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# Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum

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On the sixth anniversary of the US-led military invasion, Afghanistan is faced with its worst crisis since the ouster of the Taliban in 2001. There are increasing concerns, both internationally and domestically, that Afghanistan faces the distinct possibility of sliding back into instability and chaos. The country is challenged by a revitalized Taliban-led insurgency, record rise in drug production, deterioration of the rule of law, and weakening national government in the regions outside the major cities.

These troubles come amidst a changing political and military environment in and around Afghanistan compounding effective responses to the emerging challenges. Domestically, the political consensus of 2001 has been lost to disruptive factionalism. Reemerging strongmen and political opportunists linked to criminal networks have forced the weak central government into political compromises and tactical tradeoffs. The regional actors who collectively supported the post-Taliban political transition now have diverging views. Political changes in the region have strongly influenced the attitudes of a number of the regional actors. Internationally, the coalition of nations involved in Afghanistan is divided and does not share a unified vision. Nor have the members of the coalition states provided the same level of political and military commitment.

In spite of these troubling developments, there is still hope that the decline can be reversed with a new strategic approach. The significant institutional, social, and economic achievements made during the past six years provide a solid foundation for building a modern democratic Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan overwhelmingly support the transition to democracy. They are tired of war and strongly determined to achieve peace. They do not see the Taliban or other nonstate powers as alternatives to the current political

system. The renewed international focus on Afghanistan and pledges of increased investment for security and reconstruction are reassuring. The major challenge, however, still remains how to regain the original momentum and to once again win the trust of the people.

Given the compounded political and security environments, stability cannot be achieved through traditional means. Nor will any minor, inconsequential changes or modifications salvage the situation. Major political and strategic shifts at the national and international levels are required to secure Afghanistan's future. A strategy needs to be formulated by a consensus of domestic and international actors, who agree upon effective use of ways and means to achieve peace and stability. Implementation will require a "capacity surge," both nationally and internationally. This article examines the challenges facing Afghanistan and recommends ways to achieve stability through institutional, conceptual, and procedural change.

### ***Sources of Instability and Implications***

The drivers of instability include insurgency, chronic weakness of the Afghan government and state institutions, exploding drug production, and a weak economy. Uncoordinated military operations by international forces and shifting political dynamics in the region are additional contributing factors. These challenges have serious implications for stabilization efforts and state-building in Afghanistan.

Frustrated by increasing insecurity and the ineffectiveness of security forces, the government tends to make tactical deals with corrupt nonstate power brokers and special-interest groups, parties who benefit from instability. These relationships evolve into another source for popular disenchantment. The problem will only intensify as the nation gets closer to presidential elections in 2009. Political deals, posturing, and compromises linked to the election could upset a number of long-term strategic priorities. Within the government, an ongoing destructive blame-game, with its attendant accusations and rhetoric populism, job insecurity, and mutual fear, continues to impair morale and effectiveness. This situation breeds suspicion within the ruling elite and generates mistrust between

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the executive and legislative branches. The lack of trust has also tainted relations between the Afghan government and its foreign partners.

The perception of impending failure drives domestic interest groups and neighboring nations to hedge their bets. Traditionally, nonstate power networks thrive as the central government loses effectiveness. There are often signs of revival and rearming of subnational networks by former militia commanders and local power holders.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, latent and potential spoilers (nonstate power brokers and government officials) try to reach out to insurgent elements and their foreign supporters in an effort to negotiate individual deals. Despite a significant growth of the economy and sociopolitical developments, increased insecurity and poor governance have blunted the public's enthusiasm, even in relatively stable areas. As a result, people are losing confidence in the government and hope for a peaceful future.

Within the region, doubts about the future of Afghanistan have driven neighboring countries to once again look for proxies and spheres of political influence. This is particularly noticeable in the attitudes of the governments of Iran and Pakistan. The initial international coalition formed to stabilize Afghanistan (including Iran, Russia, and Central Asian countries) has been riven by widening cracks, which impede regional cooperation in efforts countering terrorism and insurgency. At the August 2007 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested that the SCO should host an international conference on Afghanistan to boost stability in the country and the region.<sup>2</sup> Within the international community, the involvement of additional actors and expanding resources has further complicated coordination. An uneven level of commitment among donor nations and the accompanying operational constraints inhibit strategic coordination required to successfully counter the insurgency and form state institutions.

In order for Afghanistan and its international partners to reverse these negative trends, a thorough and realistic assessment of the situation needs to be conducted along with the creation of a strategic action plan addressing immediate and long-term security challenges. Compared to one year ago, there has been an acknowledged shift toward security as the most important thing Afghans desire to improve their quality of life.<sup>3</sup> Security cannot be achieved, however, without an integrated effort to build effective governance, fight the illicit drug trade, and defeat the insurgency.

### ***Building Effective Government***

Afghanistan has made major strides in its political transition to democracy and in rebuilding state institutions. The government's legitimacy has been supported by the political participation of all the domestic stakeholders in adopting the constitution and holding fair presidential and legisla-

tive elections. Yet the inability of the government to deliver services and exert influence throughout the country has eroded its institutional legitimacy.

The issue of legitimacy has figured prominently in the country's development during the past three turbulent decades. Since 1978 the unsuccessful struggle by successive governments to establish legitimacy became a major factor in destabilizing the state. The bloody Communist coup of 1978 sparked a crisis that haunted the country's political infrastructure for decades. None of the ruling powers that succeeded the old regime managed to gain long-term legitimacy. All, including the Communists (1978-92), Mujahedin (1992-96), and Taliban (1996-2001) based their political authority on ideology enforced by military power—a process alien to mainstream Afghan values. The regimes' efforts were challenged by religious and cultural resistance and hampered by factional divides, structural deficiency, economic failure, and foreign interference.

None of these ideologies were able to escape the factional splits that eroded its legitimacy. Intraparty friction and ideological fragmentation were particularly pronounced at the subnational level, where ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian differences undermined ideological solidarity. Successive governments failed to create the viable political, social, and economic institutions needed to solidify power. In their zeal to promote political agendas through ideology, leaders failed to set concrete objectives or to establish the concomitant programs required. These governments used ideological rhetoric to mobilize supporters and undermine opponents. This lack of structural legitimacy contributed directly to the failures of the ideological approach. Viewed in a broader context, this was what Max Weber labeled as “rational-legal authority,” only obtainable when rules, supported by institutions to enforce them, underpin popular acceptance of government.<sup>4</sup>

The structural legitimacy of the current Afghan government suffers from a lack of capacity, particularly at the subnational level, where the vacuum is filled by insurgents, militia commanders, combined with local criminal gangs, all of whom undermine human security, local governance, democratic values, and the delivery of basic services.<sup>5</sup> The destabilizing effects of rapidly expanding insurgencies in the north, northeast, and west will only amplify this cascading process by providing a conducive environment for crime.<sup>6</sup> All of these factors, coupled with the insurgency-related violence in the south and southeast and the inability of security forces to counter local criminals and drug lords, has led to a tremendous loss of public confidence.<sup>7</sup>

Although a series of new state-building projects opted for a “top-down” approach, the real political and military influence in the country remained a “bottom-up” trend. As the political process continued, the failure to build the institutional power of the central government perpetuated the influence of regional factions. This situation could once again result in a fragmen-

tation of power, similar to that which dominated the political scene during the civil war. As the United Nations Secretary-General recently warned the Security Council, security, institution-building, and development gains made since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban might “stall or even be reversed.”<sup>8</sup>

Building effective governance at the provincial and district levels is the key to legitimacy and stabilization. Currently, subnational institutions mandated by the constitution are only partially established. The introduction of district, village, and municipal councils has been delayed indefinitely. Elected provincial councils are in place but are fraught with confusion regarding their roles and responsibility. The resulting institutional vacuum inhibits the democratic process. The situation further complicates the coordination of sustained services to the local populace. Even the security-driven projects run by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)<sup>9</sup> and other groups sometimes conflict with the objectives of government institutions and processes, undermining their effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

According to a recent World Bank report, *Service Delivery and Governance at the Sub-National Level*, the key constraints to strengthening subnational systems in Afghanistan are, first and foremost, the absence of a clear policy framework regarding a desired institutional structure and a strategy to implement it.<sup>11</sup> Highly centralized ministries are responsible for delivery of most of the key services in the country. The report is extremely critical of the fact that national ministries tend to be overcentralized, with offices in Kabul retaining functions that could be performed much more efficiently at lower levels of government. While the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy provides for the emergence of a representative and effective system of governance, detailed plans as to how best to achieve these goals are not clear. There are three major issues that need to be addressed before an effective government can be established at the subnational level:

- The role of each level of government in the delivery of services.
- The level of capacity required for planning.
- The relationship between elected and appointed government

bodies.<sup>12</sup>

Removal of existing perceptual and managerial divides between Kabul and the outlying regions is essential for defragmenting the current administration. The key to obtaining this objective is bringing about a balance between the creation of a strong and effective central government and the assurance of a degree of decentralization in an effort to secure some semblance of equal distribution and participation.

From the vantage point of the international community, the upsurge of violence in the spring of 2006 caught many by surprise. The “Afghanistan Compact” was focused primarily on social-economic development, and based on the assumption that security had improved.<sup>13</sup> With the deterioration of security in the

south, however, the focus was shifted to military operations at the expense of programs designed to develop and improve governance. Now, it is imperative that a balance be struck between military operations and development projects.

### ***Security and the Rule of Law***

The rule of law is at the heart of any government's legitimacy and a prerequisite for human security. Unfortunately, in the case of Afghanistan, there has been a failure by the international community to place a high priority on reforming the law enforcement and justice sectors; failures with severe consequences. The focus on security demands in such an unstable environment has led to excessive emphasis on security at the expense of the rule of law. This approach subordinates justice to security considerations and turns police into a force primarily used in combating insurgents instead of protecting the populace and supporting law and order. Obviously, in conflict-ridden conditions there is a need to meet security threats head-on; however, such an approach cannot compromise the administration of justice. It is, after all, the rule of law that contributes directly to the security of the nation and its people.

Security capacity in Afghanistan is limited, diverse, and fragmented. The Afghan National Army (ANA), currently about 47,000 strong, has achieved significant progress. But it is seen operationally more as an extension of Coalition forces than a national entity. Despite the vehicles, small arms, and other equipment supplied by the United States in the 2005-07 period, the ANA suffers from a lack of firepower, indigenous air support, and the absence of a self-sustaining budget. The 82,000-strong Afghan National Police is three years behind its development schedule. Despite some improvement in several urban centers, the police lack the capacity to enforce the rule of law. At the same time, the challenge of a growing insurgency is driving the police to the front lines of the counterinsurgency. There have been 1,150 police officers killed in the last 18 months alone, more than double ANA losses.<sup>14</sup> As an International Crisis Group report indicates, "President Karzai's government still lacks the political will to tackle a culture of impunity and to end political interference in the appointment and operations of police."<sup>15</sup>

The decline of the security situation in Afghanistan is often attributed to a lack of capacity required to respond to threats from domestic and external sources. Officials and observers cite the slow development of the Afghan security forces (army and police), poor infrastructure, and inadequate numbers of US and NATO forces as reasons for the violence and instability. While all this is relevant, a much greater factor is the absence of strong and unified leadership. This absence combined with the lack of a shared vision capable of directing the efforts of all the various actors is a formula for failure.

The Afghan national security strategy is only found on paper. The operational procedures of various security elements are dissimilar, their rules of engagement varied, and their capabilities uneven. In the absence of any unifying mechanism, operations by these organizations are not only devoid of synergy, they are often working at cross-purposes. For example, when ANA succeeds in securing a conflict-afflicted area the police lack the capacity to hold it. Similarly, government institutions do not have the ability to establish a workable administration or foster reconstruction in secured areas. Meanwhile, the absence of a strategic or operational focus for the various intelligence agencies, their institutional fragmentation, and poor coordination with other security entities hinders the planning and execution required for successful security operations.

Finally, fighting corruption is a major challenge hindering emergence of Afghanistan as a viable nation-state. According to the annual survey (2007) by the Berlin-based Transparency International, Afghanistan ranks 172 out of 180 countries in the *Corruption Perceptions Index*.<sup>16</sup> In its effort to counter this corruption Afghanistan will ratify the UN Convention Against Corruption and will adopt related legislation by the end of 2007. Part of these actions requires the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to oversee implementation currently scheduled for completion by the end of 2008. There are no simple and quick answers to the myriad of problems. But making the decisions to fight poverty, offer better salaries to law-enforcement officers and civil servants, depoliticize the appointment of law-enforcement officials, and adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward corrupt government officials will all contribute markedly to achieving the nation's long-term, anticorruption goals.

### ***The Drug Problem***

Three major hurdles hamper any counternarcotics campaign in Afghanistan. They include a record production of opium, consolidation of the drug trade into a network of politicians and traffickers, and disagreement over any counterdrug strategy by representatives of the international community. With a 34 percent increase this year, opium production has peaked to 8,200 metric tons.<sup>17</sup> A new geographic trend indicates that opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty, but is more closely linked to greed and the insurgency. The major difference in this year's poppy cultivation has been the growing divide between the north and south, with significant poppy reductions in northern provinces and substantial increases in the south. Seventy percent of the opium was produced in five troubled southern provinces where insurgency has intensified, giving credence to the belief that counterinsurgency missions are also counternarcotic efforts.<sup>18</sup>

The Afghanistan *National Drug Control Strategy* aims to achieve a sustainable decrease in the cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption



of illicit drugs with a goal of complete elimination. Its four priorities are disrupting the trafficking network, providing alternative livelihood for farmers, reducing demand, and building institutions.<sup>19</sup> The strategy is endorsed by contributing nations, but there is a chronic disagreement among some international partners over who to target first: traffickers or farmers. The United States favors spraying poppy fields with pesticides from the air, but the Afghan government has concerns that spraying might estrange poor farmers and drive them into the arms of the Taliban. The United Nations and NATO oppose spraying with NATO refusing to get involved in fighting traffickers or destroying drug labs and markets. Meanwhile, the lack of a decisive campaign by the Afghan government against the traffickers has permitted them to consolidate their trade into networks with significant political backing—a possible prelude to a narco-state. Efforts to disrupt drug networks are stymied by the absence of political will, protection of traffickers by government officials, poor investigative capacity, and corruption within the police and judicial system.

Given the multidimensional nature of opium production in Afghanistan, counternarcotic efforts should be integrated into every aspect of development: security, economic growth, and governance. There are no quick or simple solutions. Attempts to simplify the problem, in order to make it manageable and compatible with the domestic policies of donor countries, seldom lead to sustained progress.

### ***Fighting the Insurgency***

The Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan is waged in a highly volatile sociopolitical environment. What drives people to fight is not merely the ideology, but rather the unstable environment and the influence of existing networks of tribes, clans, criminal networks, and transnational organizations. There are many independent but interlinked actors challenging the Afghan government and its international allies for various reasons. It is quite different from the insurgency of the 1980s, when a multifactional Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation was operationally fragmented, yet all groups fought for a common cause with uncompromising determination.

The new insurgents are an assortment of ideologically motivated Afghan and foreign militants, disillusioned tribal communities, foreign intelligence operatives, drug traffickers, militia commanders, disenchanting and unemployed youth, and self-interested spoilers. The insurgency is more of a political alliance of convenience than an ideological movement. The challenge in dealing with this insurgency is to separate the insurgents from the terrorist-minded militants. This can only be achieved by an integrated strategy of military and civil operations.

Three different models of an insurgency are present in Afghanistan. Numerous disenchanting and aggrieved communities and tribes exercise the traditional-historical model of defying governmental organizations; such movements are normally local, defensive, and nonideological in nature. Their struggle is aimed at reestablishing an equilibrium that has been disrupted on the local level, or to returning to a previous political and social arrangement that had become compromised. The second model pursued by the neo-Taliban (and some other groups including Gulboddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami militants and Jalaluddin Haqani's tribal network) appears as a classic insurgency. It is national and strategic in scope and ideological in nature. It fights in an effort to seize control of the state and introduce an ideological political system. This group has a political identity; it champions a cause and thrives in safe havens. Its tactics include political mobilization, guerrilla warfare, and the use of terrorism. These techniques and strategies are all attributes of a "proto-insurgency."<sup>20</sup> The Taliban have recently unveiled a shadow constitution outlining an alternative government in Afghanistan based on strict interpretation of sharia (Islamic religious law). The constitution of this organization, the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," bans "un-Islamic thought" and ignores human rights that are not compatible with "the teaching of Islam."<sup>21</sup> The third model (adopted by militants such as al Qaeda and its associates) is based on the waging of a transnational, terrorist-centric, and ideological war against the US-backed Afghan government and its international supporters.

Opinion surveys indicate that despite the rise of violence the overwhelming majority of the people view the Taliban negatively and do not favor their return.<sup>22</sup> A year ago, the number of Taliban sympathizers in the south was estimated at only 11 percent.<sup>23</sup> There is a strong inverse correlation between the strength of the government presence and the strength of support for the Taliban.<sup>24</sup> With increased violence, however, the trend is changing and people are losing confidence in the government. The number of undecided Afghans is rising. General David Richards, former commander of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, estimated in mid-February 2007 that only ten percent of the south's population supports the Taliban, 20 percent does not, and the remaining 70 percent will attach themselves to whomever they consider to be the most effective at providing security, income, and better living conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Support for the Taliban tends to increase either out of a desire for security or from a combination of religious views and a nationalist, anti-foreigner sentiment. Moreover, people in the combat zones detest civilian casualties and the tactics used by some of the international forces. It goes without saying that few hearts and minds are won by breaking down doors and threatening the privacy and integrity of an individual's home. But still, in areas where the US and international forces are believed strong, opinions of them are high even if secu-

rity is not necessarily the best. In locations where international forces are deemed weak, they are less popular, even if security is adequate.

As the result of having suffered heavy losses, to include dozens of mid-level and even a few senior commanders last year, the insurgents have been staging fewer conventional attacks this year on NATO and Afghan forces.<sup>26</sup> Insurgents have come to rely more on suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices, assassinations, intimidations, and abductions. A recent UN report says that suicide attacks employed by the Taliban as a military technique have had little military success in Afghanistan and have instead caused an increase in public resentment. According to the report, 80 percent of suicide bombers came from Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).<sup>27</sup> The majority of the suicide bombers were Pakistani Pashtuns from FATA, while others were from Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and a few were Afghan Pashtuns from refugee camps in Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> "The Afghan suicide attacker is not crazed, fanatical or brainwashed. Some are recruited in madrassas, but many are not. Of those we've seen most are young, poor, uneducated, and easily influenced," said UN Special Representative Tom Koenigs.<sup>29</sup> Afghanistan has found that individuals (including children) are being coerced or duped into carrying out these attacks.<sup>30</sup> But the insurgents are hardly moved by public resentment against suicide attacks since their aim is to intimidate people, undermine government legitimacy, and erode public support for the Afghanistan mission in NATO capitals.

Consequently, support for the Taliban's tactics has steadily eroded as suicide bombings increased. The greatest impact of suicide bombing has been on innocent civilian bystanders and the general population. A total of 183 Afghans, 121 of whom were civilians (65 percent), were killed in 100 suicide bombings in the first six months of 2007.<sup>31</sup> Attacks on civilians, schools, and infrastructure have also led to a decrease in the popularity of the Taliban. Additionally, as Taliban attacks have slowed progress on reconstruction projects, the lives of many in the general population have worsened, further alienating the populace.

The Taliban's tactical defeats, however, have had little impact on the strategic situation since most military actions by Afghan and NATO forces are conducted at the tactical and operational levels and do not necessarily translate into strategic gains. The real challenge for the government of Afghanistan and its allies is how to prevail strategically in the campaign. Obviously, there is no entirely military solution to any insurgency, although a counterinsurgency effort can readily be defeated without adequate military support. Similarly, political legitimacy alone cannot end the insurgency unless it is seen as capable of providing protection and services to the people. Development brings positive changes in people's lives if it is linked to good governance and the rule of law.

The current counterinsurgency strategy needs to deal with the different elements of insurgency in an integrated way. Military action should target

terrorists and insurgent organizations in an effort to dissuade, deter, and defeat them by means of direct combat. Nonmilitary action needs to be focused on assuring, persuading, and influencing the local populace, through the provision of security, humanitarian assistance, providing basic services, establishing infrastructure, institution-building, and support for the rule of law. These two strategies for defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan are not currently being coordinated. NATO, commanding some 40,000 troops in Afghanistan, sees itself responsible for the military action in counterinsurgency efforts, but often only when and where it can utilize firepower as a substitute for its limited number of forces. The resulting collateral damage and civilian casualties have often contributed to feelings of insecurity and resentment among the local populace that are exploited by the enemy. Counterterrorism operations by the international coalition of about 12,000 troops have caused similar resentment as a result of what many believe to be unwarranted arrests and mistreatment of peaceful villagers suspected of aiding the insurgents. Adding to the confusion is the appearance that no particular organization is in charge of a wide range of nonmilitary counterinsurgency efforts. These nonmilitary efforts are conducted in what many believe is a “free for all” sphere of action, spawning additional problems and adding to the feelings of insecurity.

One of the major challenges is how to consolidate military gains by maintaining security in the areas cleared of insurgents. A long-term security presence is critical to the reestablishment of governance and the continuation of reconstruction projects.<sup>32</sup> NATO commanders claim to lack the forces needed to consolidate success. Once they clear a district of insurgents the Afghan security forces and allied contingents do not have sufficient forces to hold the ground, facilitate governance, and protect the population.<sup>33</sup> This situation hinders efforts to isolate the population from the insurgents and win hearts and minds of the people. The campaign needs to target both “hearts,” through political legitimacy, and “minds,” through a visible capacity to prevail. The Afghans simply want to see greater security with less brutality against the civilian population, as well as some tangible improvement in their daily lives. Strengthening legitimacy in the eyes of the people requires the government to address corruption from within and to seek ways to improve the economy and provide public services.

There is also an urgent need to develop a consensus among the domestic and international partners based on a unified strategy and campaign plan. Implementation of such a strategy will require a major “surge” of forces, equipment, and funding if Afghanistan is to achieve any semblance of support for a cohesive, long-term, integrated military and civil effort. This may also require bringing the NATO-International Security Assistance Force and US-led Operation Enduring Freedom forces under a unified command capable of executing both combat and stabilization-peacekeeping operations.

The key to the success of such a strategy is to legitimize the campaign with demonstrable Afghan government ownership.

### ***Negotiating with Insurgents***

President Hamid Karzai has signaled an increased interest in negotiating with the Taliban. He recently went so far as to show his willingness to meet personally with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and to even give militants a position in the government in exchange for peace. Not all domestic and international participants concur with President Karzai's approach of a dialogue with the Taliban, nor has the Afghan government officially articulated a well-defined policy to govern such talks.<sup>34</sup> The Taliban have responded by saying the militia would never negotiate as long as international soldiers are stationed or present in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> Reaction from the international community has been mixed. Although there is wide support for peace talks with elements of the insurgency that renounce violence and join the legitimate political process, the United Nations insists that Omar and other top insurgents remain on a UN "blacklist." This insistence and a number of other initiatives are considered nonnegotiable, this includes attempts to amend the Afghanistan constitution.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, the United States rejects all-inclusive negotiations with the Taliban. As long as instability persists in the south, Kabul will remain in this weak position of not being able to achieve favorable outcomes through negotiations. There is real concern that the confusion surrounding the proposed peace talks can demoralize anti-Taliban supporters, increase the Taliban's activities, and cause certain local networks to consider rearming.

Negotiations with foreign-supported militants who want to overthrow the government and turn Afghanistan into a safe haven for global terrorism are out of the question. These militants need to either modify their beliefs or face the probability of being destroyed. The majority of insurgents, most of whom are not against the political system as an entity, but are opposed to the government, can be won over through a continuing process of national reconciliation. This will only be possible if these insurgents can be successfully isolated and protected from the radical elements within the insurgency.

### ***Regional Perspectives***

Throughout history few insurgencies have survived without safe havens abroad. As long as the insurgents maintain a sanctuary in Pakistan it will be difficult to defeat them in Afghanistan. The upsurge of violence in Pakistan and the Talibanization of the tribal areas aggravate the impact of regional influence on Afghan developments. The Taliban have safe-havens in Pakistan and receive technical and operational assistance from transnational extremists located there.

Although a US ally in the war on terrorism, Pakistan views such threats in the context of its own domestic and regional interests. Pakistan's lack of decisiveness in containing the Taliban has contributed to the instability in Afghanistan, while its deals with militants in Waziristan have aided al Qaeda and the Taliban in their efforts to regroup and expand their influence across borders. FATA is becoming increasingly Talibanized, a fact that is helping al Qaeda to reorganize and acquire secure footholds.<sup>37</sup> A July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate assesses that al Qaeda has regenerated "safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas."<sup>38</sup> This comes at a time of political unrest in Pakistan that has forced Islamabad to scale back its operations against the militants.

In August 2007, the long-awaited Afghan-Pakistan tribal peace jirga was held in Kabul, bringing together 350 delegates from each country. The aim of the assembly was to forge a consensus in dealing with the growing Taliban and al Qaeda. The jirga's final declaration, unfortunately, was mainly focused on generalities recognizing the link between the narcotics trade and terrorism and pledging to jointly combat both. It mandated a smaller, 50-member jirga, whose members would be equally appointed by both governments. This body will have the responsibility for negotiating with the Taliban. In a sharp departure from Pakistan's repeated denials of providing sanctuary to the Taliban, President Musharraf for the first time acknowledged that there is support for the Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan.<sup>39</sup>

Although the meeting was seen as a positive step in defusing tensions between Kabul and Islamabad, the absence of the Taliban and tribal representation from north and south Waziristan (the hotbed of Pakistani Taliban) devolved the assembly into a meeting between handpicked delegates of their respective governments. The impact of this jirga remains to be seen.

Removal of sources of the insurgency in Pakistan requires a new regional approach combining the military and political efforts of the United States, NATO, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This revitalized approach needs to address a number of legitimate concerns of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among the most compelling of these concerns are the development and education of the populace in the rural tribal areas on both sides of the border, promotion of democratic values within Pakistan, enhancement of governance in Afghanistan, and the political integration of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In the broader context, reducing the sources of transnational militancy and religious extremism in South Asia and the economic integration of the entire region needs to be an integral part of this new approach.

## ***Conclusion***

Unless dramatic actions are taken the situation in Afghanistan can rapidly spiral out of control. Delays in a response on the part of allies and

regional partners will only compound the myriad of challenges facing Afghanistan: the expansion of militancy in Pakistan, the possible transfer of jihadists to South Asia following the reduction of US forces in Iraq, and various uncertainties associated with Iran. Responding to these ongoing challenges requires the rebuilding of a strong consensus on the part of international and domestic actors, each having a shared vision, strategy, and implementing mechanisms. A revised Afghanistan National Development Strategy can serve as a framework for this undertaking. Implementation will require the establishment of a strong Afghan National Security and Economic Council with the capacity to plan, coordinate, and lead the implementation of the strategy and associated programs. The strategy needs to encompass all the components associated with stability operations (security, governance, rule of law, and economic development). The council should also closely coordinate strategic issues with international stakeholders in and outside of Afghanistan.

Finally, there is a critical need for the creation of an international coordination mechanism headed by a senior international representative in Kabul. To have any sense of legitimacy this organization should be mandated by the international community to make decisions, establish priorities, and oversee implementation. This coordinating body will also develop processes to maximize the utilization of domestic and international means under the overarching umbrella of an effective partnership.

#### NOTES

1. The Senlis Council Afghanistan, *Countering the Insurgency in Afghanistan: Losing Friends and Making Enemies* (London: MF Publishing, 2007), 32. Prices of weapons in the south have largely gone up. The steepest rise is seen in ammunition and heavy weapons.

2. Ash Narain Roy, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Towards New Dynamism," *Mainstream Weekly*, 45 (15 September 2007).

3. Afghan National Development Poll, *ANDP 5: Security and ANSF Perceptions*, 16 September 2007, 38.

4. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), 130-32, cited in James Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 38.

5. See Afghanistan NGO Safety Office Report, *ANSO Quarterly Data Report Dec 22, 2006 - June 30, 2007*. The report states that the impunity of local power-brokers (predominantly former combatants but also religious and ethnic leaders) will continue to combine with limited law enforcement capacity to create an environment in which NGOs will continue to suffer criminally related fatalities going into 2008.

6. Ibid.

7. See, for example, Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim, *Northern Afghanistan: The Enemy Within*, Afghan Recovery Report No. 265, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 13 September 2007.

8. Agence France-Presse, "UN Chief Calls for New Afghan Strategy Against Insurgents," 26 September 2007.

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