

## AFGHANISTAN: STILL AT A STANDSTILL

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Since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the state of affairs in Afghanistan have constantly deteriorated, with a marked increase in violence, fatalities, casualties and a growing/ budding Taliban insurgency that has gained immense momentum and continues to escalate. Till date, more than 7,000 people have been killed in international military action against the Taliban. Regardless of US and NATO claims of achieving progress and development in Afghanistan, the year 2007 has been Afghanistan's 'most violent' year since the ouster of the Taliban. Despite seven years of intervention, and the US's so-called campaign of 'liberating Afghanistan', the country continues to be entrenched in turmoil and bloodshed with no visible decrease in insecurity and violence.

US President G. W. Bush said that the war in Afghanistan must continue or the country will become a haven for drugs, terrorism and organized crime. "We are fighting a poisonous ideology of Islamic extremism which threatens to become a global movement"<sup>1</sup>. However, a 2007 report by the United Nations Human Development Fund illustrates-reveals that Afghanistan has plummeted in every field – economically, socially and politically. More than half of the population lives below the poverty-line, average life expectancy has decreased, malnutrition has increased and literacy has dropped. Hundreds have been killed and thousands have been displaced. Afghanistan continues to be the largest narco-producing state, accounting for 93 percent of the world's opium. Afghanistan is the 4th poorest country in the world.<sup>2</sup> And is ranked 174 out of 178 on the "human development index"<sup>3</sup> (which measures the scale/level or standard of health and education) with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$964.<sup>4</sup> About 60-80 percent of the population live on less than 1US\$ a day<sup>5</sup>. Majority /large sections of the population strive without basic services. With limited achievements, Afghanistan continues to face huge political, economic, security and development challenges as well as humanitarian needs. The country has made no significant progress and continues to be confronted by a weak and ineffective government, increase in violence, deteriorating security situation, a resurgent Taliban movement, civilian casualties, large-scale displacement of masses, collapse of state infrastructure, thriving/flourishing narcotics trade, growing poverty and lack of development. Internationally, the US-NATO coalition involved in Afghanistan are divided, with no unified vision, and disparity in the level of political and military commitment.

Despite numerous drawbacks, and the Taliban's strict regime and enforcement of their callous version of Islam particularly, their policies towards women, it needs to be mentioned that the Taliban were successful in restoring the law and order situation in Afghanistan, de-weaponisation of the Afghan society, eliminating the warlords, filling the leadership vacuum, providing the people a sense of security, curtailing poppy cultivation and establishing a central government machinery.<sup>6</sup>

This paper attempts to review the current state of affairs in Afghanistan since the US invasion in 2001. With particular focus on the year 2007, this paper will examine the progress achieved – if any – over the past seven years and the challenges that continue to confront the country itself and the international community in bringing stability and peace to the war-ravaged country.

### **Violence/Casualties**

According to an Associated Press count (provided by local and international officials), more than 6,500 people were killed as a result of the ensuing violence in Afghanistan in 2007.<sup>7</sup> Including 1,977 civilians, making it the "bloodiest" period since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. As of February 2008, there have been 703 coalition deaths in Afghanistan as part of the ongoing coalition operations (Operation Enduring Freedom) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)<sup>8</sup> and 1,693 wounded. 5,820 Afghan security forces have been killed, 5,000 have been wounded and 725 have been captured.<sup>9</sup> According to the United Nations, in 2007, 516 improvised explosive devices were launched by the Taliban. Security incidents, a broad category that includes bombings, firefights and intimidation, are up from 500 a month in 2006 to 600 a month in 2007, a 20 percent increase.<sup>10</sup>

According to a United Nations tally for civilian deaths in 2007, 314 were caused by NATO/US Afghan forces, and 279 by Taliban.<sup>11</sup> A similar Associated Press count, though slightly lower, revealed the same ratio, with 213 civilian deaths caused by US- NATO forces, and 180 by the Taliban.<sup>12</sup> The tally, based on Western and Afghan official data, puts the violence far ahead of 2006, in which 4,000 people died.<sup>13</sup>

Human Rights Watch released a report in April, 2007 that raised widespread concern and resentment regarding the increasing number of civilian casualties affected by the conflict, and that too due to poor intelligence and careless NATO attacks on the Taliban. In 2006, the Taliban killed far more civilians than U.S. or NATO military actions, but the trend has reversed in 2007, mostly due to poor intelligence and through the aggressive use of air power. NATO/US forces used four times more – 1,032 air strikes, according to the U.S. military. In August 2007 alone, 168 civilians died in armed conflicts, suicide attacks, improvised explosions and aerial bombardments marked a 16.6 percent increase in civilian deaths over July, 2007 alone, when 144 non-combatants reportedly lost their lives. According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), two-thirds of the 168 civilian deaths were a result of the military operations conducted by international forces against the Taliban.<sup>14</sup> As a result, US and NATO-led international forces have come under immense criticism for causing huge civilian casualties during strikes on suspected militants, causing widespread protests for the withdrawal of coalition forces, and resentment among the masses for President Karzai with calls for his removal.

President Hamid Karzai pleaded with foreign troops to coordinate ‘more closely’ with their Afghan counterparts to prevent villagers from being hurt. However, US and NATO-led forces based in Afghanistan have often refuted reports of civilian casualties in their military operations against Taliban insurgents. “In a number of cases we have gone out and investigated, where they have claimed there were civilians killed and in fact those were unfounded,”<sup>15</sup> Reuters quoted US Army Brig-Gen Perry Wiggins as saying. Taliban insurgents have also refuted reports that their fighters, in clear violation of the rules of war, deliberately harm civilians in their hit-and-run attacks. Consequently, a US civil rights group filed a lawsuit on 4 September 2007, demanding that the American military release documents related to civilians deaths caused by US forces in Afghanistan, accusing the government of trying ‘to hide the human cost of war’.

An estimated six million people, out of a population of about 30 million, have fled to neighbouring countries during the years of conflict. Since 2002, some 4.8 million Afghans have returned home, mostly from Iran and Pakistan, according to the UNHCR. However, due to the escalating violence, the rate of returnees has dropped. Apart from violence, many Afghans face the risk of landmines and unexploded ordnance, which kill or injure about 62 Afghans a month, according to the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan.

### **Weak Government**

The poorest country in South Asia, Afghanistan’s economy is more dependent on illegal drugs and foreign aid than any other nation. Considered as a mere “mayor of Kabul” for his inability to extend his government’s writ outside the capital, the government of Hamid Karzai has so far been unable to provide either security or good governance. Initially, welcomed by the masses, the Karzai government has, within a short period of time, drawn internal and international criticism. Public support for Karzai has diminished; primarily due to his slow response in condemning the civilian casualties caused as a result of collateral damage by NATO/US forces and his government’s inability to improve the lives of the masses. The government lacks authority, remains weak and ineffective, with little or no central authority. Plagued by corruption, the country is still under the rule of warlords and drug merchants who have either been elected to, or placed their supporters in parliament. Karzai has been unsuccessful in establishing his government’s writ beyond Kabul and still struggles to rebuild the country’s ruined infrastructure, weak economy and battle the opium trade.

Despite failure on the part of the international community (US-NATO), the Afghan government has been equally to blame. Afghanistan’s elected President, Hamid Karzai, has been unsuccessful in providing security. Over the passage of time, there has been growing dissatisfaction and resentment towards Karzai. Public support has plummeted. Both domestic and international criticism has increased regarding the government’s stance – policies on human rights. And its lack or inability in providing good governance is increasing. Recently, in February 2008, the Afghanistan parliament supported the death sentence given

to journalist Sayed Parwez Kaambakhsh, accused of blasphemy, a judgment highly criticized and viewed in the west as a mockery of the overthrow of the Taliban. More important, on a strategic level, was President Karzai's expulsion of two foreign diplomats including Michael Semple, declared persona non grata for brokering the deal with Mullah Salaam Ullah and his opposition to former? Diplomat Paddy Ashdown's appointment as the UN's Special Envoy to Afghanistan has been one of mystery and intrigue. Considered an impulsive decision, analysts are of the view that as a result of his actions, the president might end up trapped between growing resurgent Afghan reaction and opposition to outside interference and the International community's dissatisfaction regarding Karzai's weakness and offers of reconciliation with the Taliban as the only way forward.

The failure of the Afghan state and international coalition forces in expanding the writ of the state has resulted in the revival of the drug economy, which is estimated to be contributing around fifty percent of the gross domestic product of the country. Its volume in monetary terms is more than USD 3 billion, a colossal amount that sustains warlords and it is said also partly funds the Taliban insurgency.

The Afghan National Army (ANA), currently about 47,000 strong, has achieved limited progress. But it is seen operationally more as an extension of the 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 frontlines of the counterinsurgency. There have been 1,150 police officers killed in the last 18 months alone, more than double ANA losses. 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>16</sup>

### **Reconstruction and Development**

Although Afghanistan has maintained double-digit economic growth over the past several years, it has failed to reduce poverty and economic inequality. Huge amounts have been dispensed to help rebuild Afghanistan's shattered infrastructure<sup>17</sup> and economy. The West has largely failed in the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. According to the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency private investment in Afghanistan dropped in 2007 to US\$500 million – about half the amount invested in 2006<sup>18</sup> – due to the worsening security situation in the country. Most of the money allocated for Afghanistan has been spent on military operations whereas reconstruction has been slow and dogged by allegations of corruption and waste on the part of the government, aid agencies and contractors, curtailing the desperately needed development and reconstruction. The promises made at the Afghanistan Compact in 2006 – of peace, good governance, human rights, economic development and that "all illegal armed groups will be disbanded by end-2007 in all provinces – have hardly been met. In a second report, published by the Afghanistan Study Group, a collection of US diplomats and military experts clearly reveals that Afghanistan is a war gone wrong and continues to be a costly endeavor and undertaking in terms of the spreading instability and violence. With no visible progress or development – political, economical, developmental, human casualties – the mass of conflicting strategies all point towards failure. More and more referrals are being made to Afghanistan as a "failed state".

The international community has limited its efforts in Afghanistan to military alone – by focusing on military intervention/involvement rather than (the much needed and all essential) progress and development. Development aid has been misused; either been spent in the wrong places, in the wrong way, or has simply disappeared (unaccounted for) leaving the rural areas and the masses bereft. Erratic and mismanaged humanitarian assistance, lack or absence of social and economic progress has led to instability, and widespread resentment among the masses for/against foreign forces and the government.

### **NATO**

Despite seven years into its operation and the presence of more than 50,000 coalition/US foreign troops, Afghanistan continues to be a critical test for NATO, undermining the 26-member alliance in its first out-of-area combat mission and risking the alliance's credibility as a successful organization, particularly in

external operations. The US and NATO's mission in Afghanistan is a case of 'large space and insufficient force ratios'. With no strategic plan, the coalition has been conducting the war in a highly tactical manner with force. NATO forces in Afghanistan are not fighting against Taliban but against space logistics and mechanics.

Since NATO/ISAF's presence in Afghanistan, only US \$8 billion have been spent on reconstruction, whereas more than US \$80 billion have been spent on military operations alone. Weaknesses have appeared in the organization's performance as the mission itself presents a growing challenge to NATO which has been facing a tough challenge in convincing its members in meeting troop commitments for Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> The worsening security situation has prevented NATO member nations from contributing extra troops needed to curb the growing Taliban insurgency.

Although many in NATO's circle believe that a strong and reliable Afghan government is required in order for NATO to succeed, NATO-led ISAF operations have constantly been hindered by national caveats that restrict the operations of many units deployed in Afghanistan. Such restrictions limit deployment areas and types of missions for particular national contingents or impose other criteria that reduce the effectiveness and flexibility of ISAF operations. On 24 October, 2006, General James Jones estimated that there were about 102 national restrictions, 50 of which significantly hampered operations, including a German restriction on "extended patrols" for German troops.<sup>20</sup> Other nations have forbidden deployment of their troops to eastern or southern Afghanistan, where support for the Taliban is most entrenched and insurgent threats are constant. "Putting caveats on operations means putting caveats on NATO's future". While the US, Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands are bearing the brunt of the fighting, France, Spain and Italy are only involved in defense missions confined to peace-keeping, training and support functions.

Although all 26 members of NATO have contributed to ISAF, most of the fighting has been taking place in the south – Taliban stronghold – with forces of the US, UK, Canada and the Netherlands. US allies like Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Turkey have refused to send their troops to the south for combat operations placing caveats on their troops. In January 2008, Canada threatened to remove its troops by 2008 if other NATO states refuse to deploy their troops in the combat zones. Coalition forces differ greatly on the question of reconstruction priorities, use of force, commitment of troops, command structures and other vital issues that would have a strong bearing on the outcome of the reconstruction process. The United States would like the European Union to provide more troops and participate more in policing, drug interdiction, poppy eradication and combat operations, than its member states are apparently willing to offer.

## **Taliban**

Despite US and NATO claims of blunting the Taliban's threatened comeback offensive, the group has made a strong and steady comeback, proving to be "stern adversaries". They have reorganized themselves and have re-emerged as a growing political and military threat, gaining support from the masses. Despite the killing of almost 40 commanders, and close to 2,000 fighters, including its most senior military commander, Mullah Dadullah in May, 2007, the Taliban are stronger than before and appear to have no difficulty finding recruits to make up for their losses. Although quite a few former Taliban members, including a few former senior commanders and officials, have reconciled with the government, thousands of fighters continue to join the insurgency. There were claims that differences had risen among the group, but they seem to be mere speculations as the Taliban have in fact proven that they are active and exert influence. Initially restricted to the south, the Taliban have managed to contest the government's control, extending their area of control from their traditional heartland in the south to the northern parts of the country.

Within a short span of time, systematically and consciously, the Taliban have managed to recuperate, retaliate and achieve 'tactical victories' over a highly superior, better-equipped and trained adversary. Since their comeback/return, the Taliban have taken over more than half of Afghanistan. Their presence and influence is not confined to the group's traditional areas of control such as Zabul, Helmand, Urzgan and Kandahar. In fact, since late 2007 and early 2008, they have been actively operating in the provinces of Logar, Wardak, Ghazni and the capital Kabul. Because of the US's mismanaged war in Afghanistan, battle for the hearts and minds has also been lost.

The masses, who initially welcomed the US as liberators who were going to rescue the Afghan people from turmoil and suppression, have in fact once again turned towards the Taliban because the masses know the Taliban are not fighting to occupy, rather they are fighting a foreign forces to defend their country. When and if US/Coalition troops withdraw from Afghanistan (just as they did after the Soviet defeat/pullout), the Taliban will continue to exist, proving that they are a legitimate part of Afghanistan and the people, and therefore cannot be ignored or pushed aside as the US thought they had done.

There has been an increase in their support because of the ineffective, corrupt government. The real challenge today is the growing power of the Taliban. Over the past two years, they have emerged as a credible force with greater capacity to trouble the Afghan national army and foreign troops. One of the most important reasons for the resurrection of the Taliban is that reforms, reconstruction, development and security have not “gained traction” across the whole country, particularly among the Pashtun-dominated regions where the Taliban insurgency has been on the rise.

## **Reconciliation**

President Karzai has repeatedly offered talks with the Taliban, trying to establish dialogue in an effort to include them in the political process. However, the Taliban have refused, relentlessly sticking to their principle demand that negotiations or dialogue would only take place once all foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan. Under a 2002 amnesty program, which was greatly criticized by many in Afghanistan and the West, President Karzai managed to convince hundreds to lay down their arms and reconcile with the government. Some of them were elected to the Afghan parliament and senate and one became governor of Uruzgan province.

On 9 September 2007, President Hamid Karzai renewed a call for talks with the Taliban and also offered positions in the government to insurgent leaders (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) willing to put down their weapons and join the political establishment. He ruled out talks with al-Qaeda and other foreign insurgents. Expressing frustration as to how to contact the Taliban he said, “We don’t have any formal negotiations with the Taliban. They don’t have an address. Who do we talk to?21 I wish there (was) someone that will eventually come out with a telephone number, with an address, with a leadership structure that we can go and talk to”.22

On 10 September, the Taliban said it was ready for talks with the Afghan government. Senior Taliban spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP “that they were ready for talks with the government for the sake of national interests and whenever the government formally asks for negotiations, we will be ready.”

The Taliban responded after President Hamid Karzai offered negotiations with the Taliban and other militants in a bid to end the nearly six-year bloody insurgency. Retracting from their previous statement, on Sept 18-19, the Taliban said they would only hold talks with the government, provided certain pre-conditions were met, which include the complete withdrawal of US and NATO forces and that Shariah, a conservative brand of Islamic law, is enforced. The prospects of talks seem quite bleak and unlikely, as the West and the Karzai regime will never agree to such demands.

In December 2007, key Taliban commander in southern Afghanistan, Mullah Mansoor Dadullah, was dismissed from the movement for “disobeying orders” and conducting activities “against the Taliban’s rules and regulations”. Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, in a statement attributed to the group’s leader, Mullah Omar, said that Mullah Dadullah was no longer a part of the Taliban movement and those providing help to Mansoor should “stop doing so”.23 Consequently, in January 2008, a former Taliban commander and governor of Uruzgan province, Mullah Abdul Salaam was named as the government’s top official and district chief of the Musa Qala district in the southern province of Helmand, the Taliban’s stronghold, site off the fiercest fighting and the country’s largest opium producing region, accounting for 50 percent of the produce. In an unexpected turn, Mullah Salaam Ullah and his Alizai tribe assured their allegiance to the Karzai government. Since then, other tribal leaders in Helmand province have supported Salaam’s appointment as Musa Qala district chief. Mullah Salaam’s appointment, expected to foster reconciliation between the government and moderate Taliban, came as quite a surprise. Mullah Abdul Salaam was allegedly approached by Michael Semple, an Irish diplomat working for the European Union in Kabul, who was expelled in December, 2007 by the Afghan government for back-channel contacts with

the Taliban. Before being expelled from Afghanistan, Semple managed to make a deal with Mullah Salaam, winning his allegiance and support for the Karzai government.

### **Tactics**

As mentioned above, the Taliban have shown great organization and resilience as stern rivals, despite the presence of more than 50,000 US-NATO troops. The Taliban have adopted new tactics and have altered their strategy (military and other), somewhat moving away from head-on confrontation and instead relying on bombings, ambushes, and kidnappings, similar to al-Qaeda's tactics in Iraq. This is evident, as on 9 August 2007, the Taliban launched their mobile radio station, Radio Shariat, with transmission in Paktia, Paktika, Khost and Ghazni, and in the eastern and central provinces of Afghanistan. On 12 August, the Taliban held their first news conference at the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), in Ghazni City, since they were ousted in 2001. The Taliban published its first military field manual detailing how to spring ambushes, run spies and conduct an insurgency against coalition forces in Afghanistan, and published their Constitution.

### **Kidnapping**

Foreigners in Afghanistan have rarely been targets of kidnappings in the past. However, in subsequent years, the kidnapping of foreigners has become more common, and in recent months there has been an unprecedented increase in the practice as it has been "a very successful policy" for the Taliban. The Taliban have been using kidnappings as a useful tool of pressure against the government of Hamid Karzai and countries with troops deployed inside Afghanistan. According to critics, such tactics have set a dangerous precedent that could spur more kidnappings and make life even more dangerous for foreigners. The latest being the kidnapping of 49-year-old US aid worker for the Asian Rural Life Development Foundation, Cyd Mizell, and her Afghan driver: abducted in the southern city of Kandahar on January 26 2008. However, no group has claimed responsibility. In March 2007, President Hamid Karzai approved a deal – the release of five senior Taliban prisoners, including the brother of the slain Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah, for the release of an Italian reporter, Daniele Mastrogiacomo. Prior to this, in September 2007, two kidnapped Italian military intelligence officers were freed during a raid by NATO-led troops. September 2007: Taliban kidnapped four members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the province of Wardak. The men were freed in the same month. In July 2007, two German engineers were kidnapped by the Taliban while travelling in Wardak province. One German was killed, the other was freed on October 10, 2007. In July 2007, 23 South Koreans were kidnapped from a bus travelling from Kabul to Kandahar. On July 25, a church pastor leading the group was shot dead. Five days later, another male hostage was shot. As a goodwill gesture, two female captives were freed. August 30, 2007, Taliban released all the hostages after South Korea agreed to certain conditions regarding its role and presence in Afghanistan under the banner of NATO.<sup>24</sup>

### **Opium**

Afghanistan produces around 93 percent of the world's opium making it the largest producer of narcotics. According to a United Nations Office on Drug Control (UNODC) report, published in August 2007, since the ouster of the Taliban, opium-poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has increased "dramatically". The Taliban had enforced an effective ban on poppy, virtually eradicating the crop in 2000, wiping out close to 42 percent. Afghanistan has become the largest producer of narcotics since 19th century China. The report said the area of Afghan land where opium poppies are being grown has risen by 17 percent to 193,000 hectares in 2007 from 165,000 in 2006. 2007's harvest was 8,200 tonnes, up from 6,100 tonnes in 2006. Afghanistan's illegal drug economy (mainly opium and heroin) accounted for an estimated \$2.7 billion in 2005, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.<sup>25</sup> More than 50 percent of the size of the legal gross domestic product.

Afghan officials estimate that 400,000<sup>26</sup> farming families benefit from opium poppy cultivation. Many of these participated in alternative livelihood programs last year, but expressed anger at the \$2 a day short-term projects like clearing irrigation ditches that offer little stability. Poppy growing had been reduced or abandoned in four other provinces – Nangahar, Badakhshan, Laghman, and Baghlan.<sup>27</sup> The current situation clearly highlights the failure of international Afghan and British-led counter-narcotic efforts to tackle the problem. Unfortunately, drug production and trafficking continues to increase at alarming rates,

providing the insurgents with resources and local support for the protection they provide to the poppy cultivators, demonstrating the lack of commitment and failure of the international community in providing alternative options of livelihood to the masses who seem to have returned to their previous practice of cultivating poppy.

The country has lapsed back to a criminal economy under the scrutiny of the international coalition forces, due to lack of power, will and social capacity to address the issue. The (UNODC) report blames corruption and lack of security in southern Afghanistan for the problem, and warns that efforts to control the opium crop in Afghanistan have not succeeded, thus highlighting that Afghan and British-led international efforts have failed.

### **Positive Developments Progress**

Although it is not to deny that some reconstruction has in fact taken place, such as the construction, reconstruction of roads (Ring Road), hospitals, and schools, a nascent banking sector with eight or more private banks now set up in Afghanistan. The country's growing industry has been the telecom industry; with more than 1.5 million Afghans using phones<sup>28</sup> (most of them mobile phones), a figure expected to double in the next three years. The country- a victim of over 25 years of conflict, turmoil and bloodshed Afghanistan is faced with its worst crisis since the ouster of the Taliban with increasing concerns, both internationally and domestically, that Afghanistan faces the distinct possibility of sliding back into instability and chaos.

### **A Way Forward**

- First, NATO needs to convince President Hamid Karzai to put his house in order. The masses are losing confidence in the Karzai government, which is besieged by endemic corruption and is accused of being incapable of protecting or administering the country. Karzai not only needs to alter his government's image of being corrupt and ineffective but also needs to deal with corrupt officials, and warlords whom he has ignored so far.
- Effective measures need to be taken to eliminate the narcotics trade, which has been rising continuously, and of which many officials are allegedly a part. Illegal opium farming has also been providing funds to both druglords and Taliban fighters. Alternatives to opium poppy cultivation need to be offered.
- There is also the need for the establishment of a representative government in Afghanistan. Many within Afghanistan feel that the present government does not represent a majority of the Afghan people and is merely a puppet regime of the US – to carry out the US agenda.
- NATO must change its image from an “occupation force” to a peacekeeping or liberating force, as it has been responsible for transforming the Taliban militancy into a popular resistance movement. For this purpose, NATO needs to go back to its original purpose of winning the hearts and minds of the masses in Afghanistan rather than carrying out careless search and destroy missions which target innocent civilians.
- NATO also needs to realize that Afghanistan cannot be stabilised unless the issue of Pashtun alienation is addressed. There has been some progress on the question of Pashtun representation since the parliamentary elections of September 2005. However, more needs to be done in this regard, particularly concerning the Taliban, who are predominantly Pashtun. One way is to have peace talks and agreements with the Pashtun tribal leaders and those Taliban who are willing to come to the negotiating table. By doing so, these elements will become a part of the political process.
- NATO has to comprehend and accept the reality that unless regional actors are drawn into the internal dynamics of Afghanistan, they cannot accomplish anything inside Afghanistan. Regional players such as Pakistan, India, Iran, and Russia need to be convinced to extend their support for any peace moves to succeed. In this regard, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been at their lowest. This is an issue of serious concern for both sides and needs to be resolved urgently, for it could derail the entire rebuilding process.

- NATO and its partners must realize that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won by force alone. It can only be won by winning over the hearts of the Afghan people, by providing them with an environment in which they can exercise their liberties freely. NATO and its allies need to accept the fact that this region, unquestionably, does not belong to NATO; it should, therefore, fulfil its agenda of stabilizing Afghanistan and then leave it to the Afghans and the regional actors to deal with any remaining problems.
- Inevitably, an organisation will be judged by what it can do. From the start, alliance commanders in Afghanistan have never been given the forces that they requested for the operation. NATO faces its toughest challenge ever. And it has laid bare its vulnerability and inability in quelling warlordism and militant insurgency in Afghanistan. In view of the collateral damage, it has caused -especially the killing of non-combatant civilians - it may be determined to wriggle out of the quagmire it finds itself in, but looking at developments as they are unfolding, even the most optimistic people would find it difficult to view its future positively.
- NATO has to accept that Hamid Karzai's government is weak, and that the economy continues to be dependent on opium production. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda continue to re-emerge as political and military threats. Afghanistan will continue to haunt NATO with the stigma of incompetence until the above issues are addressed. Hence, NATO's performance remains highly debatable. And here, one cannot but think that the operation in Afghanistan was overly ambitious, and hinged on expecting too much too soon.
- The war in Afghanistan cannot be won militarily the past seven years clearly reflect that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.
- US forces should withdraw from Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom - purely combat in nature has achieved neither peace nor stability - but instability, violence, poverty in short occupation and turmoil. NATO should stay in Afghanistan and fulfill its assigned-original role as a peacekeeping - stabilizing force, by concentrating on reconstruction and development. More emphasis needs to be laid on developing and strengthening the worn torn infrastructure. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's) need to be more active and instrumental in this regard.
- Regional Countries-neighbors need to be more actively involved in the reconstruction and development process- and can work together with one another as well as with NATO in this regard.
- The OIC can also play an instrumental role in the stability and reconstruction off Afghanistan. Muslim states of the OIC can under UN auspices as the "blue berets" help in peacekeeping.
- The UN must continue to be actively and deeply involved in securing peace in Afghanistan.
- More money needs to be allocated for reconstruction and development. The US can, in this regard, play an active role. By funding developmental projects, the US can alter its image from an aggressor to a helper or even well wisher friend.
- Considering the US policy, (after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan) towards the Pashtuns and tribal leaders on both sides of the Pak-Afghan Border, and the reputation it holds of never 'honoring its commitments' the US needs to win and secure their support, otherwise peace and stability will not be possible.
- Neighbouring states and western counterparts need to place a greater role for a stable, peaceful, unified nation state in the Afghanistan, with focus on its reconstruction and development. Considering the history, terrain, legacy and the nature of the task, Afghanistan's failure terms of nation- and state-building will imply disaster not only for Afghanistan itself, but the region band entire international community. Hence, sincere efforts need to be made to transform it from a centre-point of regional conflict to a centre of/for regional cooperation.



- The Afghan government needs to assume more responsibility as an effective authority and gain confidence of the masses who have seen nothing more than turmoil, and bloodshed.

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