rear-weak force disposition. This leaves the force extremely vulnerable to counterattack. It is always easier to maneuver reserves from depth than to shift troops along a committed front. This was clearly visible in recent military operations. The Taliban 1999 summer offensive (28 July - 3 August) north of Kabul was well planned but poorly executed. The operation involved attacks on two parallel axes while pinning down opposing forces on a third heavily-mined direction. The operation lasted a week and resulted in the capture of an extensive territory in Parwan and Kapisa provinces. However, the Taliban forces failed to consolidate their territorial gains by constructing defensive lines and conducting mop-up operations. Consequently, their advance was reversed by Masoud's blitzkrieg counteroffensive on 5 August, which left hundreds of Taliban fighters dead.[24] The militia fared better in the Northwest Campaign in the summer of 2000 through a more calculated advance toward its operational objective (Taleqan). However, it lost some of the occupied territories in October.

Unconventional Use of Conventional Weapons

Except for the Kalashnikov assault rifle, which is the standard infantry weapon, there is no standardization of combat equipment in units. Weapons on hand in combat units are those captured in previous battles. There are small units with heavy artillery and tanks, and larger formations with few support weapons. Both sides use a large variety of arms, ranging from former mujahideen weapons adapted to guerrilla warfare[25] to surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and armored vehicles inherited from the old regime's conventional army.[26] Tactical use of these weapons does not follow standard rules and procedures. Lack of professional skills often leads to underemployment of advanced military technology and oversimplified use of sophisticated weapons.

Particularly notable is poor performance in the tactical employment of armored vehicles. Tanks are the most likely equipment to be captured intact because of ineffective infantry-tank mutual support and coordination. Poor technical support at the tactical level leads to the loss of stalled vehicles to the enemy when a unit is forced to fall back. Certain equipment has been modified in response to combat exigencies. For example, Masoud's forces have enhanced the firepower of light trucks and BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles by fitting them with 32-shot 57mm rocket pods salvaged from combat helicopters (Mi-24 and Mi-25). These reportedly were extremely effective in recent fighting because of their combined mobility, firepower, and armor protection.[27] Both factions have enhanced the mobility of single-barrel and multi-barrel rocket launchers (BM-1, BM-12, Saqar-20, and Saqar-30) and DShK and ZGU-1 heavy machine guns by mounting them on wheeled and tracked vehicles.

Both sides adapt modern technology and sophisticated weapons to traditional methods of warfare. Instead of using artillery fire and air strikes to facilitate the maneuver of infantry, artillery and air strikes are usually used disjointedly against static targets. Systematic use of tanks and other armored vehicles as a means of combining firepower, battlefield maneuver, and shock action is rarely practiced. Instead, armor is mostly employed in the single role of fire support.

The low force-to-space ratio on extended fronts undermines defenses, allowing the attacker to break through gaps into the depth at high speed once the first line of defense is breached. On the other hand, the same factor increases the chances of success by a well-planned counterattack against a poorly coordinated advance. In several recent battles, the attacker has been pushed back almost as fast as his offensive progressed. Lack of adequate military skills in using modern weapons (combat aircraft, rockets, artillery, and mortars) and poor fire control systems increase the collateral destruction, causing enormous casualties among the civilian population.

The Afghanistan air force has long ceased to exist as a professional military establishment. Remnants of the old regime's aviation forces have changed hands over the past eight years of civil war. Initially the air force included 12

squadrons of combat aircraft (126 aircraft),[28] five aviation transport squadrons (about 60 planes),[29] and nine combat and transport helicopter squadrons (about 100 helicopters, including 14 combat helicopters).[30] These were deployed at five air bases around the country. Some of the An-12 transports were equipped with Soviet-designed bomb dispensing mechanisms allowing each to carry up to 38 250-kilogram bombs.[31] Currently most of the surviving aircraft (including about 40 combat aircraft and an assortment of transport planes and helicopters)[32] are under Taliban control. These are based in Kabul, Kandahar, Shindand, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif. Most of the planes have outlived their operational age, and many are not technically safe to fly. Rudimentary improvisation and cannibalization provide a few combat aircraft (six to eight) for limited missions.

The United Front reportedly has only eight Mi-17s, six Mi-8 helicopters, and four Mi-24 and Mi-25 gunships. These are based in Badakshan province, and fewer than half are operational. Three An-26 transport planes and a couple of combat aircraft are based across the border in Tajikistan's Kulab military base.[33]

Neither side has the organizational and technical infrastructure necessary to use air power in its conventional role. Combat aircraft hit selected individual targets without regard to the ground operations. The psychological implications of air attacks outweigh their military usefulness, and their collateral damage is greater than losses to intended targets. The air control system is inadequate, and coordination with ground forces is poor. In some cases, communication between the Taliban's radar stations and on-call fighter jets is provided by shoddy, commercially purchased radios. Taliban aviation's most effective role is in using transport planes and helicopters to move troops and materiel and to provide communication, command, and control. Because of its geographic isolation and the rugged terrain, the United Front particularly finds helicopters essential to sustain its combat. Helicopters facilitate communications between Taleqan, Panjsher, and bases of UF allies in the Konar province.

Logistics

In strategic terms, the Taliban forces have access to more sources of supply and logistical support. They control most of the territory and highways, they have links to Pakistan and outside non-governmental networks (including those related to Usama Bin Laden), and they have access to increasing revenues from the drug trade. These factors provide them with uninterrupted logistical support. On the other hand, the United Front has a limited and vulnerable supply line to the outside world. Its best supply route to Tajikistan is exposed to Taliban attacks. While the UF receives cash assistance from Iran and materials from Russia and Central Asian states, it still has the monopoly on printing Afghan currency that circulates in Afghanistan and can be exchanged for hard currency in Kabul and Peshawar.

On the whole, the combat logistical system is rudimentary on both sides. The situation is slightly better in UF forces where a system of combat logistics support is developed at the tactical unit level. The headquarters of military formations have material supply units, technical maintenance service, and transportation detachments.[34] Combat units of both militias mostly rely on local resources and cash purchases of food and other material available in the market. This often strains the local economy and causes price hikes, particularly during major military operations. The Taliban's massive shopping in Kabul and everything-for-the-front drive during the summer operation of 1999 caused acute food shortages in the area.[35] The system does not effectively support extended or lengthy operations. One of the reasons for quick reversal of military actions is attributed to poor logistical support.

The Outlook

The armed conflict in Afghanistan is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There is little chance for a military solution to the war for a number of reasons. Three issues are particularly important.

First, foreign support of the warring factions maintains their military machines and contributes to the stand-off. Pakistan's military and logistics support for the Taliban constantly invigorates the militia's military potential. The commitment of thousands of Pakistani "volunteers" to the Taliban cause provides the movement with an open-ended flow of recruits. The Taliban also counts on Pakistan's assistance to replenish key military supplies and to provide intelligence as well as assistance in the command and coordination of large-scale operations. The student militia receives extensive financial and technical support from a wide network of non-state sources, including Islamic extremist organizations, smuggling connections, and drug-trafficking circles. Similarly, the opposition heavily depends

on financial, military, and logistical support from Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, and India. The Kulab military base in Tajikistan is the principal strategic airhead for Ahmad Shah Masoud's militia, supporting its small fleet of helicopters and warplanes. The base also serves as a transit point for military supplies provided by Iran and Russia.[36]

Second, the unusual nature of the armed conflict promotes the survival of the belligerents and the continuation of the war. Neither side is seriously concerned about the needs of the populace and feels free to use public resources in support of its military effort. Subdued and cowed by the warlords, the public has little motivation to mobilize against the militias. The warring factions see no urgency to end the war through decisive action or compromise. Since such a war is more destructive to the civilian population than to the combatants, the militias have little incentive to opt for a peace that does not favor their corporate agenda. A play-it-safe tendency takes precedence over bold maneuvers and risk-taking initiatives. Such practices prolong the conflict.

Third, a lack of political vision hinders national and international peace efforts. Military actions are not linked to unified political objectives and spawn new conflicts once the military goal is achieved. This has been a chronic problem in Afghanistan during the past two decades. The mujahideen failure to create a viable alternative to the communist regime plunged the country into the grips of civil war once they overthrew the Moscow-backed government. The Taliban movement based its legitimacy on its pledge to disarm the warring factions and unify the country under a stable government. Despite its extensive military achievements, the militia's ethnic dominance, its dependence on Pakistan and foreign "volunteers," its poor human rights record, and its economic failure proved that it is not up to the challenge.

Even if the Taliban were to succeed in bringing the entire country under its control, peace is not likely to return. Although the Taliban represents a relatively homogeneous movement, it is not immune to factionalism. Signs of widening political, tribal, and regional rifts are already visible within the group, pitting madrassa-trained elite against other clerics, nationalists versus internationalists, traditionalist elements against modernists, and western Pashtuns against the eastern tribes. Such rifts were partially exposed in recent disturbances in Khost, Konar, and Nangrahar. Moreover, the elements that have joined the militia have differing agendas that can become a source of friction. As long as the Taliban faces the opposition forces, these differences might stay under the surface, but the real showdown can come into the open once there is no common enemy.

The first step to a solution of the Afghan imbroglio is to reverse the current process of conflict resolution. It should focus on disarming the warring factions through a comprehensive political settlement rather than forcing peace by way of military dominance. The situation in the country is too complex to be resolved by single-track strategies. A long and devastating war, coupled with landmark geopolitical shifts in the region, has deeply transformed the country and caused fundamental changes in the nature of the war itself.

Given the wide dimension of the war, a solution to the crisis is far beyond the capability of the Afghan factions. A multi-faceted settlement--in my opinion entailing serious involvement by the United States--should address both internal and external aspects of the conflict and turn regional competition for influence in Afghanistan into cooperation for peace and stability for all.

International peace efforts have failed because they have focused on the symptoms of the problem rather than on the roots of the conflict. Instead of working for an inclusive political settlement, they have concentrated on cease-fires and power-sharing among the warring factions which are parts of the problem. During the past eight years, several power-sharing arrangements have been mediated without long-term solutions. The strongest partner in the coalition usually saw its party establishment as the core element of the "state" and its militia as the "national army." This was the case during the Rabbani-Masoud government in Kabul. Of the eight divisions based in Kabul and nearby areas, seven were dominated by Masoud's men and commanded by his cronies. Now that Kabul is under Taliban control, the militia considers its administration the embodiment of the "state" and its militia, which includes thousands of foreign citizens, as the national army. The Taliban has not shown the flexibility or desire to negotiate on its monopoly of leadership.

Any lasting solution in Afghanistan will need to include a verifiable end to foreign intervention, disbanding factional militias, restoration of the state under international supervision, and a "Marshal Plan" of some sort to rebuild the national economy.

NOTES

1. This included 165,000 troops in the Army, 97,000 in the Ministry of Interior, and 57,000 in the Ministry of State Security. See M. A. Garyev, *Maya Posledniya Voyna* (My Last War) (Moscow: 1996), p. 192.
2. It included 1,568 tanks, 828 infantry fighting vehicles, more than 4,880 artillery pieces, 126 combat aircraft and 14 combat helicopters, 12 R-300 (Scud) missile launchers and 10 Luna-M (Frog) missile launchers. See Garyev, pp. 192-93.
3. The National Guard Corps was created after the Soviet withdrawal. It included five well-equipped and highly paid brigades, all based in Kabul.
4. Russian estimates of the mujahideen active fighters in 1991 included nearly 200,000 fighters, 97 tanks, 60 BMPs, 100 APCs, over 5,000 anti-aircraft heavy machine guns, 2,000 recoilless rifles, over 11,000 antitank weapons (RPGs) and 3,500 mortars. See Garyev, annexed map.
5. The United States sent \$5 billion worth of weapons to the mujahideen during 1986-90, while the Soviet Union provided an arsenal worth an estimated \$5.7 billion to Kabul during the same period. See Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), p. 179.
6. Interview with Dr. Raz Mohammad Paktin, Minister of Interior in Najibullah regime, Dushanbe, May 1995.
7. See the report of UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur Felix Ermacora, E/CN4/1995/64, 20 January 1995. Also see Assadullah Walwaleji, *Dar Safahat-e Shamal-e Afghanistan Che Migozasht* (What Was Happening in Northern Afghanistan) (Peshawar: 1999), pp. 22-24.
8. The three were: Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, which fell to the Taliban in March 1994; Hezb-e Wahdat, which was driven out of Kabul in 1995 and from its final base in Bamian in August 1998; and the Uzbek-led Jonbesh-e Mili Islami under Abdul Rashid Dostum and Malik, which was defeated in August 1998.
9. The United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIFSA), commonly refereed to as the United Front. It is formed around the forces of Ahmad Shah Masoud and includes the remnants of the Wahdat, Jonbesh Mili Islami, Abdurrab Sayaf forces and elements which were once part of Hezb-e Islami of Golbuddin Hekmatyar. UIFSA identifies itself as the military forces of the "Islamic State of Afghanistan" under ousted President Borhanuddin Rabbani.
10. In his theory of war, Clausewitz identifies three levels of violence in relation to the predominant tendencies which are in it. The "trinity" is composed of: the original violence of its element, i.e. hatred and animosity that "may be looked upon as blind instinct"; the play of probabilities and chance which makes it a free activity of the soul; and the subordinate nature of a political instrument, by which it belongs to reason. The first of these three phases concerns more the people, the second more the general and his army, and the third more the government. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), pp. 121-22.
11. Ahmed Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (November-December 1999), 22-35.
12. Ibid.; Reuters, 28 July 1999; Electronic Telegraph, 22 July 1999; *Asiaweek*, 6 August 1999.
13. UN Security Council Statement, 25 October 1999.
14. See *Asiaweek*, 28 August 1998.
15. Interview with several former Afghan officers who had fought in Afghanistan, Peshawar, January 2000.
16. Ismail Khan and Steve LeVine, "The Rebel Connection," *Newsweek International*, 13 March 2000.

17. Walwaleji, pp. 42-43.
18. The 5th Corps was composed of the 40th Infantry Division in Bagram and the 2d Infantry Division in Jabal-Seraj. Masoud heavily equipped and reinforced the corps, and currently it has three divisions deployed in Bagram-Charikar, Jabal-Seraj, and northern Salang.
19. The corps includes the 54th Infantry Division in Konduz, the 55th Infantry Division in Takhar, and the 20th Infantry Division in Badakhshan.
20. The equipment included most of the tanks of 16th Tank Division (50 tanks) and other armored vehicles, R-300 (Scud) and Luna (Frog-7) surface-to-surface missile batteries, multi-rocket launcher artillery (BM-21 and BM-22), plus two Mi-25 Hind helicopters.
21. Agence France Press, 29 July 1999.
22. The vehicle, nicknamed "Ahu" (the deer), was widely used in mujahideen operations particularly in Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, and Nimroz provinces during the war with Soviet forces.
23. Some estimates put the Taliban losses on the two axes at 2,500 killed.
24. Reuters, 28 July 1999; Associated Press, 29 July 1999; AFP; BBC News, 29-30 July 1999; Reuters, 6 August 1999.
25. Such as Chinese 107mm MBRL (BM-12) and SBRL (BM-1), Egyptian Saqar-20 and Saqar-30 SSM, ZGU-1 and DShK heavy machine guns, 82mm mortars, Orlikan anti-aircraft gun, antitank TOW and recoilless rifles, and RPG-7, Stinger, and Blowpipe shoulder air defense missiles, etc.
26. Including S-300 (Scud) and Luna-M (Frog-7) surface-to-surface missiles; Dvina (SAM-2) and Pechura (SAM-3); Grad (BM-21) and (BM-22) MBRL; T-34, T-54, T-55, and T-62 tanks; BMP-1 and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles; 76mm, 100mm, 122mm, and 152mm artillery pieces, etc.
27. Each of the six blocks of rocket launchers takes 32 rockets. The rocket fire impact area covers 500 square meters. Interview with a former general of the United Front, Peshawar, February 2000.
28. Mig-21, Su-7, Su-20, Su-22, and Il-39 aircraft.
29. An-12, An-26, An-32, and Yak-40 aircraft.
30. Mi-8, Mi-17, and Mi-24 helicopters.
31. Interview with a Taliban air force officer, Washington, April 2000.
32. Almost half the combat planes are Su-20 and Su-22. Both are export models of the Russian-built Su-17 fighter-bomber. The other half include Mig-21 interceptors and ground attack fighters. The Taliban also converted a few Il-39 trainer aircraft to bombers.
33. Interview with a Taliban air force officer, Washington, April 2000, and interviews with several Afghan officers in Peshawar, February-March, 2000.
34. Interview with Lieutenant General Mohammad Taher, former Inspector General of the Armed Forces of the "Islamic State of Afghanistan," Peshawar, February 2000.
35. AFP, 28 July 1999.
36. Russia's Secretary of the National Security Council, Sergey Ivanov, announced on 8 April 2000 that his country intends to continue its support of the Rabbani-Masoud faction, which Russia recognizes as the Afghan government. Islamic Republic of Iran's News Agency (IRNA), 8 April 2000.

Ali Ahmad Jalali is the chief of the Farsi Service of the Voice of America, in Washington, D.C. He is a former colonel in the Afghan army and served as a top military planner with the Afghan resistance following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He attended higher command and staff colleges in Afghanistan, the United States, Britain, and Russia, and he has lectured widely. Mr. Jalali is the author of several books, including a three-volume military history of Afghanistan. His most recent book, *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998), coauthored with Lester Grau, is an analytical review of the mujahideen war with the Soviet forces in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. As with all *Parameters* articles, the views expressed here are the author's and not necessarily those of the Voice of America, the Department of the Army, or any agency of the US government.

Reviewed 12 February 2001. Please send comments or corrections to carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil