

Afghanistan's reconstruction and the international community: post 9/11 scenario

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Introduction

The reconstruction of countries that are affected by prolonged conflict always needs an environment that is conducive for rebuilding of the state and society. In recent years, the role and significance of extensive foreign assistance has also been realized especially in cases where extensive reconstruction is required after protracted turmoil. Such is the case of Afghanistan. This also makes obligatory for the conflict torn country to have, and to maintain, good friendly relations with international community, especially with countries in its immediate and regional neighbourhoods. This leads towards better understanding of issues, and a cooperation that in turn yields development and prosperity of the nation. This is not unprecedented; World Wars I and II had badly damaged life, property, economy and industrial infrastructure throughout the Europe. The need for massive reconstruction and creation of peaceful environment after these wars led to the inception of the United Nations and introduction of the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe.

A prominent feature of the Cold War period (1945-1991) was that during those years the world order turned from a multi-polar into a bi-polar system. It created opportunities for the developing countries to join in political and military alliances, and also confronted them with problems as socialist versus capitalist polarization was also at its peak. The Afghan conflict started during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that was considered by the Capitalist world as an encroachment on its sphere of influence. Thus it decided to fight against the Soviet occupation to any extent and the Afghan jihad was fully supported; it was financed and supported by the USA, Great Britain, and their allies from all around the world. Pakistan became a frontline state for that war as Muslim fighters from all over joined the war to liberate Afghanistan. The war brought misery, poverty and destruction and turned millions of Afghans into refugees in neighboring Iran and Pakistan and other countries of the world. It also introduced poppy cultivation in Afghanistan as the United States

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wanted to finance the war through yields from Afghan soil due to lessons learnt from losses in Vietnam. Moreover, a Kalashnikov and drug culture was introduced not only in Afghanistan, but rather, the entire region.¹

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 Afghanistan suffered further due to internal rivalries among various ethnic groups. The damage to life and property during the 1990s was greater than that during the decade of Soviet occupation. As Ahmad Rashid notes, “The massacre of the ethnic groups amongst each other during the period 1994-98 had created a historical hatred, which had damaged the national and religious prestige.”² From 1998 on, the Taliban controlled the law and order situation in the country and controlled the production and use of poppy. During their rule the American gas giant UNOCOL was interested in a gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan,³ but the deal was not finalized due to unknown reasons. Meanwhile Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda also appeared on the Afghan screen and further frustrated hopes of restoration of peace, security and development. This background reflects that conflict torn countries always need to create a peaceful environment as a strong pre-requisite for overall reconstruction. If this is delayed, more complex issues arise, as is happening in Afghanistan today. This paper primarily focuses on issues related to reconstruction of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11, highlighting issues of governance, drug-trafficking, energy, reconstruction and economy. It will also include the role of the regional countries and the international community in this regard.

Emergence of a realization to reconstruct Afghanistan

A strong realization has emerged among the international community after 9/11 that a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in everyone's interests. Indeed, there is a danger that if the country is not reconstructed it will fall again in the hands of extremist elements. Thus, there should be a proper politico-administrative setup for the Afghan people to give them good governance, a judicial system, proper security forces, and economic, trade and industrial infrastructure development. This realization is also reflected in the notion that war is not the solution to win hearts and minds of the people. The process started with the Bonn Conference held in Germany in 2002. Many countries participated in the conference, including USA, Italy, Turkey, Germany and Afghanistan and the main purpose of the conferences conducted by the international community since then was to help rebuild the infrastructure of Afghanistan. The Afghan delegation included politicians, warlords, intellectuals, businessmen and others.

In the conference six major points vital for development and rebuilding the war-torn Afghan society were discussed. They were:

- Reorganizing the Afghan military forces,
- The establishment of ISAF,
- Protecting human rights,
- Establishment of the Afghan Human Rights Commission
- The Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly), and
- Issues related to governance.⁴

Aid conferences on Afghanistan: Tokyo 2001 to London 2010

The Tokyo conference was the first international conference of donors on Afghanistan with the main aim to provide financial help to the country. The two day international conference was held on 21-22 January 2002, and was attended by ministers and representatives from nearly 61 countries and 21 international organizations. The Afghan delegation was represented by President Hamid Karzai and his ministers and they identified the key areas that needed attention and foreign aid. These included: (1) administrative capacity, like improving salaries and improving government administration, (2) education, especially for girls, (3) health and sanitation, (4) infrastructure development including roads, electricity and telecommunication, (5) improving the economic system, and (6) agriculture and rural development.⁵

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Before the conference it was estimated that initially Afghanistan needed USD 1.7-2 billion per year and it could go as high as USD 20 billion for the next ten years.⁶ From 2001 until 2011, Japan alone has given nearly USD 3.15 billion of aid which was spent on different sectors including agriculture, education, health, culture, transportation and security.⁷ However, it is not easy to disarm militias as their rivalry is based on ethnicity and it will take time to fully integrate the warring and armed militias into the Afghan society. After Tokyo a number of small and large conferences have held during the next ten years in different countries in Asia, Europe and America. All were focused on assessing the situation, gauging the progress on reconstruction and making further pledges.

During 2006 an international conference was held in London on January 31-February 1, in which more than fifty countries and international and regional organizations participated.⁸ They discussed issues related to security, governance, human rights, social and economic development etc. This was the first conference to be held in London and its aim was to develop Afghanistan's infrastructure, improve law and order, social and economic development and to control the production and smuggling and use narcotic drugs.

During 2007 another conference was held in Rome, Italy on the revival of the Afghan judiciary system, which was completely destroyed after the US invasion. This conference discussed many key issues and additional gaps within the judicial system, where the main issues are the salary support, infrastructure and office equipment, public awareness, codes of ethics and financial management and also other challenges like building the legislator process, institutional strategies and coordination, capacity building, legal education and training.⁹ This first step of the international community to rebuild the judicial system would be to address problems faces by the common Afghans. The conference also announced the decision to provide \$360 million to support short term projects and also to provide more funds to implement the National Justice Program.¹⁰

The last international conference in this trend was held in London on January 28, 2010. After so many conferences and declarations, this was another step to bring Afghanistan on a path of infrastructure and economic development. The main aims of the conference were to increase the number of security forces in Afghanistan, to improve governance and effectiveness of aid, and to persuade the neighboring countries to help in restoring peace in Afghanistan.¹¹ Delegates from nearly 70 countries were present at the conference and they highlighted major points including security, governance and development, corruption, increasing security forces up to 171,600 in the Afghan National Army and buttress the Afghan National Police with up to 134,000 personnel.¹² This conference stressed the need to increase the strength of Afghan National Security Forces by providing training, logistical support and financial support. It was also decided to rebuild the infrastructure of Afghanistan including roads, railways, and electric transmission lines and also to connect it to its neighboring states. With the help of the Asian Development Bank, the feasibility study of the Hairatan and Mazar-e-Sharif railway link which connects Uzbekistan and Afghanistan was also approved. With this conference emerged the consensus that security responsibility was to be given to Afghanistan, and that the solution needed to go beyond military options.¹³ It also acknowledged that a stable, secure and democratic

Afghanistan can act as a land bridge to South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia to increase trade, energy and diplomatic relations among regional countries in particular and the world as a whole. It is also essential to note that the Taliban rejected the conference as meaningless.

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In 2011, the Bonn II conference was held in December and from the outset there were doubts about its outcomes. This conference was focusing on increasing the security forces, reconstruction and infrastructure development. Pakistan was also supposed to participate in the conference but in protest against the unfortunate incident on the Pak-Afghan border in which 26 Pakistani soldiers were killed,¹⁴ it opted out. Since the first Bonn conference was held in 2001, there has been little sign of progress in increasing the strength of Afghan security forces, reconstruction and infrastructure development in northern Afghanistan but no development had taken place in southern Afghanistan where the

Taliban are present, and hence these aspects were seen as essential for detailed discussions. The conference was attended by nearly 85 countries and 15 international organizations, and the international community and Afghanistan decided to deepen and broaden their partnership to a new level as the “Transition to the Transformation decade 2015-2024” was initiated.¹⁵ The conference discussed major issues related to the stability of Afghanistan and the world, including governance, security, peace process, economic and social development and regional cooperation.¹⁶

Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA)

RECCA, or Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, was another peace and reconstruction initiative taken at regional level. This conference was first called by Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2005 in Kabul. The basic purpose of establishment of this forum was to facilitate trade, energy, road and railway linkages among neighboring and regional countries. It was hoped that it would boost trade cooperation, establish energy projects and also improve diplomatic ties

between these countries. Since its creation, nearly four conferences have been held:

- 2005 in Kabul, Afghanistan
- 2006 in New Delhi, India
- 2009 in Islamabad, Pakistan and
- 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey

These conferences provided opportunities to the regional community to help Afghanistan in resolving its problems in rebuilding its infrastructure, economy, agriculture cooperation, rebuilding educational institutions, mining, health facilities, anti-narcotics measures, capacity building and border management. In the first RECCA conference, it was decided to start cooperation with regional countries in fields like trade, energy and power development, trade facilitation, energy transport, transportation and enhancing the business climate.¹⁷ The importance of this conference was to develop the infrastructure of Afghanistan through the financial assistance from the international community.

The second RECCA conference was held in New Delhi with Afghanistan as co-host, and regional countries and members of regional and international organizations were also present. The two day conference that was held on November 18-19, 2006, has also become known as the “New Delhi Declaration”. The main aim of this declaration was to make Afghanistan an energy hub and trade corridor and the declaration urged the neighboring countries to help in facilitating road and air traveling facilities.¹⁸ The conference was attended by Pakistan, Iran, China and members of G8 industrialized countries and donor agencies. TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline was also discussed, as the conference paved the way for a third RECCA conference to be held in Islamabad in 2009.

The Islamabad conference was held on May 13-14, 2009, where future projects connecting the neighboring states to Afghanistan were discussed. Afghanistan has a strategic location which connects South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia, which could benefit both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The main aim of this conference was to promote mutual cooperation in different fields like education, mining, infrastructure development etc. It was attended by high level delegates from nearly 20 countries, and members from 18 different international aid and donor agencies. This conference successfully moved a number of long term regional projects related to railway transportations, energy sector and also the establishment

of Customs Academy in Kabul, signing of Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) and building Border Economic Zones around Afghanistan.¹⁹ The United States along with three European countries also attended this conference and an invitation was sent to United Arab Emirates as well. Strategic infrastructure projects were also highlighted, including CASA 1000 electricity transmission line, Jalalabad-Torkham railway line, and Uzbek-Afghan railway link.

The fourth RECCA conference was held in Istanbul Turkey from 2-3 November 2010. It had the same objectives as the previous RECCA conferences and was attended by 27 countries and 14 international organizations.²⁰ It focused on regional cooperation among the Afghan neighbors to help the war battered country in economic, health, education, human resource development and infrastructure development. In the “Istanbul Declaration” it was decided that regional cooperation in other fields like infrastructure development, health, border liaison offices, and energy would be given more attention.²¹ The conference also endorsed all the previous RECCA conferences’ declarations on Afghanistan.

RECCA was not as successful as it should have been, given its realistic and suitable focus on regional countries. This was since it focused only on economic development, infrastructural improvements, narcotics, building bridges and gas pipelines, and the growth of trade among regional countries. These were all worthy aims, but they missed the one essential element that serves as the prerequisite to such initiatives, i.e. political stability. There was no mention of any process of reconciliation with the Taliban, or of bringing political stability through other means and economic development appeared to be an end in itself. RECCA failed to acknowledge that economic development cannot be achieved without having adequate security, which in turn comes as a result of political stability.

Role of the Regional Countries

Pakistan

Pakistan wants peace and stability in Afghanistan because it has suffered tremendously from the Afghan conflict. It has always tried and supported every effort aimed at creating peace despite a very bitter history of relations with Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Pak-Afghan relations have been at times tense due to insurgencies from the tribal areas. Pakistan had already voiced its concern

over the Afghan situation, and called for the international community to address these concerns.

On a bilateral level, the first Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) was signed in 1965 between the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan; this was first major step in trade between the two countries. Pakistan can provide easy access to Afghan and Central Asian states through its Karachi and Gawadar Deep Sea ports. But there is little official bilateral traded compared to the volume of informal trade, with the huge volume of illegal trade harming Pakistani local industry.²² Pakistan is losing millions of dollars in taxes annually due to smuggling of goods

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under the old Pakistan Afghan Transit Trade Agreement of 1965, has now planned to work on long term infrastructure projects like building roads and railway links to Afghanistan and Central Asian states. This will increase bilateral trade and also increase people to people contact. Pakistan had invested millions of dollars in projects like in education, railway link, health facilities and in providing scholarships to Afghan students,²³ and has already opened three border points with to increase trade and people to people contacts. Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan was nearly \$2 billion in 2010-11, which had increased from 25 million dollars during the Taliban regime.²⁴

Iran

Iran shares a 936 km long border with Afghanistan. It also shares a common culture and language with the people of western Afghanistan, where it has always had deep ethnic and sectarian influence. There are, however, many problems such as border and water issues. There are two rivers flowing from Afghanistan to Iran, i.e. Helmand and Harirud, and water sharing is disputed. Iran does not want water to be stopped since this will affect its agricultural lands. During the Taliban period, it entered inside Afghanistan and excavated nearly 30 km of Helmand River to increase the flow of water into Iran.²⁵ Iran also fears that if the Salama dam is built on the Harirud River it will disrupt water flow.²⁶ Iran had cut relations with

Afghanistan during the Taliban rule because it suspected that the Shia sect was under attack by the Taliban.

After the 9/11 attacks, Iran supported the US against the war on terrorism. After the downfall of the Taliban government, Iran wholeheartedly supported the Afghan government in building infrastructure. It gave millions of dollars between 2002-2008 in aid and soft loans.²⁷ Iran also hosts mostly Persian speaking Afghan refugees who have taken refuge in its territory since the Soviet invasion. Due to Iran's influence in Afghanistan, Americans have suspicious of anti-west activities and accuse Tehran of supporting insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Iran is also constructing a Zaranj-Delaram highway which connects Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chabahar.²⁸ This will provide an opportunity for Afghanistan to increase its exports but also to reduce its dependence on the Pakistani seaport. A cause of concern for Iran is the opium production in Afghanistan. Iran is facing many problems in controlling the drug trade; in 2009 they seized nearly 590 tons of opium, 23 tons of morphine and 25 tons of heroin coming from bordering provinces of Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁹

China

Afghanistan and China share the most difficult border in the region, i.e. the Wakhan corridor which has a length of about 74 km. It is the ancient silk route, which was used for trade for thousands of years. China first established its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan nearly 50 years ago but these broke down due to the Taliban government in Kabul. After 9/11, China showed keen interest in developing Afghanistan, which borders the Chinese Muslim inhabited region of Xinjiang.³⁰ After the opening of its mission in Kabul in 2002, China provided millions of dollars of aid as Economic and Technical assistance to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2009 and written of \$75 million dollars of debt as its grant for the next five years.³¹ China is also investing in Afghanistan's infrastructure development, mining, energy, health sector, and communication sector by spending millions of dollars. China has started work on three major projects in Afghanistan including the \$3.5 billion Aynak Copper Mine, a 400 Megawatt Coal power plant and constructing a railway line from western China via Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Pakistan.³² This railway line will help the four countries in increasing trade, importing raw materials and improving people to people contacts. China's strategic interests in Afghanistan include the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking; these are major issues affecting China's security interests in the region.³³ China's major interest is to prevent extremist elements in

Afghanistan from entering into the Xinjiang province.

India

During the Cold War, both India and Afghanistan were part of the Soviet bloc that created problems for Pakistan's security. Both countries pursued an anti-Pakistan policy, with Afghanistan claiming its ownership of the Pashtun territory and carrying out anti-Pakistan campaigns amongst the Pashtuns – acts that did not succeed. Before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both India and Afghanistan had friendly relations and cooperated in the fields of banking, trade, agriculture, commerce, sports, health, education and cultural exchanges.³⁴ During 1990s their relations with Afghanistan came to an end after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. But after the downfall of the Taliban, India again established relations with Afghanistan by providing support to anti-Taliban forces which captured Kabul with the help of US and NATO-led forces. Since 2001, India has spent nearly \$2 billion on Afghanistan in sectors like law and order, infrastructure development, economic development, security and governance and participation etc.³⁵ This has helped improve relations between Afghanistan and India. Almost all neighboring, and regional countries are involved in Afghanistan directly or indirectly, protecting their own interest, e.g. India is involved in Afghanistan to gain influence and by pass Pakistan's genuine security interests in Afghanistan.³⁶ India has also been working on many different infrastructure projects like constructing the new Afghan Parliament, building Salama dam for energy purposes and also financing the construction of Zaranj-Delaram road in Western Afghanistan.³⁷

Russia

After the fall of the Taliban government in 2002, Russia began to support the US-NATO led coalition against terrorism, as it feared that extremist elements might spread to its territory. Russia's main interest is to control corruption, drug trafficking and Islamic extremism. After the fall of the Taliban, both countries had signed nearly 17 agreements concerning the construction and restoration of infrastructure development, delivery of agricultural machines and equipment, energy projects and other projects.³⁸ Despite claims by Afghan authorities on the reduction of drug production, Russia still suffers from this menace of drugs and nearly 2.5 million Russians are drug addicts, with nearly 30,000 young people dying every year due to drug usage.³⁹ Russia also has taken keen interest in participating in major regional projects like TAPI and the transmission line from both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan etc.

Central Asian States

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are the three Central Asian States that have borders with Afghanistan. They are rich in energy and mineral resources and their potential, if realized, could lead to multiple benefits both regionally and internationally.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan became an independent state after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 and slowly started diplomatic relations with other states. It later joined international and regional organizations like Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), UN and SCO. Uzbekistan has plenty of natural resources including oil, gas and metallic minerals which could benefit Afghanistan, Pakistan and the world as a whole. It is one of the top ten gas producers in the world with an estimated 66.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and also has nearly 596 million barrels of oil reserves.⁴⁰ Uzbekistan has a 137 km long border with Afghanistan, and enjoyed good relations before the Taliban government. After 9/11, Uzbekistan re-established its diplomatic and trade relations but trade fluctuated tremendously; in 2002 the trade volume was nearly 61.5 million dollars but after a period of two years it had fallen to 19.3 million dollars⁴¹ as internal conflicts reduced the trade potential. Uzbekistan constructed a railway line which has connected Haritan to Mazar-e-Sharif at a cost of \$ 165 million. The 75 KM Railway line which was inaugurated in late 2010, which has connected Afghanistan to both Asian and European markets. This land mark project was completed in less than a year with great cooperation from both the Afghan government and general afghan public.⁴² This will not only increase contact between the two countries, but also connect other states like Pakistan and Iran to develop their relations in other fields like infrastructure development, counter drug-trafficking, cooperation against terrorism and extremism. Uzbekistan's minerals resources will also benefit the whole region once peace returns to Afghanistan as Uzbekistan is a major producer of both metallic and non-metallic minerals; copper, lithium and Tungsten are included in metallic minerals while non-metallic minerals include are gemstones, industrial minerals and mineral fuels etc.⁴³ There are two

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major mining and metallurgical complexes operating in Uzbekistan, namely the Almalyk mining and metallurgical complex and Navoi mining and metallurgical complex. Almalyk mining and metallurgical complex is now operating on three different mines in Uzbekistan, including the two copper mines of Kalmakyr and the Sary-Cheku copper deposits in Toshkent Viloyati [Province] and the Uchkulach lead-zinc-barite deposit in the Jizzax region in Uzbekistan. These three mines produce different kinds of metallic minerals including gold, silver, copper, zinc, rhenium, selenium, sulfur, tellurium, molybdenum, and indium.⁴⁴ Uzbekistan is also producing other metallic and non-metallic minerals like uranium, lithium, manganese, oil and gas, iodine etc.⁴⁵

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is another Central Asian Republic which gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It is also a member of many international and regional organizations. Turkmenistan is participating in Afghanistan's infrastructure development and reconstruction projects. Turkmenistan has one of the largest deposits of gas in the world, with estimated reserves of about 101 trillion cubic feet of gas and also has nearly 546 million barrels of oil.⁴⁶

Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have agreed to expand cooperation in other fields like energy, infrastructure development, providing education to Afghan students in Turkmen institutions, boosting economic ties and cooperation against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking.⁴⁷ After 9/11, Turkmenistan considers drug-trafficking and extremism as a big problem and has been facing difficulties in controlling the flow of drugs from Afghanistan because of corruption, and also the opposition to its claims that officials are involved in smuggling drugs as well.⁴⁸

Tajikistan

Tajikistan shares a 1030km long border with Afghanistan, but the two countries share limited trade due to civil wars in both. Tajikistan also faces the menace of drug-trafficking, as shown by the 2005 official figures given by counter-narcotics department of Soghd region's internal Affairs Directorate, which had captured nearly 235 kg of drugs.⁴⁹ Other than fighting extremism and terrorism, they also have trade relations, which are being expanded in other areas like energy cooperation and infrastructure development. Tajikistan plans to construct a major highway which will connect Shirkhan Bandar to the Afghan capital Kabul. The highway is partially complete, and is built both by Chinese and Turkish companies

with US assistance, and is likely to be particularly useful for Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁵⁰ Tajikistan is rich in different metallic and non-metallic minerals which are major sources of its income; the mineral industry mainly consists of mining mineral ores which include aluminum, arsenic, boron, cement, celestine, coal, construction materials, semi-precious and decorative stones, strontium, tin, tungsten, uranium, while the country also has reserves of rare metals including germanium and gallium.⁵¹

Conclusion

Overall it can be concluded that there is enormous potential for regional countries to help Afghanistan reconstruct and revive. The proposed and initiated reconstruction and development projects for Afghanistan can bring about a great change in the lives of Afghans if peace is given a chance. Of course, reconstruction is a long process that can take decades and one should not expect overnight miracles. There is no denying that the international community, especially Afghanistan's neighbours, has expressed willingness to help Afghanistan. The fact, however, remains that certain factors are seriously hampering the reconstruction process. There is widespread sense of uncertainty as the bare minimum requirements of peace and self-sufficiency have not been met. Inefficiency, poor governance, corruption, nepotism, political and ethnic polarization, and law and order are still big challenges. One fears the situation will further deteriorate after 2014 when foreign troops leave. The Taliban are not interested in negotiation as they feel victors after the announcement of withdrawal date. More important than the future power sharing arrangement is the stability, security and reconstruction of the country. The role, influence and vested interests of regional actors, in this regard, cannot be ignored in the future state of affairs in Afghanistan.

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