

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

---

Volume 35  
Number 3 *Parameters Autumn 2005*

Article 11

---

8-1-2005

## Afghanistan Four Years On: An Assessment

Sean M. Maloney

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Maloney, Sean M.. "Afghanistan Four Years On: An Assessment." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 35, 3 (2005). <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol35/iss3/11>

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 Four Years On: An Assessment

SEAN M. MALONEY

© 2005 Sean M. Maloney

“The transformation of a traditional society could only be achieved extremely slowly, and certainly not by wrecking its existing structure and relationships. Even in the Soviet Union there had been the ‘great mistakes’ of the 1920s and 1930s. As a Soviet official in Moscow was also reported as saying [in 1981], ‘If there is one country in the world where we would not like to try scientific socialism at this point in time, it is Afghanistan.’”

— Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan* (2001)

In Spring 2004, *Parameters* published “Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?” which explored the situation in Afghanistan in early 2003, or a little over one year after the Taliban regime was removed from power. The tone of the piece was guardedly pessimistic and in effect reminded readers that though there had been progress, the possibility remained that overenthusiastic and emotional responses by the international community in the follow-on phase of the campaign could scuttle that success. That article also laid out a number of challenges that would have to be addressed to avoid what the critics increasingly referred to as “another Vietnam.”

In 2005, the situation in Afghanistan has progressed to the point where guarded optimism is justified. Unfortunately, the perception of the situation on the ground has become distorted through the prism of American partisan politics, particularly during the run-up to the 2004 election. The focus of this rhetoric was and remains issues related to narcotics production and a number of spin-off arguments related to it. Afghanistan is apparently no longer looked at as “another Vietnam”; now it is perhaps “another Colombia.”<sup>1</sup>

Though the narcotics issue is critical to the future of Afghanistan, public discussion of it in American fora has overridden acknowledgment of

other areas of success, areas which are in fact more important than any single issue and which will, in the long run, have a positive effect on counternarcotics operations in the region anyway. This article examines how the situation in Afghanistan has dramatically changed since 2003, and why. It will also suggest that there are new areas for concern which policymakers may wish to focus on beyond the currently salient narcotics problem.

### ***Where Did We Stand in 2003?***

Combined Forces Command Afghanistan or “CFC Alpha” (CFC-A) is the American-led Coalition headquarters for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Established in late 2003 to rationalize a convoluted command structure, CFC-A is now the focal point of the Coalition military effort. The situation in-country in July 2003, according to CFC-A, was characterized by these elements: a Coalition force with a counterterrorist focus; an enemy which had sanctuary in Afghanistan conducting operations against Coalition forces; a neutral population; an Afghan National Army that was in training; only four Provincial Reconstruction Teams; and minimal support from Pakistan. There was no constitution, no political process, and minimal sovereignty was exercised by Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of the overly simplified portrayal of the enemy forces, these points were generally accurate,<sup>3</sup> but they require some elaboration. In 2003, the primary problem was the embryonic nature of the interim and transitional Afghan governments and the possibility that fragile structure could be destabilized and toppled before it could get to work. Connected to this was the questionable legitimacy of the government’s leader, President Hamid Karzai. On the ground, Karzai was variously portrayed as a pawn of the United States or in the pocket of southern anti-Taliban fighters of Pashtun ethnicity, or implicitly controlled by the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance exerted explicit control over Kabul and the associated political processes by dint of its 27,000-man military contingent based in the city and its environs. There was no countervailing federal governmental coercive power in Kabul, let alone throughout the rest of the country. This power was in the hands of local leaders, anti-Taliban chieftains which the media pejoratively labeled “warlords.” Remnants of the Taliban, supported by the remnants of al Qaeda’s military forces,

---

Dr. Sean M. Maloney served in Germany as the historian for 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade, the Canadian Army’s Cold War contribution to NATO. The author of several works, including the forthcoming *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian Visits Afghanistan* (Potomac Books), Dr. Maloney has extensive field research experience in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. He currently teaches in the Royal Military College War Studies Programme.

---

were by this time in the process of transitioning from a conventional guerilla war to a low-level terrorist campaign, and the possibility of a return to the destructive post-Soviet era infighting between the chieftains existed in numerous locations, including Kabul. The Afghan population outside of the Pashtun areas was, in the main, not openly hostile toward the international forces, but it generally was not overtly supportive either except in certain cases.<sup>4</sup>

International forces in Afghanistan at that time included the 18,000 members of the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the 4,500-strong European-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). OEF was evolving into a mature counterinsurgency force, operating mostly in the southeast and eastern parts of Afghanistan, while ISAF was confined to Kabul. ISAF had a muddled mandate and, without the resources to carry it out, functioned as a nearly symbolic European presence in Kabul, a green-uniformed island in a tan-uniformed sea. A pilot program intended to coordinate OEF efforts with those of the provincial chieftains and the embryonic Afghan National Army, called the Joint Regional Teams, was established in Gardez by mid 2003 (in time, the Joint Regional Teams were renamed Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs).

The Afghan National Army program was, at the time, convoluted, and little progress had been made because of the inability of ISAF to support the task effectively and the reticence of OEF to take it over completely pending clarification of the responsibilities of both forces vis-à-vis the emerging transitional government. Infrastructure damage after 25 years of war was another impediment to extending federal government control over the provinces. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were intimidated in insurgency areas, which had a spill-over effect in secured areas: the insurgents targeted NGOs in the southeast knowing that the organizations would pull out of the whole country if enough casualties were taken by aid workers. OEF operations against the insurgents were complicated by the sensitive matter of Pakistani territorial sovereignty and the volatile political scene in that country.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, the Afghan transitional government had questionable legitimacy among the people (though not necessarily on the international scene), it was subject to coercion by better-armed entities, and it was dependent on international forces in every way. Without security, there can be no reconstruction, and with no reconstruction there would be no nation-building, thus leaving Afghanistan susceptible to continued instability and penetration by international terrorism. On the plus side, the insurgency was forced by OEF operations to alter its methodology, which in turn made insurgent operations less effective. There were clear indicators that the Afghan population did not and would not support the continuation of Taliban influence (and consequently al Qaeda) in the country.

### *The Situation in 2004-05*

There are, essentially, three enemy forces operating against the Afghan government and its Coalition partners. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) organization, still seeking to influence the brokerage of power in Kabul, operates from areas east of the city and still mounts usually ineffective attacks on ISAF, OEF, and Afghan National Army forces in the capital. Taliban military formations have been completely reduced by OEF operating methods and appear to have shifted from guerilla warfare to pinprick terrorist attacks, usually in ethnically Pashtun areas in the southeast. Al Qaeda provides training and equipment to both HIG and the Taliban. Additionally, al Qaeda mounts its own limited raids on Coalition forces located on the border with Pakistan. These raids appear to employ the well-equipped remnants of al Qaeda's "conventional" formations which worked with the Taliban prior to 2001. Unlike HIG and al Qaeda, the Taliban are still trying to create a parallel government to garner popular support in Pashtun areas with the aim of retaking the country. At this point, the synergy of HIG, the Taliban, and al Qaeda has been unable to significantly influence the direction that the Afghan people are taking under the Karzai government.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of Karzai's election in this milieu cannot be underestimated. It is a truism that government legitimacy and the support of the population are absolutely critical in the fight against guerilla and terrorist organizations. By most indications, this has been achieved for the time being in Afghanistan. The elections were fair and carefully monitored: the voter turnout, more than 80 percent, should put the citizens of the United States and Canada to shame with regard to their respective voter turnouts during elections in 2004. Attempts by enemy forces to use terrorism to interfere with the Afghan election process were crushed before they could bear fruit, particularly in Kabul, where ISAF and OEF forces operated together with Afghan police and military forces in a coordinated fashion.<sup>7</sup>

The success in containing the insurgency and suppressing other elements posing challenges to the Afghan reconstruction effort is attributable to several "moving parts," all of which are interdependent. First, the American-led Coalition, OEF, is the repository of mobile striking power in Afghanistan. In the past, OEF special operations forces used direct action against high-value targets and worked closely with various chieftains' militia forces, while airmobile light infantry was brought in to hit concentrations of enemy fighters and sweep support areas. Most OEF operations were conducted in the eastern part of the country. This approach has, in some ways, changed. A prototype regional team concept, established in 2003, deployed a small coordination cell to Gardez to assist with information collection, limited civic action, and NGO coordination in

conjunction with the local militia force commanders. These regional teams were originally in support of the sweep and raid operations conducted by the airmobile and special operations forces, and were renamed Joint Regional Teams. Each was expanded in numbers and capability to encompass broader reconstruction coordination and security tasks, and they were then again renamed as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). By late 2004, the emphasis on mobile sweep and raid operations in the east shifted to supporting the 18 PRTs, which were located in every significant populated area in the country. In addition, each concentration of PRTs required a Forward Support Base with helicopters, medical resources, and reaction forces. The effects of establishing a PRT and Forward Support Base network throughout Afghanistan, however rudimentary in the early days, provided a firm basis to extend Afghan government influence once the nature of that influence could be determined.<sup>8</sup>

The main cog here was the development and expansion of the Afghan National Army (ANA), the second “moving part.” By late 2003, the ANA support process from the international community had become much more rational. ISAF (pre-2003) had dropped the ball in the training scheme and it was picked up by OEF, but the direction taken in the design of the Afghan National Army was initially haphazard and impeded by the chieftains in Kabul and their militia forces. In time, high-quality instruction provided by American, Canadian, and British Embedded Training Teams established a significant confidence level in the fledgling Afghan Ministry of Defence and, most important, in its fighting units. The Afghan National Army expanded from three experimental “kandaks” (battalion-equivalents) toward a goal of 26. With an expanded ANA, the Afghan government has forged a power-projection tool to take advantage of the expanded Coalition presence throughout the country. ANA garrisons now exist in most urban areas. The development of the ANA, however, is still very much a work in progress.<sup>9</sup>

The third “moving part” was the ISAF in Kabul. ISAF in its pre-NATO configuration had a vague but potentially competing mandate with OEF and possessed virtually no resources or firepower to provide significant influence in the city of Kabul, its designated area of operations.<sup>10</sup> The NATO summit in Istanbul in 2003 and the acceptance by NATO of ISAF command dramatically altered this state of affairs.<sup>11</sup> Under Canadian influence, the vague ISAF mandate evolved to a statement specifically supporting the interim government and establishing security in Kabul. This depended on an improved ANA capability to offset the military capabilities of at least two heavily armed chieftains who controlled the city and its security forces, which in turn had a countervailing influence on the Afghan political process. ISAF’s area of operations was expanded to encompass the entire province of Kabul, not just the city, and coordination between ISAF and OEF was improved, particularly in the special

operations realm. ISAF was able to keep an eye on potential problem factions, assist in the hunt for HIG and al Qaeda-trained infiltrations, and facilitate a wide variety of local projects which synergistically assisted the security efforts by building trust with the population.<sup>12</sup>

Yet another “moving part” is the institution-building and coordination efforts between OEF, ISAF, the Afghan Ministry of Defence, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), and police forces in Kabul. Proceeding simultaneously with the OEF effort in the field, ISAF in Kabul, and the ANA training activities, experienced Afghan military and security leaders were asked to provide their leadership to the central government. This was no easy task, as some had fought each other in previous years. Consensus-building, however, has had some success, and the mentoring programs provided by private military corporations like MPRI have professionalized in some respects the bureaucratic mechanisms needed to handle national army and security forces and have assisted in their coordination with OEF and ISAF. All of this had to be done without generating the perception that the result was being imposed from the outside by foreign entities.

OEF takes on the organized insurgents, while ISAF assists with security of the capital. PRT expansion provides bases for the extension of central government power into the outlying areas. These ambitious programs did not proceed without challenges. Clearly, the primary antagonists, all supported by al Qaeda, continued in their efforts to disrupt and derail in a broad sense the direction being taken by the Karzai government. The real nub, however, are the chieftains and their militia forces. How, exactly, can a central government be established and its power expanded without a return to the bad old days of 1993-1996? Can a civil war be prevented?

A simplistic analysis would have us believe that the main encumbrances to stability and peace in Afghanistan are “the drug-fueled warlords” and that there aren’t enough American troops on the ground in Afghanistan to confront them because of operations in Iraq.<sup>13</sup> Such politically motivated critiques ignore the historical realities of Afghanistan, however, specifically that a large infusion of outside forces would place us in the same position that the Soviets found themselves in during the 1980s. They also are a slap in the face to those Afghan commanders and soldiers loyal to the Afghan government who have engaged in combat against those seeking to topple it. A large infusion of Western soldiery is not necessary; indeed, less is more, when handled adeptly. Having limited resources demands that subtlety and thought be employed rather than brute force. Brute-force solutions will not work in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup>

The necessary subtlety is currently employed through the “chess game,” a coordinated effort using a variety of tools to incrementally lessen the power that regional chieftains have and supplant it with central government in-

---

*“There are grounds for optimism vis-à-vis  
the future of Afghanistan.”*

---

fluence while at the same time avoiding fighting.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, these are influence tools of differing coerciveness. The “chess game” would be impossible without the high-end coercive resources that OEF and ISAF bring to bear, but that factor is in the background and builds on the psychology of OEF’s four-year firepower demonstration against the Taliban, plus the overall goodwill engendered by the special operations forces, civil affairs teams in the provinces, and ISAF operations in Kabul. Other mechanisms wielded in the “chess game” include the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program; the Heavy Weapons Cantonment (HWC) program; “soft entry” deployments of the Afghan National Army; the proliferation of a variety of police forces to a region; and the “lateral promotion” of recalcitrant militia leaders.

Broadly speaking, the DDR program is used to demobilize personnel, while HWC cantons heavy weapons from machine guns to tanks and artillery. They are separately funded programs with different lines of control.<sup>16</sup> DDR is now used as a verb: to “DDR” a militia formation is to incrementally demobilize it and canton the weapons. DDR may be employed bluntly as a threat, while at the same time DDR is an ongoing process throughout the country.

On the police front, militia forces under chieftain command previously provided security of all types in an unsystematic fashion. Now, border police, highway patrol police, and municipal police, all trained in Kabul, are incrementally introduced to professionalize and systematize the application of law at the local level. To a certain extent, law and order remains relative, but the concept behind an incremental transfer of power applies. The method of establishing a small Afghan National Army garrison, building it up slowly, and having its personnel develop relationships with militia forces provides yet another mechanism for progress.<sup>17</sup>

Militia forces are leadership-dependent. The main issue in this regard is one of “face.” The outright removal of an uncooperative chieftain is too abrupt and, in any event, if he no longer has a stake in the reconstruction process because he is out of power, than why should he and his remaining followers not take to the hills? Instead, chieftains have been brought into the central government in all manner of portfolios and assigned staffs to mentor them in governance. Second-tier militia leaders are promoted to become police commanders—but in another province, with other forces funded by



Kabul. Rather than taking a moralistic Western stance and labeling them all drug-dealers and war criminals and then demanding Nuremberg-like trials, it has proven to be far better to assume everybody is “dirty” after 25 years of war and to start anew. Yes, some militia leaders will remain dirty, and mechanisms will have to be found to deal with that. However, the avoidance of civil war and a resurgence of Taliban influence is the objective, not show trials using Western laws or our version of international law.

It is critical to emphasize that this “chess game” is not something imposed from the outside: it is a coordinated effort between the Karzai government and the international entities operating in Afghanistan. Indeed, the United Nations, NATO, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the prolific number of American agencies working there are cooperating in various degrees in this direction and with varying levels of effectiveness. It would be easy to label this a “CIA plot” if it were not so transparent and multifaceted. It is clear to objective observers that President Karzai is not a pawn in the game.<sup>18</sup>

It would be foolish to argue that this “chess game” works perfectly. Indeed, the modeling of third- and fourth-order effects is not up to speed, and there can be unintended consequences when the relationships between certain key personalities are not taken into account.

The situation in Herat in the summer and fall of 2004 was a test case for the “chess game.” Ismail Kahn was a popular but recalcitrant chieftain who had in fact employed substantial revenues generated by cross-border trade with Iran to beautify Herat and its environs, but his militia commanders were not really interested in going along with the central government’s plans for power-sharing. Over time, the militia forces were incrementally “DDR’d” to the point that they were unable to offer serious resistance when Kabul ordered two Afghan National Army battalions into the area. Despite a small firefight, the national army forces were able to convince local militia forces to back off. Factions in Ismail Khan’s forces then attacked each other. Khan was “laterally promoted” to a post in Kabul. The confidence level built up after the Herat affair permitted the Karzai government to conduct a similar action with Fahim Khan’s militia forces in Kabul, which in turn neutralized a significant coercive force in the capital. As a consequence of such effective actions, the fall elections of 2004 were conducted in an atmosphere nearly devoid of Taliban, HIG, or militia coercion.<sup>19</sup>

### ***New Challenges***

The main supporting effort of the “chess game” mechanism will be police and judicial reform. In time, the incremental deployments of central government people to the outer reaches of Afghanistan will have to be backed up with a functioning legal system. Italy is in charge of assisting the Afghan

government in this area. Though Italy brings to bear substantial experience in combating organized crime, the reform process has been slow and cultural differences are significant. The same can be said of police training. Germany is the lead nation in this regard, and for reasons most likely related to the Afghan budget, progress is slower than anticipated. At some point, it will no longer be desirable for the Afghan government and Coalition entities to continue to use military force to police the country.

This takes us to the narcotics problem. The assumption among some international entities operating in support of the Afghan government in 2004 suggests that the removal of chieftains engaged in narcotics cultivation and trafficking via the “chess game” may have two effects. It may result, in the worst case, in better networking under the guise of legitimate government activity. Second, the removal of the prominent leadership will devolve power to second-, third-, and even fourth-tier local personnel engaged in narcotics production, trafficking, and protection. By no means are all of these personnel former militia force personnel, which complicates attempts to identify and deal with them. Though this works to the advantage of the Afghan government in that the traffickers’ ability to organize a “narco-insurgency” is severely reduced, the lack of police and judicial capacity means that Kabul cannot yet target these dispersed, low-level groups. Similarly, an anti-corruption force will have to be formed to police the chieftains and others in the government to ensure that they remain uninvolved in narcotics production and distribution. In effect, Afghanistan will become like every other nation trying to take on organized crime (and not a Colombia-like narco-insurgency), but only if the right tools are forged and brought to bear.

Two other extremely important aspects of extending government influence to the provinces are sometimes overlooked in military assessments. These are the lack of roads and other infrastructure, coupled with the extremely high illiteracy rate. How does one provide anti-narcotics information to a nearly illiterate population? How does one deploy police and a legal system when the roads do not facilitate vehicular traffic? The deployment of PRTs, be they NATO or OEF, will assist in collecting information as much as they will assist in the local and provincial coordination effort, but how will Afghanistan “balance its books” in the reconstruction effort? And what priorities will be assigned? Politically motivated criticism in the Western media can interfere with the assessment and establishment of priorities. Demands by Western politicians and their mouthpieces for a huge and expensive counternarcotics force could divert the Afghan leadership’s attention from what they rightly view as their own established reconstruction priorities.

The seemingly constant demand by critics that more and more international troops need to be deployed to Afghanistan was addressed earlier.

However, the PRT expansion program, whereby NATO members have in principle agreed to accept lead-nation status for several former American OEF-run PRTs, has stalled out because of a lack of contributors.<sup>20</sup> The PRTs and their associated Forward Support Bases are supposed to be manned by approximately 5,000 personnel (100 per PRT, and 400 to 500 per FSB), yet NATO member nations can't seem to come up with the additional personnel to meet this requirement. The reason is principally attributable to the stultifying euro-bureaucracy, but there also are serious problems in how ISAF is commanded as it expands to the provinces.

In 2004, the Eurocorps took command of ISAF, while the Franco-German Brigade was placed in command of ISAF's Kabul Multinational Brigade. The relationship between the two French-led or dominated NATO headquarters with Combined Forces Command Afghanistan and certain American, British, and Canadian nations contributing forces to ISAF can be described in polite terms only as dysfunctional. The infighting, kept to a minimum under Canadian command last year but now detrimental to ISAF's effectiveness, has reached the point where a new command concept should be considered. Steps were taken to conceptualize a NATO "Afghanistan Force" that would command both CFC-A and ISAF, but the lasting problem over the international command of American forces will prevent significant and effective movement in this direction for the time being.<sup>21</sup> As usual, the demand by the French to command the planned NATO force grates on the sensitivities of other NATO members. The only entities to benefit from these fractures are France and al Qaeda.

An Afghanistan Force option was rejected by NATO in spring 2005. As it stands, the phased replacement of OEF PRTs with NATO PRTs will result in the transfer of some American-led PRTs to NATO command. Special operations forces engaged in the hunt for high-value targets will continue to operate in the region. The command relationship between those forces and the new, expanded ISAF is currently under discussion. In effect, ISAF will absorb elements of OEF, not replace them. SHAPE planners are, as of summer 2005, developing a campaign plan for the entire country. The problem of who will conduct the "robust" portions of that plan and what national restrictions will be placed on those forces will remain the main issues.

Another emerging challenge is the demands by international legal personalities for Balkans-style war crimes trials in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> These demands appear to be rooted in simplistic notions that one size fits all when it comes to international law (other motives, like personal ambition and job security, cannot be ruled out). Afghanistan is not Bosnia, nor is it Kosovo. The Balkan wars were comparatively short in duration and had identifiable protagonists who could be singled out as instigators of mass crimes against humanity. Afghanistan, on the other hand, has had 25 years of war. The existing

polity includes people who fought on both sides during the Soviet era but against the Taliban in more recent years. Milosevic-style indictments will not work in Afghanistan, where almost everybody may be guilty of violating some Western-based law. Indeed, if we are to have war crimes trials for Afghanistan, one should first call to the dock Soviet military and political leaders for acts of genocide, followed by every Soviet soldier who fought there, before moving on to any current Afghan leader or American soldier. A South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be the better tool. Afghanistan needs reconciliation, not a reprise of Nuremberg.

A disturbing trend is the belief among some in OEF that the Coalition is barely breaking even in the information war. Recent events in Jalalabad, where 15 people were killed during rioting over the alleged mistreatment of the Koran at Camp Delta in Cuba, coupled with the persistent ongoing hunt for another Abu Ghraib by media outlets, will require deft handling. We can assume the Jalalabad riots were externally stimulated, but if it can happen in Jalalabad, it could happen elsewhere. The best response is an effective and integrated Afghan response, not the imposition of OEF or ISAF troops to put down these information-warfare events. The Coalition, working closely with Afghan authorities, must become better at countering the more salacious allegations by media sources rather than remaining mute in an effort to ride them out.

Similarly, concerns within the intelligence community of the “migration” of tactics used in Iraq to Afghanistan are very real: in May 2005, a mosque in Kandahar was attacked with a significant death toll. In July, captured Afghan police were beheaded by insurgents, while a car bomb was used against the PRT in Kandahar. This new emphasis on mass civilian targets and gruesome terrorism against police indicate that while there has been success in countering the insurgency, there are still those who seek political change through violence. The best response, however, is an Afghan response.

### ***Conclusion***

There are grounds for optimism vis-à-vis the future of Afghanistan. As with any complex mechanism, however, the finer components may be damaged with wear and tear, not all the gears will mesh when we want them to, and the casing will be dropped from a great height time and again. There is an argument to be made in the age of information operations that the simplistic metrics applied by the media and those seeking to make political fodder out of Afghanistan will always leave us with a perception that the country is on the brink of failure. The lack of historical context to these arguments, the ignorance of the effects of the high level of damage caused by 25 years of war, an underestimation of what the Afghan people are capable of, and the ruthless

hunt for apparent failure will obscure the realities and complexities of reconstruction in this vast and diverse country.

Operation Enduring Freedom and the International Security Assistance Force continue to be critical instruments in buying the Afghan government time for security sector reform. NATO members, however, must live up to the high expectations they established in Istanbul.

Thus far, the path to reconstruction, though rocky, has been navigable, but not every hairpin turn can be anticipated, and there are still bandits on the road. The country we are dealing with is not Vietnam, not Colombia, nor is it Bosnia. It is Afghanistan, and it needs to be seen in its own light.

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, T. Christian Miller, "Post-Invasion Chaos Blamed for Drug Surge," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 2004; Robert Novak, "Lost in Afghanistan," 31 May 2004, <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/robertnovak/rn20040531.shtml>; Seymour Hersh, "The Other War," *The New Yorker*, 12 April 2004, [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040412fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040412fa_fact); JohnKerry.com, "Afghanistan," [http://www.johnkerry.com/issues/national\\_security/asia.html](http://www.johnkerry.com/issues/national_security/asia.html); Barnett R. Rubin, "Road to Ruin: Afghanistan's Booming Opium Industry," Center for American Progress, 7 October 2004.

2. Combined Forces Command Afghanistan briefing to the author, Kabul, Afghanistan, 1 December 2004. Hereinafter "CFC-A briefing."

3. The OEF operations conducted in 2003 were not strictly counterterrorist in nature. The enemy employed a variety of structures and methods which included terrorism, and OEF forces responded with a full range of synchronized activities to go after al Qaeda international terrorist remnants, al Qaeda light infantry formation remnants, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's organization, and Taliban insurgents who used terrorism, ambushes, and rocket attacks. From 2003 to 2005, enemy forces have operated from both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

4. These were the author's observations on a research visit to Afghanistan in 2003.

5. OEF briefing to the author, 5 March 2003, Bagram, Afghanistan.

6. CFC-A briefing.

7. Confidential interviews.

8. CFC-A briefing.

9. Interview with General Zahir Azemi, Kabul, Afghanistan, 9 December 2004; Embedded Training Team briefing to the author, Kabul, Afghanistan, 12 December 2004.

10. "The International Security Assistance Force: The Origins," *Canadian Military Journal*, 4 (Summer 2003).

11. NATO, "Istanbul Summit Communiqué, 28 June 2004, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2004/p04-096e.htm>; NATO, "NATO Update: NATO Expands Presence in Afghanistan," 29 June 2004, <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2004/06-June/e0629a.htm>.

12. ISAF Headquarters briefing to the author, Kabul, Afghanistan, 28 November 2004. Hereinafter "ISAF HQ briefing."

13. One example among many is Hersh, "The Other War," and the sort of "Monday morning quarterbacking" that Richard Clarke engages in.

14. Which was, of course, one of the lessons of Vietnam. It is truly bizarre to see those critical of today's American effort in Afghanistan demand that more troops and more force be used in Afghanistan when some are the same ones who criticized the high levels of American force used in Vietnam.

15. My assessment of the "chess game" is based on personal observations and a wide variety of interviews conducted while on a research visit to Afghanistan in 2004.

16. ISAF HQ briefing.

17. I observed this process in Konduz province courtesy of the German ISAF contingent during November-December 2004.

18. Confidential interviews with personnel with access to the ambassadorial level of activity in Kabul.

19. Azemi interview; confidential interviews.

20. ISAF HQ briefing.

21. CFC-A briefing; confidential interviews.

22. BBC News, "Afghan Report Demands War Justice," 29 January 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4218775.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4218775.stm).