AFGHANISTAN *AGONISTES*:
THE MANY STAKES IN A THIRTY YEARS WAR

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A CENTURY FOUNDATION REPORT

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The Century Foundation Project on Afghanistan in Its Regional and Multilateral Dimensions

This paper is one of a series commissioned by The Century Foundation as part of its project on Afghanistan in its regional and multilateral dimensions. This initiative is examining ways in which the international community may take greater collective responsibility for effectively assisting Afghanistan's transition from a war-ridden failed state to a fragile but reasonably peaceful one. The program adds an internationalist and multilateral lens to the policy debate on Afghanistan both in the United States and globally, engaging the representatives of governments, international nongovernmental organizations, and the United Nations in the exploration of policy options toward Afghanistan and the other states in the region.

At the center of the project is a task force of American and international figures who have had significant governmental, nongovernmental, or UN experience in the region, co-chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi and Thomas Pickering, respectively former UN special representative for Afghanistan and former U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Acknowledgments

This paper began to take shape after half the members of The Century Foundation's task force had taken part in a series of visits to Afghanistan and some of its neighbors, as an effort to organize and explore for the benefit of the entire task force the insights that various members were hearing along the way. I count myself fortunate in having had a most remarkable set of readers to comment on my first draft, whose critiques corrected or reshaped some of my own thinking: Lakhdar Brahimi, Jim Dobbins, Robert Finn, Larry Korb, Sadako Ogata, Tom Pickering, and Francesc Vendrell. No one working on Afghanistan's contemporary political and diplomatic developments could dream of having better advisers, and I thank them for it.

Since 1946, Afghanistan has headed the list, at least alphabetically, of United Nations member states. Since 1979, its bitter conflicts have topped the list of threats to international peace and security that have actively engaged UN member states. During this time, its cycle of violence has killed, injured, or displaced millions of Afghans, and drawn in a procession of outsiders to "help" the cause of one side or another, not always benevolently. Over the past decade, since helping oust a regime that had hosted the world's most notorious terrorist network, the international community has drawn together to assist Afghans in their country's reconstruction. However, the persistence of deep divisions and the resurgent violence in recent years have taxed the patience and resources of many of the country's increasingly bewildered foreign friends.

No one's patience and resources have been taxed more, of course, than those of long-suffering Afghans themselves, who believe (with some justice) that the succession of foreign friends and foreigners' priorities over the years has contributed to their country's predicament. Thirty years of war and upheaval have devastated what had been one of the world's poorest and least developed countries even before the deadly downward spiral of violence and vengeance began. Despite the profound ideological, ethnic, and personal chasms that separate them, most Afghans share a yearning for an end to their country's fratricidal agony. They rightly believe it is long past time to restore peace to Afghanistan.

This will not be easy. Over the past third of a century, two drivers have propelled the tragic politics of Afghanistan: an intense and often intolerant ideological fervor that gives little space for alternative views, and a winner-take-all triumphalism that brooks no compromise with weaker opponents. Since the last king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, was exiled to Rome in 1973, the tenure of every Afghan leader has ended in a spasm of violence, often in a hail of bullets, and sometimes in the leader's grisly death.[1] The Leninist true believers who seized power in 1978 so lustily exterminated critics of their revolutionary project that even their Soviet backers urged them to halt the firing squads[2]; they scarcely understood that their forced march toward socialism was in the headwinds of an Islamist storm surge sweeping the Muslim world that would capture the Iranian revolution. Their mujahideen opponents (and the mujahideen's suppliers in

Washington and Islamabad) were so convinced that the communist Kabul government would collapse instantly after the departure of Soviet troops that they stonewalled UN mediators' efforts to craft an all-party settlement—only to find the government of Mohammad Najibullah considerably more durable than they imagined.

The true believers in an ancient ideal of Islamic society, who swept to power in the mid-1990s, unflinchingly suppressed doubters, modernizers, heretics, and sinners. Refusing all compromise when they held the whip hand, they were confident of eliminating the last pockets of opposition just when their foreign guests' attacks on New York and Washington upended them. In turn, a popular successor government, deterred by American backers scorning the vanquished as "dead-enders,"[3] failed to reach out to the battered but unbowed remnants of the Taliban regime as a new constitution was fashioned. And as insurgents regained ground after 2005 in provinces across the country, many seemed intoxicated by the righteous prospect of inevitable victory—they saw no need to compromise with a corrupt Kabul government that they felt would collapse instantly after the departure of international troops.

This vicious circle of moral absolutism and winner-take-all triumphalism has kept Afghans fatally at each others' throats for more than thirty years. But foreign hands have fueled those conflicts, decade after decade, sometimes cynically and usually misguidedly. The Soviets imagined they could "normalize" Afghanistan with a quick show of force to shore up Kabul's communist zealots. The Americans thought they could bleed the Soviets white—and avenge the fall of Saigon—by arming mujahideen. The Pakistanis wanted to drive India's superpower ally out of Afghanistan to prevent their own country's encirclement. "Arab Afghans," initially recruited by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (and armed by the United States) to bedevil the Soviets, subsequently sought sanctuary to wage global jihad; and so on. All of these intervening foreigners of course had the interests of their Afghan allies at heart, but they were also playing on regional and global chessboards where Afghanistan's own well-being rarely entered policymakers' strategic calculus.

Only after the expulsion of al Qaeda, at the end of 2001, did much of the world community rally to support Afghanistan's economic and social development. Yet even

today, foreign donors' substantial aid for Afghanistan's reconstruction is dwarfed by their mammoth but arguably evanescent investment in security. Through the United Nations, the international community has sought to create a framework for harnessing nations' and voluntary agencies' efforts in support of Afghan reconstruction. Yet persistent divisions among donors and Afghans have stymied the country's progress, as have the sometimes contradictory strategic concerns of their neighbors and friends.

Some of the strategic concerns those neighbors have about Afghanistan are readily understandable. Tons of opium, streams of trained terrorists, and tidal flows of refugees have poured from that stricken country. Other concerns reflect tensions among the neighbors themselves, projected into Afghanistan. In contrast to the 1980s, the period since 2001 has seen most countries' individual interests harmonized, with a handful of exceptions, in the United Nations' mandate. While it is Afghans who must address the despair and disaffection that have provided the kindling for an armed insurgency, the international community has urgent stakes in following through on its own professed commitment to realizing Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Even with the intensified fighting of recent years, peace should be possible in Afghanistan. The international community has successfully contained and then resolved a number of murderously intractable conflicts—Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Bosnia-Herzegovina are but a few. Afghanistan is a particularly challenging case, but not a hopeless one. In fact, the see-sawing military balance makes the prospect of achieving peace now visible on the horizon—and this should be no mirage.

The Afghan Mosaic in 2011

Nine years ago, when an international conference in Bonn drew representatives from a number of interested Afghan political factions—except, fatefully, the just-ousted Taliban—there was remarkable convergence internationally about the need to join together to support the fragile new political order: even Iranians and Americans came

together in common purpose. Afghans, too, especially in the cities, seemed relieved by the fall of the Taliban's puritanical "emirate" and optimistic about the prospects for peace and prosperity, which the international community's new engagement appeared to presage. Hopes were high that the new government—skewed at the start toward the newly re-empowered northern-based militia factions—would work to achieve a better balance to reflect Afghanistan's ethnic realities, and that, with international help, could reverse the country's steep decline of the previous quarter century.

As the decade ends, however, relief has turned to foreboding, and enthusiasm to despair. Precipitously falling turnout in Afghanistan's presidential and parliamentary elections—five million fewer voters in 2009 than four years earlier—is a telling indicator of public disillusionment, as Afghans' confidence in their political leaders has plummeted.

But the international community too has stumbled badly. The hard-forged unity of purpose was strained, just weeks after the end of the Bonn conference, by Washington speechwriters' discovery of a putative axis of evil. The international "footprint" was so light—indeed, outside Kabul, it was invisible —that self-dealing militia leaders, which had been armed and funded by the United States to help drive out al Qaeda and the Taliban, quickly filled the security vacuum and re-entrenched themselves around the country. A division of reconstruction responsibilities among four Western "lead countries"—aggravated by an allergy to "nation-building"—yielded more incoherence than results. And Washington's wandering eye had already focused on Iraq, which not only deprived Afghanistan of attention and resources, but quickly inflamed suspicions of American purposes throughout the Muslim world, including among Afghans.

Afghanistan's Islamic Republic

The Bonn conference sidelined Zahir Shah and Burhanuddin Rabbani, both of whom had hoped to reclaim former roles as head of state, and the Afghan factions represented there agreed to accept Hamid Karzai as head of an interim government until a new political order could be suitably constituted. In the meantime, the surge

of Northern Alliance militias across the country was creating facts on the ground, so that the effort to create a constitutional regime had to face power relationships already forged from armed militias and patron-client bonds.

The *loya jirga* that approved a constitution for Afghans' Islamic republic in 2004 took up a draft fashioned by a commission appointed by President Karzai, with considerable encouragement from the representatives of the international community, led by UN special representative Lakhdar Brahimi and U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. Civil society was modestly represented at the *jirga*, where provincial bosses and the resurgent mujahideen warlords had a disproportionate say. Conspicuously absent from the *jirga* were the ousted Taliban, whose leaders had agreed that they "should go and join the process" that got under way in 2003—but whom neither the Afghan government nor its international defenders "saw any reason to engage" and whose representatives faced risk of arrest.[4]

Despite the limitations of the process, the constitution prescribed an Islamic state in which human rights and democratic principles are deeply embedded. These provisions appear to enjoy wide public support, particularly among Afghanistan's literate minority. But support for the Kabul government established under the constitution is far more precarious. The modernizers in Afghan society—businessmen, educators, and professionals in particular—are a core constituency of the republican régime, though many are dispirited by the rampant corruption and unresponsiveness they see in the government. The Afghan diaspora, too, which initially provided sorely needed talents and resources for the new republic, continues to back the government, though perhaps with similarly diminished enthusiasm.

There may be more motivation among the patronage networks of Afghans who have gained government jobs, public contracts, or influence over the allocation of those jobs and contracts. The presidency has vast appointment powers under the constitution, and President Karzai has astutely deployed those powers to cement the support, if not always loyalty, of regional strongmen and an emerging business elite for him and the central government. The international community's lavish spending on security and its investments in development have helped triple the country's

gross domestic product, fueling a boom that nourishes the constituency reliant on political access. This constituency, amplified by the republic's own swelling security establishment, continues to support the government, at least insofar as it can keep the international community's financial resources flowing.

Still, civil society and beneficiaries of presidential patronage comprise only a small share of the country's population. As the Islamic republic confronts a startlingly resilient Taliban insurgency, it counts on the support of a much broader swath of Afghans who suffered directly under the Taliban emirate, and remember it unforgivingly as harshly repressive, small-minded, backward, and impoverishing. Women in particular suffered major restrictions and disempowerment under the Taliban régime, and are presumed to have a deep stake in the republic's success. But there is little evidence that women in the countryside can mobilize effectively to support the republic, or even care to, and it is not clear that, among themselves, Kabul's leaders see women seriously as a power resource against the Taliban challenge apart from the backing they can elicit from foreign governments.[5]

The other mass constituency that retains bitter memories of Taliban brutality is the majority of the population composed of the country's non-Pashtun minorities. Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens were recruiting grounds of the Northern Alliance resistance to the Taliban in the 1990s, and their opposition to a Taliban reconquest of power remains vehement. They are acutely sensitive to Pashtun pretenses to entitlement to rule, as the largest ethnic group in the country, and they see the hated Taliban as driven to dominate not just by religious but also by ethnic zealotry. Problematically, they are seen as particularly overrepresented in the senior ranks of the Kabul government's burgeoning security forces.

In fact, the disproportionate Tajik presence at the helm of the government's security forces reinforces concern in some quarters that the old anti-Taliban Northern Alliance remains at the core of the reigning Kabul coalition. The sorry record of mujahideen commanders in battling for control of the carcass of post-Najibullah Kabul was a major factor in persuading many Afghans (as well as the Pakistani intelligence services) to welcome the Taliban after 1994. Though Northern Alliance fighters were

roundly defeated by the Taliban, they continued desperately to battle the emirate's forces as they were pressed into their last redoubt in 2001. It was only al Qaeda's assaults of September 11 that triggered a determined American response that helped catapult Northern Alliance leaders back into power. Whether the old alliance could reconstitute itself as a coherent fighting force in opposition to a Taliban deal after nearly a decade of being integrated into a relatively inclusive government is unclear—it scarcely cohered when it was fighting for its life in the late 1990s—but leading alliance alumni have been the most vehement critics of compromise with the Taliban enemy.

Perhaps the most important constituency for President Karzai's government is external: the international community, whose assistance has been indispensable for the revival of the Afghan economy and for the survival of the republican régime. To be sure, it did not prevent the Northern Alliance militia leaders from reinstalling themselves in Kabul at the end of 2001, a failure whose repercussions for Afghanistan's political reconstruction still reverberate, but it is the international community—the United States, the European Union, Japan, and the United Nations—that has repeatedly pressed for openness and inclusivity in Kabul as President Karzai has navigated the claims of the régime's various power centers. Relations between Karzai and his international allies have become increasingly strained, however, as the president has vocally challenged their military forces' conduct in the field (on which Karzai has seemed to demonstrate a canny appreciation of Afghan public opinion)—and as his international allies have challenged the government's increasing sclerosis of corruption, of which the looting of the Kabul Bank by associates of the regime, unmasked in 2010, provided a glaring and potentially economically crippling example.[6]

A unified international community has afforded the Karzai government recognition and legitimacy—something it had notably denied to the Taliban emirate—and it has tangibly supported the fledgling republic with massive security and development assistance, all too often channeled around the government it is meant to sustain. The decision by Western troop contributors to continue their security presence until 2014 has created space for an orderly transition of responsibility, and,

in apparent recognition of the urgent need to shape up a flaccid public administration, Karzai has turned to one of Afghanistan's most internationally respected technocrats to restore state effectiveness.[7] But, inevitably, the régime's apparent dependence on foreign protection and funding undercuts its national legitimacy in many Afghans' eyes—and is one of the most insistent themes of insurgent propaganda against it.

The Taliban Insurgency

At the heart of the Taliban insurgency remains the religious zeal that gave birth to the movement fifteen years ago, even as it now also wraps itself in the mantle of nationalism. Nine years after his flight from Kandahar, the leader of the ousted emirate, Mullah Mohammad Omar, couches the continuing struggle as a fight for Islam itself, as well as for the nation: "The current Jihad and resistance in Afghanistan against the foreign invaders and their puppets, is a legitimate Jihad, being waged for the defense of the sovereignty of the Islamic country and Islam"; "faith," he emphasizes, is triumphing over "infidels."[8] The primary source of recruits for the Taliban, especially in the discouraging days following the movement's humiliatingly rapid loss of power, has been clerical—both madrasa clerics and their students—though with Taliban resurgence recruitment has snowballed beyond that clerical base, especially among disfranchised and frustrated village youths.[9]

The emirate rode to power in the mid-1990s on a wave of public disgust with the rapacious mujahideen who had taken to fighting each other as furiously as they had earlier fought the Soviets. Many Afghans welcomed the rectitude, seeming purity of intentions, and even incorruptibility of the madrassa students—*taliban*—who were mobilized to take their country back from warring warlords. Their leaders vowed to "live a life like the Prophet lived 1400 years ago," seeking no pay, "just food, clothes, shoes, and weapons"[10]—Islamic Franciscans, with guns. From the start, they drew the attention and support of Pakistani intelligence services, but indignantly resisted Pakistani pressures for tactical alliances with warlord factions they viewed as tainted in order to defeat others.[11] Remarkably, they put the other factions to flight and established their model Muslim emirate.

Their rigid puritanism and harsh intolerance soon alienated much of the population, especially in the cities. The rejoicing at their ouster was not feigned, and many Afghans view them with dread. Today, however, when the issues said to be stoking public anger with the regime in Kabul are a widening inequality and pervasive corruption, the Taliban's claims of simplicity and righteousness make a stark contrast.

The Taliban's resurgence after 2005 is a testament to the faith and fervor of their committed cadre, to the ready supply of new recruits from madrassas in Pakistan, to the sagging performance of a Kabul government in which Afghans had put high hopes, and arguably to the fueling of Taliban recruitment in southern Afghanistan by a U.S. military strategy that for years relied heavily on forceful tactics such as air strikes and late-night house searches (over the Kabul government's objections) that yielded counterproductive civilian casualties and indignities. The refuge in Pakistan of the Taliban leaders who had led the 1990s emirate has given them a respite from the high-tech military pressures deployed by the Americans, although their relative safety is also creating a widening gulf from the fighters who regularly cross back into Afghanistan to attack ISAF troops, assassinate government officials, and enforce cooperation on rural villagers. The lethality of the expanded American troop deployments of 2009 and 2010 is taking a growing toll on the Taliban, unnerving to some who had thought they were signing onto a winning cause rather than martyrdom. But it may also be encouraging estrangement of the younger replacement commanders in the field from the middle-aged Taliban leaders in Quetta and Karachi who are not exposed to the new level of firepower, and who fret about a hot-headed generation that may challenge their authority.[12]

Beyond the ranks of religiously devout Sunnis, the Taliban retain a supportive constituency in the Pashtun heartland from which the movement sprang—a heartland that sprawls across the frontier with Pakistan. It was to blunt the Taliban's appeal to Pashtun nationalism that, after the emirate's ouster in late 2001, the international community was so insistent that a Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, be named to head the new government. But that government includes a far broader Afghan mosaic, fanning

some Pashtuns' suspicions that behind some decorative Pashtun faces lies an essentially Northern Alliance seizure of power—suspicions that the dispatch of Tajik and other non-Pashtun administrators or security personnel into Pashtun areas would often risk intensifying. Conversely, non-Pashtuns increasingly smolder at what they see as Karzai's growing tendency to appoint fellow Pashtuns to leading positions.

Pashtuns at least recognize Dari speakers as fellow Afghans. Far more alien are the foreign troops and foreign aid administrators who have flooded into Afghanistan to support the country's reconstruction and, specifically, the Kabul government. Aside from Turkish contingents, nearly all the troops in the International Security Assistance Force are non-Muslim ("infidels" in jihadi parlance), and while opinion research in Afghanistan found surprising tolerance for the Americans and their NATO allies early in the last decade, more recently that tolerance has been wearing thin. In the countryside in particular, tactical reliance on air strikes called in by U.S. ground forces encountering small arms fire, or based on tips from sometimes dubious informers, exacted a significant toll in civilian casualties—and has reportedly been a boon to Taliban recruiters of local fighters.

Long shrugged off in NATO capitals as a regrettable but inevitable transaction cost of war, the civilian casualties generated outrage in the Afghan public and prompted vehement protests from the Afghan government. Yet Kabul's apparent impotence in asserting the nation's sovereignty over its foreign protectors seemed only to validate Taliban propaganda. Only in 2009 did U.S. force commanders themselves move to restrict air support tightly in belated acknowledgment of its adverse strategic consequences.

The insurgency finds its unity in the supreme goal of expelling the foreigners from Afghanistan (or at least expelling the Westerners; the emirate's own dependence on its foreign friends in al Qaeda, and the bases it had given them, was an irritant to many Afghans when it held sway in Kabul). It is the most insistent theme of Taliban rhetoric, the one appeal on which the insurgency can claim the patriotic high ground against a government that, for all its infirmities, still rates higher in public opinion than the emirate.

Beyond Afghan nationalism, however, the insurgency has its own fissures. The Haqqani network pays formal obeisance to the leadership of the old emirate based in the Quetta Shura, but is operationally independent of it—and far more dependent than Quetta on the Pakistani intelligence services.[13] The most closely linked of all the Taliban factions to al Qaeda ideology, Haqqani is responsible for most of the brazen suicide attacks against Afghan civilians. The faction of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—a career mujahideen who received more covert financing from the United States and Saudi Arabia in the anti-Soviet war than any other faction leader, and who has made and betrayed countless allies ever since—seems to be waging its own private war.

Assessing a Decade

In power, the Taliban's emirate ruled a country with low crime rates—but also with extraordinarily low scores on economic opportunity, schooling, health, access to communications and electricity, and even drinking water. Thanks both to its appeal to educated and entrepreneurial Afghans and to its close partnerships with the international community, the successor republic has registered significant gains in all these areas.

Gross domestic product more than tripled, from $4 billion in 2002 to $13.4 billion in 2009; agricultural production (exclusive of poppy) grew from 2.4 million metric tons in 2000–01 to 5.3 million in 2007-08; and the value of agricultural exports went from $95 million in 2000 to $188 million in 2007.[14] The number of students in primary and secondary schools has sextupled, from less than 1 million in 2001 (virtually all of them boys) to 6.3 million in 2009 (a third of them girls).[15] Child mortality rates have fallen from 257 deaths per thousand live births in 2003 to 161 deaths in 2008, and adult life expectancy has grown by two years (to a still alarming forty-four years).[16] The number of Afghans with telephone service soared from 1 million in 2002 to over 12 million in 2010. The country's electrical capacity when the new government took over, 243 megawatts, was barely half what Afghanistan was able to generate when the war against the communist régime began in 1979; by 2009, total installed capacity had quadrupled, to 1028.5 megawatts. (Even so, only 15 percent of households in urban centers, and 6 percent in rural areas, have access to electricity.)

The country has registered gains in more subjective, less quantifiable areas as well. Despite its many flaws, the post-Bonn political system operates under formally democratic rules, assuring more space for civil society and for electoral success by political competitors than one finds in most of the world's poorest quartile of countries. The president's political opponents are no longer led before firing squads, instead competing against him and his supporters in elections that have been held more or less on schedule—albeit tainted by electoral fraud that independent commissions have had to step in to reverse. Media are free, and freely critical. Human rights are recognized and largely respected. Perhaps most strikingly, women—whose rights and status had advanced step by step under the monarchy, the Daoud republic, and the communist regime, only to be reversed by the mujahideen and harshly and totally eliminated by the Taliban emirate—have won back their space in the public sphere, schools, and employment, and indeed enjoy reserved seats in parliament and other political bodies to assure that women can have bargaining leverage in political life.

Of course, the political system is lubricated by the grease of patronage and corruption to a degree that shocks and offends not only foreigners but also many Afghans as well; and self-dealing by insiders, especially relatives of senior government officials, and the much more broadly based explosion of opium production both have corrupted and distorted the country's economy.

Afghans appear to have noticed the improvements, which track closely what they tell researchers are their biggest problems.[17] Even acknowledging the imprecision of survey research in a war-torn developing country with high levels of illiteracy, in-depth studies of public opinion provide revealing glimpses of the public mood. Perhaps no research has been more exhaustive than that sponsored by the Asia Foundation annually for the past five years, which has found over time a steady plurality convinced that the country is "moving in the right direction" (47 percent in 2010, a third successive year of rising confidence after earlier declines), compared to 27 percent believing things are going in the wrong direction (a proportion that remains, however, a third higher than in 2006). The main reasons respondents cite to justify their optimism are improvements in security (38 percent), seemingly paradoxically; progress on reconstruction and rebuilding (35 percent); and the opening of schools for girls (15 percent—though this is down by a third from 2009 levels). By nearly four-

to-one margins, they believe their economic situation has improved and they expect continued economic improvement.[18] On the other hand, the lead reason identified by Afghans who are gloomy about the country's direction is insecurity (cited by 42 percent of pessimistic respondents), followed by corruption (27 percent), and bad government (18 percent).

Tellingly, even the more upbeat respondents now despair of one of the principal gains they saw in Afghanistan five years ago: the percentage volunteering "peace" or an "end to the war" as a top reason for optimism about the country's direction has plummeted from 29 percent in 2006 to just 12 percent in 2010. The sharp increase in public disaffection with pervasive corruption should be triggering alarm bells around Kabul, since it is the one—perhaps the only—issue on which memories of Taliban rule contrast positively with assessments of the current regime. In 2010, 55 percent of respondents said corruption is a major problem in their daily lives, and 76 percent describe it as a major problem for the country as a whole.

Although the Afghan National Army appears to receive a share of public confidence that is more than that of any other public or political institution (90 percent favorable in 2010), this does not appear to be a judgment about its capacity to suppress the insurgency. Seventy percent of respondents assert that the government's army needs the support of foreign troops and cannot operate by itself; half say it is unprofessional and poorly trained. Indeed, the public seems to be far from demanding a military victory over the insurgency, with 83 percent of respondents declaring their support for negotiation and reconciliation with the insurgency (a notable increase from the 71 percent who backed negotiations in 2009).[19] On the other hand, research data suggest that the Taliban may have peaked too soon. While a remarkable 56 percent of respondents acknowledged in 2009 that they had at least some level of sympathy with the motivations of armed opposition groups, by 2010, the share holding that view had shrunk to 40 percent, with 55 percent declaring they have "no sympathy at all" for the violent opposition.[20]

These snapshots of Afghan public sentiment underscore that, quite apart from the situation on the battlefield, the country at large sees no future in a "military" solution to Afghanistan's political conflicts: Afghans have seen too many such "solutions," and

seen that none is sustainable. Perhaps more than leaders invested in victory, they appear to want a political reconciliation and settlement that will end the warfare and allow Afghanistan to build on the gains in economic and social reconstruction of the past decade. The question is whether the leaders of the men with guns, whether in Kabul or Quetta or elsewhere in the country or region, can see their way to compromise—and also whether the international partners and patrons that have protected and supported them over the past decade (and longer) will commit themselves, and encourage their Afghan allies, to pursuit of a compromise peace.

Circles of Concern: The International Stakes

Through the third quarter of the twentieth century, Afghanistan seemed a fairly stable country that followed a prudent policy of strict neutrality and nonalignment in the global ideological struggle between East and West. Although a border controversy with Pakistan smoldered—Afghanistan's rulers never recognized the British-drawn Durand Line as its boundary, and dreamed of uniting Pashtuns east of the line under their Pashtun monarchy[21]—Kabul was resolutely unthreatening to its other neighbors, which included the Soviet Union and China. It was also on good terms with the distant United States, and received aid from all three. But after their seizure of power in 1978, leftist radicals steered Afghanistan into a close alliance with the Soviet Union, whose subsequent intervention elevated Afghanistan to a top-tier global concern and touched off a furious scramble by others, in the region and beyond, to enter the fray. Today, the number of countries that see a stake in Afghanistan's future has multiplied, and peace can only come to Afghanistan if its neighbors will it.

Pakistan

Under the Islamizing military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan responded to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by enthusiastic support for its mujahideen opponents. It was the conduit for the weapons and financing that the United States,

Saudi Arabia, and religiously fervent Arab supporters directed to the Afghan "freedom fighters" waging jihad against the communists. Thus did Pakistan become, for the first time, a major factor among political factions inside Afghanistan—a role its intelligence services saw no need to relinquish even after the Soviets had left and the Americans had withdrawn their subsidies. If anything, the success in expelling the Soviets—the superpower ally of its visceral foe, India—resulting from its investment in jihadist militancy on its western border seemed to convince Islamabad's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate to see the nurturing of holy warriors as a promising weapon to deploy against Indian rule in Kashmir.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) became a patron of the Taliban movement that swept aside the bickering ex-mujahideen factions. Islamabad promptly extended diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime, and after the September 11 catastrophe, Pakistan's military government evacuated Taliban leaders along with its own military advisors as the emirate collapsed in the face of coordinated American and Northern Alliance operations.[22] As a consequence, Pakistan found itself isolated at the Bonn conference in December 2001 and unable to secure commanding influence—or any influence at all—over the new government taking shape in Kabul. Instead, the security establishment saw the Northern Alliance enemies it had helped the Taliban to oust now in the saddle and—most galling of all—re-opening relations with India. For most of the decade since, Pakistani authorities have provided sanctuary to the exiled Taliban leadership, tolerated if not supported Taliban re-equipment, and permitted if not directed Taliban fighters' attacks against Afghanistan and the international forces supporting its government.[23]

Though not a single Indian soldier has been deployed to Afghanistan in defense of the republican regime, Pakistan's military establishment sees a mortal danger of "encirclement," and accuses Indian secret services of fomenting unrest in Baluchistan across the ill-guarded Afghan border from their purported "bases" inside Indian consulates. Islamabad has seen a "friendly" government in Kabul as essential to Pakistan's own national security—by which it meant a government that would exclude, or at the very least seriously limit, any Indian influence or diplomatic presence. Relations between the government of General Pervez Musharraf and that of President Hamid

Karzai in Afghanistan were tense and hostile; U.S. President George Bush, a friend and ally of both men, was unable to coax them into civil relations even when he hosted the two as his guests.

Since the fall of its military government, Pakistanis have apparently been reappraising their stakes in Afghanistan. The country's elected leadership expresses strong support for improving relations with the elected government in Afghanistan (and, for that matter, with India), and claims to see a common foe in a jihadist ideology contemptuous of liberal democracy that drives Taliban militancy in both countries. Islamist parties sympathetic to Taliban ideas have fared poorly in Pakistan's elections, and the country's elected political leaders appear confident of public support in insisting that the world "not distinguish between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban, because both are creating havoc," in foreign minister Mahmood Qureshi's words; "they are no friends of ours, they are no friends of Afghanistan."[24]

Of course, while Pakistan's elected government and its now freer press may be giving voice to broader public misgivings about Pakistan's Afghan guests, the military establishment still keeps tight control over the country's Afghan policy. There is little evidence that it has stepped back in any way from its support of the Taliban insurgency, though the security services hint at reassessing their long investment in the movement. However, insinuations of greater flexibility from senior military ranks have not translated into any changes on the ground, to the frustration of both American and Afghan government officials. A former director of Inter-Services Intelligence dismisses charges of duplicity with the observation, "Double game, triple game — it's part of the Big Game."[25]

Senior officers, who zealously promote their reputation as embodiment of national identity and as the country's most respected, and most egalitarian, national institution, have been taken aback by the ferocity of the violent attacks by Pakistan's own Taliban against the Pakistani armed forces. Outsiders who imagined that the fierce battles to rein in Pakistani Taliban would lead the military to suppress Afghan fighters have been disappointed: the security services remain careful to make precisely the distinction between home-grown and Afghan Taliban that leading elected officials reject. (In courteous reciprocity, the Afghan Taliban have been equally as careful not

to give the slightest support to their Pakistani brethren battling the army.) If the trail of broken pacts and defiant insurrection by Pakistani militant groups has dimmed the enthusiasm of some in the officer corps for runaway Taliban victories next door, they are not yet showing it.

Pakistani military leaders are now beginning to offer themselves as potential brokers and facilitators for an Afghan settlement. They are certainly uniquely positioned to promote a settlement, since the Afghan insurgents continue to rely on their protection and support. Their arrest of Taliban leaders who have begun to explore possible reconciliation talks with the Afghan government has, however, sent another, arguably less constructive signal: that they may prefer to block intra-Afghan moves toward peace in order to ensure that Pakistan's strategic interests take priority in any negotiating process—and that they need to control, or at least strongly influence, any such process. However, they remain cagey about their asking price.

Certainly a vital strategic takeaway for Pakistan in an Afghan settlement is a guarantee that Afghanistan does not become a launch pad for subversion of Pakistan's own territorial integrity. In this regard, Pakistanis may well want assurance that Afghanistan does not again become a source of Pashtun irredentism directed at Pakistan's frontier provinces—a concern grounded in the continued refusal of the Afghan government (indeed, *every* Afghan government, including the former emirate) to recognize the Durand line as the border between the two countries.

The specter that most haunts the Pakistani military establishment, of course, remains potential encirclement by India. The military's preoccupation with Pakistan's eastern neighbor—inflamed by Kashmir and described as an "obsession" by the president of the United States[26]—is the prism that continues to refract its views of Afghanistan and of the "assets" it has cultivated there.

Iran

Afghanistan's western border with Iran was particularly tense during the emirate's rule. Taliban clerics viewed Islam's Shia tradition—dominant in Iran—as heretical. As their forces surged across Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, they were particularly

harsh toward the Hazaras, a Dari-speaking (that is, Farsi) ethnic community of Shiite religious convictions whom Tehran feels a particular obligation to protect. Iran backed the Northern Alliance coalition of Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks against the Taliban tide, and when the Taliban captured the northwest city of Mazar-e Sharif in 1998, they stormed the Iranian consulate there and slaughtered eight Iranian diplomats and one journalist. This diplomatic breach shocked the international community—but it paled against the Taliban's wider massacre of some 8,000 Hazara inhabitants of the city.[27]

Tehran was therefore relieved by the American intervention that dislodged the emirate, notwithstanding its two decades of hostile relations with the United States, and it played an active role in helping guarantee a multiethnic new Afghan government at the Bonn conference in late December 2001. Hopes that collaboration on stabilizing Afghanistan could lead to improved bilateral relations between Washington and Tehran evaporated within weeks, however, when the U.S. president lumped Iran with other enemies in an "axis of evil," and U.S.-Iranian cooperation on this or any other issue became virtually unthinkable for a number of years. Even with a change in U.S. leadership, the impasse over Iran's nuclear program has derailed potential coordination of the two countries' policies on Afghanistan.

For all the political changes in Tehran over the past decade, Iranian views of Afghanistan have remained quite consistent. After the turmoil, refugees, and hostile ideologies emanating from Afghanistan over nearly a quarter-century, Iranian policymakers—regardless of liberal or hardline tendencies—have wanted to see a durable central government set roots in Kabul that can assure stability and steady economic reconstruction in that country. They would like a government there that can clamp down on Afghanistan's booming narcotics production, which has fueled growing addiction among Iranians. In Afghan provinces near Iran, they have sought to build influence among political leaders with the clout to offset pressures in Kabul to tilt toward other neighbors. They are particularly anxious to undercut Sunni extremists, among whom they certainly count the Taliban, who can foment unrest not only inside Afghanistan but also on Iran's borders with Pakistan.

But Iranian policymakers have to balance the dangers from a war-torn Afghanistan succumbing to Taliban control against what many see as the existential threat of a large U.S. military presence on their eastern border. Periodic drumbeats in Washington for military attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, by either U.S. or Israeli air operations, ensure that Iran's Islamic republic can never view U.S. bases in Afghanistan with equanimity, but always as a potential military threat. While the Americans may be useful in the short term to batter al Qaeda's Afghan allies, and while their being bogged down in a second draining war in the Muslim world may yield for Tehran the dividend of durable U.S. public resistance to future calls for U.S. military intervention in the region, Iranian authorities would like to see those forces gone as soon as possible.[28] Tehran sees them as far more dangerous and threatening to its own survival than it ever saw the Soviet forces that were struggling to prop up Kabul's communists.

Iran's relations with Pakistan's military governments have also been testy, but it has recently sought to bring about an entente between Kabul and Islamabad, involving the presidents of all three in trilateral summits it has promoted. Tehran has also looked to complete the regional circle by bringing along the three Central Asian states that border Afghanistan on the north (finding some more interested than others), in hopes of creating a favorable regional solution that is not dependent on the Americans and that possibly excludes them. But President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's warm embrace of Hamid Karzai does not provide Kabul the resources it urgently requires to turn back the insurgency, which only the United States and its allies have been capable of supplying.

It is difficult to muster political agreement in both Tehran and Washington for direct dialogue and collaboration between them while the nuclear impasse energizes the opponents of any rapprochement in both countries. Conversely, advocates for ending the two countries' three decades of enmity see the strategic urgency for both countries of achieving stability in Afghanistan as the best opening the two countries have for feeling their way toward normalization despite the nonproliferation standoff and their tensions surrounding Israel. The unexpected appearance of a senior Iranian foreign ministry official at the Rome conference of "Af/Pak" special representatives from most of the countries supporting Kabul in October 2010 suggested that Tehran was beginning to re-open channels to ensure that its interests are not neglected.

Central Asia

Each of the post-Soviet Central Asian states has developed its own distinctive character and policy priorities—and some abrasions with the others—in their two decades of independence from Moscow. Even so, they bring a similar lens to Afghanistan's problems, shaped by the multiple legacies they share from their experience as dependencies of the Soviet Union: economic fragility, tough-minded authoritarian politics, and an abhorrence of Islamic extremism. All would like to see the jihadist surge contained and defeated before the contagion spreads further among their own disaffected Muslims.

The frontline states directly bordering Afghanistan on the north—Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—also have ethnic ties to significant minorities in northern Afghanistan. While Tajik and Uzbek officials have disavowed ethnic meddling inside Afghanistan, they are vigilant against possible transmission of the jihadist virus through Afghan co-ethnics. (Conversely, some of the most hardened jihadis in the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands have been extremist exiles from Uzbekistan.) Of equal concern in these countries—as in Iran—is the seemingly unstoppable flow of opiates from war-torn Afghanistan, which has made them involuntary transit countries for criminal networks exporting illicit Afghan produce to Russia and Europe.

Eager to assist in the Taliban's eradication, some of the governments in Central Asia have made military bases available to the United States for the supply of international forces in Afghanistan. The revenue flows have become addicting, and analysts suggest they have given the governments concerned a hard-nosed financial interest in the war's not being wrapped up too soon.[29] The bases are arguably also the most precious commodity they can offer to sustain American interest and attention, which on the one hand may give them maneuvering room and options that landlocked countries wedged between Russia and China would otherwise lack, but on the other exposes them to vexing scrutiny on issues such as human rights.

Turkmenistan has been the most cautious of the three frontline states, worried primarily about the drug invasion and supportive of leaving the search for an Afghan solution to the United Nations; it has also a forward-leaning interest in developing cross-border energy linkages in the region.

Tajikistan has had a larger problem with infiltration of Islamic extremists across its border; as its post-Soviet regime has whittled away at the political space conceded to the armed opposition in a UN-brokered peace deal in 1997, it has faced renewed terrorist attacks on its own soil and has been more overtly supportive of the international security forces in Afghanistan.[30]

Uzbekistan's government is perhaps the most committed backer of military efforts to crush the Taliban, as it faces the most aggressive extremist challenge through terrorism. It is also the most insistent in demanding that the often ignored Central Asian states be at the table to shape a regional peace accord, arguing for a "6+3" formula of the six countries bordering Afghanistan plus the Russian Federation, the United States, and NATO.

While the Central Asian states are not contributors to Afghanistan's strife, they do hold some of the keys to securing Afghanistan's economic future if peace is restored to that country. The energy resources they harbor, for which they seek free and secure flow to ocean ports, and the prospect of cross-border electrical grids and water supply lines that could knit the region together, could prove stabilizing ingredients of a post-conflict settlement.

China

The neighbor with the shortest and most impassable border with Afghanistan is China, whose Xinjiang region abuts Afghanistan for a mere 76 kilometers; there is no road or border crossing through the forbidding Wakhjir Pass, though China's multiplying commercial interests in Afghanistan may make Kabul's proposal for Chinese construction of a road through the corridor more viable.

In fact, China is the largest investor in developing Afghanistan's largely untapped mineral resources; its state-owned China Metallurgical Group paid $3 billion for a thirty-year lease to mine copper in the Aynak Valley, which the emirate regime had provided free to al Qaeda for a jihadist base and training camp. The Chinese company is paying $400 million in annual royalties to Afghanistan, well over a third of the

Kabul government's revenue.[31] As Chinese enterprises seek reliable new sources of raw materials, they see much promise in Afghanistan, as in the rest of Central Asia.

China has more than commercial interests in Afghanistan, of course. It has major security concerns as well. Its restive western regions, and in particular the Uighur populations there, are susceptible to Islamist appeals. During the days that the Afghan emirate provided bases to Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda trained Uighur extremists for jihad in Xinjiang. The Chinese warmly supported the American campaign to oust bin Laden and his allies in late 2001, and Beijing wants to keep them from returning. Ousting bin Laden's bases from Afghanistan does not, however, mean Chinese complacency with their replacement by American military bases. Chinese policymakers do not want to see a permanent U.S. military presence in Central Asia, and would hope for a political settlement in Afghanistan that keeps al Qaeda and its Taliban allies out and sends U.S. forces home.

Still, even these policy preferences are subordinate to the traditional Chinese reticence about interfering in other countries' internal affairs, a practice they profess to dislike when the Americans do it and that they are reluctant to emulate themselves. They have been equally unwilling to risk damaging their long and close relations with Pakistan by pressuring its government and army to suppress al Qaeda and the Taliban. Instead, Beijing prefers to channel its concerns through multilateral mechanisms, urging the Afghans to seek the constructive engagement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (where China has a dominant role) and calling for more energetic leadership from the United Nations (where its Security Council seat gives it some influence over collective policy). Neither of these organizations can be expected to put troops on the ground to confront an emboldened insurgency, however, and China will not, either.

India

Though it shares no border with Afghanistan, India has long been an attentive neighbor, and enjoyed good relations with the Afghan monarchy and its immediate

successors—each of which had uneasy relations with Pakistan. India was the only country outside the Soviet bloc that consistently backed the Soviet intervention in the lopsided votes condemning it in the UN General Assembly. Seeing the Pakistani hand behind the Taliban, New Delhi channeled assistance to keep the fractious Northern Alliance on life support, and since the emirate's ouster has provided over $1.6 billion in aid for Afghan economic and social reconstruction—the largest such aid investment India has ever made, making it the Afghan republic's sixth largest donor. It has carefully eschewed any involvement in the security sphere, so as not to legitimize, in the Indian view, Pakistani paranoia. Both India's strategic investment in human-development projects and the flood of its cultural exports (movies, music, and television programming) seem to have created favorable impressions of the country in Afghan public opinion, further alarming a Pakistani security establishment that is hard pressed to compete on either count.

But Indian policymakers are themselves alarmed by the "defeatism" they see in the public opinion of the countries they have been counting on to combat a Taliban resurgence that they consider a direct threat to India's own security.[32] They recall the connivance of the Taliban regime in abetting the forced release of Pakistani terrorists from Indian prisons in a high-profile airline hijacking in 1999, and recognize the movement as a tool of Pakistan's ISI. They fear a Taliban reconquest of power would embolden al Qaeda-style jihadist movements around the Muslim world—and, already perilously exposed in Kashmir, they do not doubt that their country will bear a major brunt of escalating terrorist violence if Islamist extremists secure their old Afghan base.

Derisive of Western preoccupation with the Afghan elite's corruption, dismayed by imminent reductions in Western countries' troop levels, convinced that the Afghan government is incapable of surviving without foreign forces fighting to protect it, and skeptical that the Taliban (and Islamist militants generally) will ever honor an agreement that constrains them, Indian policy circles are suspicious that President Karzai's increasingly urgent calls for reconciliation with the Taliban and warming relations with the Pakistanis may signal his readiness to take whatever deal he can

get—and to turn his back on his Indian backers. They hint at encouraging the old Northern Alliance network that underpins the Kabul republic to block any Karzai capitulation, perhaps in league with such other Northern Alliance underwriters as Iran and Russia—even as they acknowledge that Iran, at least, has countervailing concerns that weigh against its historical antipathy toward the Taliban.

Given India's substantial support for Afghanistan's reconstruction in the nine years since the flight of the Taliban—infinitely greater, Afghans acknowledge, than any reconstruction aid they have ever gotten from Pakistan—its leaders are unlikely to acquiesce meekly in Pakistani pressures for India to be excluded from regional negotiations or barred from any role in supporting Afghanistan after a settlement.

Russia

The Russian Federation bears the burden of bitter Afghan memories of the Soviet war to impose a radical communist government on a resistant population. Despite feverish rhetoric in some Western circles at the time that the Soviet invasion of landlocked Afghanistan was motivated by ancient czarist ambitions for warm water ports on the Arabian Sea, the record of Politburo debate underscores that it was classic cold war ideological blinders—and phony intelligence about Kabul's communist leader colluding with the CIA—that led it to throw caution to the wind and roll the dice on direct military action. For their trouble, the Soviets found themselves facing overwhelming international opposition—in marked contrast to the international unity in support of the American-sponsored mission aiding the Islamic republic.

The communist regime that the Soviets sought to save had, through its atheism and brutality, deeply alienated much of Afghanistan's rural population, even before the arrival of Soviet troops added outraged nationalism to the list of grievances. Though Kabul communists decreed a wide range of reforms, including many that benefited women, their rule fundamentally discredited secular-minded reform for a generation.[33] Despite the widespread resistance the leftist government and its Soviet allies provoked, they sustained a working public administration, and the government

fielded an ethnically representative army. That army may have been rather combat-averse while Soviet forces were present, but after the Soviet withdrawal, it successfully fended off the fractious mujahideen until Moscow suspended its subsidies, units defected en masse, and Najibullah's government disintegrated.[34]

The Soviet debacle in Afghanistan in the 1980s has left Russia rather more circumspect in regard to engagement in today's Afghan imbroglio (and also prudently muted in voicing *schadenfreude* at the Americans' current predicament). Still, Moscow's core interests are clear.

First and foremost, it insists that Islamic extremists must be defeated, not coddled through compromises born of Western weakness of will. Beset by terrorist violence in its own Muslim borderlands, Russia shares the Indian fear of secular-state dominoes falling to jihadist violence in quick succession throughout Central Asia should the Taliban claw their way back to power in Kabul. Russian officials have been quite adamant against relaxing the trio of international conditions for any talks with Afghanistan's insurgents—that they abjure al Qaeda, lay down their weapons, and accept the 2004 constitution (about which more below)—and proved very resistant to relaxation of UN Security Council sanctions against travel by specific Taliban-related personalities.

Second, the opiate tide surging out of Afghanistan has engulfed Russian society in a particularly grievous way. Russian authorities see the narcotics traffic as something that cannot be controlled simply by demand-reduction measures at home, but that requires forceful supply-reduction measures inside Afghanistan. With the bulk of poppy products coming from areas under strong Taliban influence (and presumably helping to finance many Taliban activities), opium production is very much a security issue to Moscow, not just a public health problem. Indeed, foreign minister Sergey Lavrov successfully raised "the Afghan drug threat in the UN Security Council as a threat to international peace and security."[35]

Finally, Russians see the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan—and the bases the United States has secured in Central Asia to supply allied forces there—as deeply worrisome. During the days when zealous promoters of a "new American century"

drove Washington's security policy, Russian policymakers did not conceal their sense of threat from America's Central Asian military presence. When relations between the two countries became difficult, Moscow sought to tighten the spigot, pressing the Central Asian states to withdraw or limit base privileges for the Pentagon. The recent "reset" of relations has eased Russian leaders' concerns about U.S. strategic intentions for the moment, but given their continuing apprehension about encirclement by U.S. military bases, they would like them gone from Central Asia as soon as possible.

The Broader Muslim World

Much of the Muslim world had rallied to the cause of Afghanistan's mujahideen against the godless Soviets. Saudi Arabia was a particularly generous funder of the resistance, along with the United States, and many Saudi volunteers joined the anti-Soviet crusade on the ground. Along with similar volunteers from across the Arab world, the so-called "Arab Afghans" would become the nucleus of al Qaeda. In the upheavals that followed the Soviet withdrawal, Saudis were impressed by the Wahhabist values and moral zeal of the Taliban. Riyadh followed Islamabad in recognizing Mullah Omar's emirate as the government of Afghanistan. Only the United Arab Emirates followed their lead.

Saudi Arabia was quick to recognize Kabul's post-Bonn government after the Americans' lightning success in ousting the emirate. It was a generous donor to the new government's reconstruction efforts in its early years. Many Saudis are believed still to be funneling money privately to al Qaeda and the Taliban, however, and the strong sympathy for the Taliban among the Saudi *ulema* (clerical establishment) has given the government an aura of relative neutrality between the Afghan sides. The Karzai government turned to Riyadh to open discreet channels for dialogue with the Taliban opposition in 2008, which the Saudis were pleased to facilitate—and unhappy to see fail. Taliban personalities continue to see the Saudi kingdom (and alternatively the United Arab Emirates) as a desirable mediator, or at least a host of talks. The Saudi strategic interest in containing Iran may influence its peacemaking possibilities in Afghanistan.

By comparison, Turkey has played a much more visible role on the ground in Afghanistan over the past decade. As NATO's one overwhelmingly Muslim member state, it was tapped to provide the first foreign troop presence authorized by the United Nations in post-Taliban Kabul, delivering control of the city from Northern Alliance militias to the interim Karzai government. The Turks continue to have peacekeeping contingents in the now vastly expanded International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In recent years, they have stepped up their efforts to forge a more cooperative relationship between Kabul and Islamabad and to foster a stronger regional commitment to ending the war. The Turks' warm ties with the Pakistanis may more than compensate for a certain grumpiness among the Taliban arising from Turkish participation in ISAF. Of all the prospective Muslim world interlocutors, they seem to arouse the least apprehensions among the internal and external parties.

United States

The United States is by far the most visible international backer of the Islamic republic. For most of the past century, it saw Afghanistan strictly through the prism of the cold war: when the Soviets invaded, it armed the resistance, and when the Soviets left, it ended its own involvement. It futilely explored a possible entente with the emirate in the mid-1990s, only to find the Taliban's alliance with al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden unshakeable (as it seemingly still is). After al Qaeda's attacks on U.S. embassies in East Africa, the Americans launched a cruise missile strike on al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. After its attacks on New York and Washington, they moved decisively to destroy al Qaeda's sanctuaries and the emirate that hosted them. To bar forever al Qaeda's return, they entered the thicket of Afghan politics to support—perhaps fitfully and at times inadequately—the emergence of a moderate and modern Afghan government.

Destruction of al Qaeda remains the central goal of U.S. policy in Afghanistan, the uncrossable "red line" for U.S. policymakers. Certainly, the Americans want to sustain a democratic regime and seek to safeguard human rights, the advances made in women's rights above all; clearly, their recent "civilian surge" and enhanced aid

commitment show that they now recognize the urgency of achieving tangible progress in the villages where most Afghans live. But their core security concern, for which they today have a hundred thousand troops in the country and are burning through over a hundred billion dollars a year, is to prevent Afghanistan's relapse into a host for the jihadist parasite.

There are, of course, many in the United States today who now doubt whether even that minimum goal is attainable. Dismayed by the paralyzing corruption and ineffectuality they see in the Kabul government, despairing at the success of the supposedly discredited Taliban in expanding the reach of their guerrilla presence across half the country, and convinced that a seeming clear victory over the fanatical jihadists was irretrievably squandered by incompetence in both Kabul and Washington at mid-decade, they tout elixirs such as a permanent drone presence to strike at al Qaeda regardless of who runs Kabul, or the partition of Afghanistan into Pashtun and non-Pashtun statelets.

And there are others who believe that victory over Afghanistan's insurgents and their Qaeda friends is still within America's reach, if the United States but shows the resolve to increase the military pressure to prevail. Another ten years of the current pressure, they suggest, is all it would take.[36]

Both sides summon the specter of Saigon to support their thesis. At the moment, neither the administration nor the Congress supports changing course in either direction, and a politically respected commander in Kabul and an intellectually subtle commander-in-chief in Washington appear to be holding the center ground.

Still, while President Obama has made clear that starting in mid-2011 he will reverse the troop trajectory that surged significantly in his first two years, there is much uncertainty about where the United States now wants to go. The administration has won allied support for its default plan—a gradual transition to Afghanistan assuming primary responsibility for security in 2014, with sufficient force kept in place to thwart any renewed Taliban surge. But relying on an expanded Afghan National Army to parry Taliban fighters and suicide assaults is generally recognized as risky and uncertain.

Over the past half-dozen years, Washington has gradually softened its objections to President Karzai's call for negotiations with the Taliban insurgency. With its military investment in Afghanistan as its first front in its global war on terror, the United States in much of the past decade was not willing to let the Kabul government negotiate on its own the terms of its accommodation with its foes—tying Karzai's hands, since an Afghan government whose core constituency base largely opposes any compromise with the Taliban enemy would be constrained in negotiations if powerful leaders believe they would have American backing in torpedoing them.[37]

President Bush appeared comfortable with Kabul pursuing a reconciliation strategy premised on Taliban acquiescence in the post-Bonn order, expressed in three preconditions, which never materialized. To date, the Obama administration has repeated the same three conditions, As secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasized in early 2011, "Over the past two years, we have laid out our unambiguous red lines for reconciliation with the insurgents: They must renounce violence; they must abandon their alliance with al-Qaida; and they must abide by the constitution of Afghanistan." But signs of greater flexibility abound: Secretary Clinton then added, significantly, "Those are necessary *outcomes* of any *negotiation*"—a major new signal.[38]

While policy circles appear to agree that annihilation of the Taliban is no longer a realistic option, they have fiercely debated whether any public sign of interest in negotiations should wait till the hefty increase in troop levels ordered in 2009 changes the military momentum on the ground. In contrast to Pakistani security services' freedom to arrest any Afghan protégés who dare engage in unapproved peace overtures to the other side, Washington cannot intern Kabul officials who test the waters for an all-Afghan settlement; but policymakers in both the Bush and Obama administrations have seemed intent on keeping a leash on peace explorations tightly in Washington's hands.

Europe and the North Atlantic Alliance

America's NATO allies responded to the September 11 attacks with an offer to join in repelling al Qaeda's audacious attacks on the leader of the alliance, in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, Washington saw no

need for alliance interference in its self-defense campaign until 2003, after it invaded Iraq. Turkey was the first country to assume responsibility for commanding the initial small deployment of an international security assistance force in Kabul (meanwhile, returned warlords heading the various anti-Taliban militias nailed down control of the rest of the country); for the first few years that command and that deployment rotated to whichever NATO country wanted the honor. Allies that had balked at Baghdad were eager to show their backing in Kabul, in a mission of security assistance that the United Nations had unequivocally authorized. Over time, a NATO command structure took shape within the framework of that Security Council authorization, eventually embracing even American forces. ISAF's leading troop contributors by 2010, after the United States, were Britain (9,500 troops), Germany (4,590), France (3,750), Italy (3,400), Canada (2,830), and Poland (2,630), with Romania, Turkey, Spain, and Australia following in the next tier. Some, such as the British, Canadians, and Dutch, have combated the insurgency directly in Afghanistan's hotly contested south; others, like the Germans, Italians, and Spaniards, operate as peacekeepers in the less contentious north and west.

Europeans have supported the Kabul republic militarily in large measure to show solidarity with the United States in a clear-cut case of self-defense, where the unanimous authorization by the UN Security Council stifles any doubts about the legality of their involvement. In short, many Europeans see their Afghan deployments as an exercise in alliance maintenance, after the strains of the unilateral U.S. invasion of Iraq, rather than an urgent issue of their own security. True, some among them also have experienced a crescendo of attacks on their own territory hatched by al Qaeda and allies in the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands, and they all argue to their publics that their own security is at stake. But these rationales look increasingly threadbare. As the Afghan government has lost ground and credibility, doubts have multiplied in Europe and Canada about the efficacy of their involvement. Public opposition to sustaining the costly effort is mounting, especially where casualties are high—as they have been for the British and Canadian contingents in particular—and as the Afghan government's capacity to fend off the insurgency falters. Several troop contributors

have signaled their intention to withdraw their contingents in the coming year, and others seem disposed to depart completely under cover of a U.S. troop drawdown.

European and other Western countries to some extent have made up for their comparatively limited contributions militarily by major financial support for reconstruction. European Union countries have provided $7 billion in development and reconstruction aid for Afghanistan since 2002, 76 percent of the $10.3 billion they have pledged; in comparison, the United States has provided $5 billion in that time, or 40 percent of $12.3 billion pledged.[39] The European Union's continued financial support for Afghanistan seems dependent on its perceptions of the government's efficacy in sustaining the progress; a Taliban-led regime bent on restoring a medieval emirate should expect to forfeit this funding support.

Japan and Other Donors

Post-emirate Afghanistan has received substantial support for reconstruction and development from additional countries that have not put "boots on the ground" there as peacekeepers or combatants. A number of them are in Europe, such as Sweden and Switzerland. The biggest donor government by far, however, eclipsed only by the United States, is Japan—among the more distant, and perhaps the most unscathed by jihadist terrorism. Japan has provided $1.8 billion for humanitarian and development projects in Afghanistan, ranging from repatriation and resettlement of its millions of refugees to locally led programs in health, education, and infrastructure, including even—in a remarkable show of confidence in the republic's longevity—a master development plan for the planned and resourced expansion of Kabul's metropolitan area into a new city on its northern edge. But Japanese funding also underwrites some core security interests: the salaries and training of Afghan police and the reintegration of former Taliban fighters into the society.

For a number of donor countries, the financial support for Afghanistan reconstruction and development has served to deflect American pressures for more direct involvement on the security side; they demonstrate they are part of the common international effort to inoculate the country and region against Taliban extremism.

Moreover, they gain public credit inside Afghanistan for good works that impact people's lives, without the popular fury levied at war-fighters whose misguided missiles take civilian lives. Washington may not feel much obligation to consult closely on Afghan political issues with financial contributors that do not put troops on the ground (though how much it involves those that do contribute troops as it formulates peace-making strategy is questionable). Still, the satisfaction of major donors will nonetheless be crucial to sustaining any peace settlement.

United Nations

In the first flush of enthusiasm after the emirate's overthrow, the watchword for the United Nations role was "light footprint." Yet over the course of the decade, it has become a principal actor on behalf of the international community at large, bearing down on Afghan authorities to ensure fair elections and seeking to keep channels open to disaffected groups, whether within civil society or among its armed opponents. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the UN's political arm in the country, has become the UN's largest peacekeeping operation without any peacekeeping troops, with a $242 million budget in 2010 and over 2,800 staffers, four-fifths of them Afghans. (NATO, of course, runs the international security assistance force, whose members bear the cost of their own deployments.) UN agencies—working alongside but distinct from UNAMA—provide food aid and vaccinations throughout the country, often with tacit agreement from Taliban commanders not to interfere, and much more besides.

During the communist period, the UN General Assembly articulated the overwhelming global condemnation of the Soviet intervention even as UN mediators shuttled between Moscow and Washington, Kabul and Islamabad, trying to negotiate a formula for a Soviet withdrawal and a compromise all-party government. During the Taliban period, the General Assembly refused to accept the legitimacy of Taliban envoys' credentials and left Afghanistan's seat in the hands of the mujahideen "government" that controlled the northernmost sliver of the country. While Taliban officials ultimately did cooperate with UN officials on drug control, they famously

scorned the appeals of UNESCO and dynamited the two sixth-century giant statues of the Buddha at Bamiyan, earning that UN body's condemnation. But it was the emirate's unstinting alliance with al Qaeda that provoked the Security Council in 1999 to adopt the far-reaching sanctions of Resolution 1267, whose travel and financing prohibitions continue to apply to listed Taliban individuals and Taliban-related organizations (as well as to al Qaeda's).

Given the UN affirmations of the Taliban's pariah status, both when it held power and in the years since they lost it, it is not surprising that Taliban spokesmen profess to see the world organization as part of the enemy alliance. And certainly the UN mission in Afghanistan needs to have a constructive relationship with the government in Kabul if it is to fulfill the Security Council's mandate to promote the country's political and economic reconstruction. Yet the other singular asset of the United Nations—a globally recognized neutrality, reflected in a vocation to listen and talk to all sides, whether formally or not—gives it a unique credibility in preparing the ground for negotiations, in midwifing a settlement, and ultimately in delivering the international legitimacy and authority to sustain the settlement when parties are tempted to renege. On its own, it is certainly not capable of delivering all parties to a deal, much less of ensuring they honor a deal, when national or factional leaders adamantly pursue their own advantage or self-interest. Still, whether in pressing for an all-party solution back in 1988, or in calling for inclusion of the dispirited but determined Taliban in the constitution-writing process in 2003, the United Nations and its representatives in Afghanistan have been reliably prophetic.

Shifting Tectonic Plates

Afghanistan's conflict has been locked for most of the past decade into long-held positions, where opposing parties and their foreign backers imagined enduring victory was just around the corner. Battlefield success on one side is matched by burgeoning force recruitment on the other, as insurgent and counterinsurgent planners fashion

new strategies to carry the day. But a new fluidity is now apparent, visibly creating movement since late 2009 and opening new possibilities if the parties to the conflict choose to seize them. Three developments seem particularly important:

1. ***The United States tops off.*** After two large increases in American force levels since late 2008, President Obama added unsettling qualifications to his announcement of a third "surge" in December 2009, upending the calculus of all parties to the conflict with his insistence that this reinforcement was limited in time and that a troop drawdown would begin in July 2011. This signaled, both to U.S. military planners and to the Kabul authorities, that a handover to the Afghan National Army was no longer a mirage on the horizon they could put off indefinitely, but rather an inexorable reality in real time. Though the pace of the drawdown was artfully shrouded in ambiguity, Obama's change in trajectory appears decisive. The international community's endorsement of a 2014 timeline for transferring full responsibility to the Afghan National Army and police signals a de facto commitment to a measured rather than precipitous pace of withdrawal. The Taliban commander who exhorts his fighters to soldier on in the face of sharply intensified military pressure because the United States is "leaving" in 2011 risks their deep demoralization if, as seems likely, the drawdown is not precipitous, the other NATO allies do not run for the exits, and (the biggest if) the much more popular Afghan National Army reports for duty and holds its ground. Its leaders know the clock is ticking; the United States has now put all parties on notice that change of some sort is coming. That unpredictability loosens many long-rigid assumptions.

2. ***Pakistan reassesses.*** The second major development since 2009 has been a shift, at least speculatively, in Pakistani thinking about the country's interests in Afghanistan. From a calculated ambiguity that veiled what many believe has been a "double game" of episodic antiterrorist cooperation and ongoing support and sanctuary for the Taliban, Pakistani security officials have begun openly to

acknowledge their potential leverage with Afghanistan's insurgents. At the same time, they have begun warily to deal with Afghanistan's government, which they had openly scorned during the Musharraf years, and even offer it limited security assistance. The security establishment has not moved nearly as far as the elected government on these issues, but even officers who have long been invested in the Afghan Taliban are increasingly pressed to account for the radicalizing impacts in Pakistan's own restive borderlands of Taliban success across the Durand line. Far from being able to count on ISI protection all the way to a triumphant reentry into Kabul, Taliban leaders must now keep an eye over their shoulders, unsure about Pakistani intentions for an end game.

3. ***Afghanistan's peace* jirga *and peace council.*** The third development over the past year that creates openings for movements toward a settlement has been President Karzai's convening of a "peace *jirga*" to debate the terms and circumstances of a renewed approach to the armed insurgency for a political reconciliation. While the *jirga* did not significantly change the terms of reference for negotiations, it provided a crucial political authorization for Karzai to pursue a negotiating track that has never had unequivocal support from either his own government or the republic's American protectors. The appointment of a seventy-person "high peace council" in September 2010 has brought elements of the Kabul coalition into a formal consultative role as the president deploys a trusted negotiating team to pursue contacts with insurgents.

The confluence of these developments has softened the long rigidity on all sides of the politics of Afghanistan, complemented also by furiously increased fighting that itself introduces new uncertainties. Whether it now becomes possible to reconcile a critical mass of key actors to some accommodation with long-time opponents is the central question to which the task force may offer tentative answers—and to which the leaders of the warring parties will presumably present dispositive ones.

Notes

1. While Babrak Karmal was retired by his Soviet protectors in 1986 without a shoot-out on the palace grounds, the mujahideen insurgency that forced their hand was violence on a massive scale.

2. "Instead of sending our troops there, we should tell [president Nur Muhammad] Taraki and [prime minister Hafizullah] Amin to change their tactics," Soviet prime minister Alexei Kosygin told the Politburo in rebuffing the Afghan leaders' pleas for Soviet intervention to suppress the first uprising in Herat. "They still continue to execute those people who disagree with them." From the secret transcript of the March 1979 Politburo session on Afghanistan, quoted in Karl E. Meyer, *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Mastery in the Asian Heartland,* A Century Foundation Book (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 128.

3. U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, interview with CNN, March 8, 2002, http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=3071: "These are hard dead-enders. These are hardline types."

4. A top Taliban official told Kandahar-based researchers Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn that in November 2002 the senior leadership in Pakistani exile agreed to return and join the new political process; "if they had been given some assurance that they would not be arrested upon returning to Afghanistan, he said, they would have come," but Kabul and Washington spurned the Taliban at that time as "a spent force." Kuehn and Strick van Linschoten, *Separating the Taliban from al-Qaeda: The Core of Success in Afghanistan* (New York: New York University, Center for International Cooperation, February 2011), 6.

5. "These are growing indicators that the position of women in terms of political representation and beyond is becoming more and more high risk," writes Orzala Ashraf Nemat. "It is also evident that many women in political positions, such as members of parliament elected on the slates of local warlords, are dutifully devoted to their position's survival, preferring to take their sponsor's side rather than uniting for women's causes." Orzala Ashraf Nemat, "Afghan Women at the Crossroads: Agents of Peace—Or Its Victims? The Century Foundation, 2011, 26.

6. Dexter Filkins, long a *New York Times* reporter in Afghanistan, wrote in the *New Yorker,* "The scandal is perhaps the most far-reaching in the nine years since Karzai took power," and reports that "investigators found that the lines connecting the Taliban and the drug smugglers often ran through the Afghan government…. The loss of nine hundred million dollars or more at the bank represents a significant percentage of Afghanistan's gross domestic product, which is only about twelve billion dollars." Dexter Filkins, "The Afghan Bank Heist," *New Yorker,* February 14, 2011.

7. Though he had become a critic of Karzai's administration and ran against him in the 2009 presidential election, Ashraf Ghani—former World Bank official and chairman of the Washington-based Institute for State Effectiveness—was Karzai's choice to head the "transition" process in the run-up to the transfer of security responsibility, and has been working with Karzai's apparent support to implement effectiveness principles in government ministries.

8. Eid al-Fitr message from Mullah Omar, September 8, 2010, http://www.uruknet.info/?p=69580.

9. See the task force paper by Antonio Giustozzi, "Negotiating with the Taliban,"The Century Foundation, 2010, http://www.tcf.org/publications/internationalaffairs/Giustozzi.pdf, 10 and following. Giustozzi ascribes the Taliban's success in penetrating growing swaths of national territory to their two-tiered political cadre, "preachers" and "agents": "The preachers prepare the ground for the arrival of the fighters in areas not yet affected by the insurgency, but most importantly, the agents visit a region to establish the potential for mobilizing locals on the Taliban side. Relying on networks established when the Taliban were the government, the agents quickly identify potential supporters, communities, and individuals holding grudges against the government, as well as those who are hostile to the Taliban. Small groups of armed fighters then move in and recruit local fighters, while at the same time weeding out hostile individuals or groups."

10. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 43.

11. When Pakistan sought to hammer out an alliance between Taliban and a few other militia leaders—including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—to overthrow Burhanuddin Rabbani's regime in Kabul, "the Taliban refused to turn up to the meeting, spurning their Pakistani mentors yet again, despite personal appeals by Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar, the [fundamentalist party] JUI chief Fazlur Rehman and the ISI. The Taliban declined to have anything to do with the other warlords whom they condemned as communist infidels." Rashid, *Taliban,* 44.

12. The high lethality rate among Taliban midlevel commanders and shadow governors over the past year is weakening the movement's coherence, and leaders of the former emirate warn that their influence over the field commanders is shrinking while al Qaeda's is growing. A notionally "reconciled" former emirate senior official, Abdul Salam Zaeef, claims that the military success in taking out Taliban leaders will perversely made a negotiated peace harder to achieve. "If these people, important, known people, disappear from the [Taliban] movement, what will happen? Who should [the Afghan government] make a dialogue with? I know the new generation is more extremist than the last generation. The new generation will not listen to anyone. This is a dangerous thing." Jeremy Scahill, "Killing Reconciliation: How Brutal Raids Are Sabotaging the Political Strategy the U.S. claims to support in Afghanistan," *The Nation*, November 15, 2010, 18.

13. David Rohde, a *New York Times* correspondent abducted en route to an interview with a Taliban commander inside Afghanistan and transported into Pakistan by Haqqani insurgents, relates the collaborative relationships he observed between his captors and the Pakistani security forces during his seven months as a captive: "The Haqqanis oversee a sprawling Taliban ministate in North Waziristan with the acquiescence of the Pakistani military." David Rohde and Kristen Mulvihill, *A Rope and a Prayer: A Kidnapping from Two Sides* (New York: Viking, 2010), 162.

14. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress," July 30, 2009, 341, http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/Jul09/pdf/Report_-_July_2009.pdf; Mohammed Ishaque Sarwari, "Development Outlook 2008: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," Asian Development Bank, http://www.abd.org/Documents/

Books/ADO/2008/AFG.pdf; U.S. Department of Defense, "Report on the Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," Report to Congress in Accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, January 2009, 67. Relevant data are summarized in Ian S. Livingston, Heather L. Messera, and Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan," at Brookings Institution, October 4, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/Programs/FP/afghanistan%20index/index.pdf.

15. "Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008–2010," Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Government Report, 114–16, http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/final_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%20Strategy_eng.pdf; Susan Wardak and Michael Hirth, "Defining the GAPS: The Case of Afghanistan," Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, April 2009,: http://www.afghan-web.com/education/case_afg_education.pdf.

16. "Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008–2010," 114–16; "Afghanistan Mortality Country Fact Sheet 2006," World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/whosis/mort/profiles/mort_emro_afg_afghanistan.pfd.

17. According to the Asia Foundation's *2009 Survey of the Afghan People*, the fourth in a series of annual detailed studies of public opinion, respondents rated the biggest problems in their local area as unemployment (26 percent), electricity (26 percent), roads (24 percent), water (22 percent), health care (20 percent), schools (15 percent), and insecurity (13 percent). In assessing the problems of Afghanistan as a whole, insecurity and unemployment top the charts (36 and 35 percent, respectively), followed by the poor economy (20 percent), corruption (17 percent), schools and poverty (both at 11 percent), and the presence of the Taliban (8 percent). *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* (San Francisco, Calif.: The Asia Foundation, 2009), 20–23, http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/627.

18. Data on perceptions of economic improvement or deterioration were collected in survey research conducted in November 2009 by the International Republican Institute. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported their family's economic situation as better in the past year, compared to 14 percent who reported it worse; 47 percent expected the economy would be better in the following year while 13 percent expected it to worsen. *Afghanistan Post-Election Survey: November 16-25, 2009*, International Republican Institute, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2010_January_14_IRI_Afghanistan_Survey_November_16-25_2009.pdf.

19. A September 2010 survey conducted by Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung similarly found that 74 percent of its respondents called for initiating negotiations with the Taliban, and 61 percent said the Taliban opposition should be part of the Afghanistan's power structures in the future. Matthias Gebauer and Hasnain Kazim, "Survey Shows Afghans Are Expecting an Unfair Vote," *Der Spiegel*, September 17, 2010, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,718053,00.html. The International Republican Institute survey in November 2009 found 68 percent of respondents supporting talks and reconciliation with the Taliban. The Asia Foundation research detects a perceptible "gender gap" in support for a negotiated reconciliation with the insurgency: While half of Afghan men "strongly" support negotiations with the armed opposition, just a third of women do. Conversely, just 12 percent of Afghan men say they oppose such negotiations, while 20 percent of Afghan women do. *Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People* (San Francisco, Calif.: The Asia Foundation, 2010), 45.

20. *Afghanistan in 2010*, 49 and following. Among the 14 percent minority who affirmed "a lot of sympathy" for the insurgency, a quarter (disproportionately Pashtun) explain their sympathy as because "they are Afghans," and another quarter (markedly higher among Uzbeks) say it is because "they are Muslims"). Among the 55 percent majority who express "no sympathy at all" for the armed opposition, the most common explanation to researchers was that the insurgents "are oppressors" (a characterization offered by 17 percent of men and 25 percent of women), followed in almost equal numbers by those who fault them for not wanting peace, for killing innocent people, or for being against the government.

21. Mohammed Daoud Khan, Afghanistan's prime minister from 1953 to 1963 (and plotter of the coup ten years later that overthrew his brother-in-law the king, Zahir Shah), strenuously pressed for absorption of Pakistan's Pashtun borderlands into Afghanistan, which was obviously resisted by Pakistan itself but also by Afghanistan's own Tajik and Uzbek minorities. His support for Pashtun militias across the Durand Line, and then an outright incursion into Bajaur by Afghan troops that Pakistani forces routed, led eventually to his dismissal by the king. Border tensions subsequently eased (and when Daoud seized power in the 1970s he did not revive the Pashtunistan campaign), but Pakistani officials may remain suspicious of Afghan intentions. See Hassan Abbas, "Militancy in Pakistan's Borderlands" The Century Foundation, 2010, 10–11.

22. See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin, 2008), for a detailed account of the Pakistani military government's backing for the Taliban emirate and the evacuation of its agents and allies as Taliban redoubts tottered.

23. The close relationship between Pakistani security services and the Taliban has been amply reported, primarily by Pakistani journalists (including Rashid, *Taliban*), and increasingly well documented, not least by in recent Wikileaks postings and by numerous foreign researchers.

24. Foreign Minister Mahmood Qureshi, speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, September 21, 2010, transcript available at https://secure.www.cfr.org/publication/22997/conversation_with_makhdoom_shah_mahmood_qureshi_minister_of_foreign_affairs_islamic_republic_of_pakistan.html.

25. Asad Durrani, speaking at a roundtable with political leaders and the task force organized and recorded by the Centre for Research and Security Studies, July 26, 2011, video posted at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxcYy78x1ak.

26. President Barack Obama, at a news conference on 29 April 29, 2009: "On the military side you're starting to see some recognition just in the last few days, that the obsession with India as the mortal threat to Pakistan has been misguided, and that their biggest threat right now comes internally. And you're starting to see the Pakistan military take much more seriously the armed threat from militant extremists." Transcript available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/news-conference-president-4292009.

27. "Survivors Describe Taliban," Human Rights Watch, November 1, 1998, http://www.hrw.org/en/news/1998/10/31/survivors-describe-taliban; Report of United Nations Special Rapporteur Choong-Hyun Paik, United Nations Economic and Social Council, March 12, 1998, E/CN.4/1998/71.

28. At a joint news conference with Karzai, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denounced the Americans' "double game" in the region and declared, "We do not see the presence of foreign military forces in Afghanistan as a solution for peace in Afghanistan." Agence France-Presse, "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad calls NATO troops 'obstacle to peace' in Afghanistan," *Times of India,* March 10, 2010, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-calls-NATO-troops-obstacle-to-peace-in-Afghanistan/articleshow/5668069.cms. The Iranian foreign ministry reacted sharply to reports that President Karzai might be negotiating an agreement with Washington for long-term bases in Afghanistan past 2014 as "against peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and the region." Press TV, February 22, 2011, http://www.presstv.ir/detail/166520.html.

29. Joshua Foust, "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan," The Century Foundation, 2010, http://www.tcf.org/list.asp?type=PB&pubid=725.

30. See "Inside the First Circle: Central Asia's Stakes in Afghanistan," a Century Foundation conference in Dushanbe, with discussion summary, http://tcf.org/events/2010/inside-the-first-circle. Abduvahid Shamolov, director of the philosophy institute of the Tajik Academy of Science, observed, "You cannot trust the extremists in a negotiation. The Soviet-backed regime of Najibullah tried to negotiate with the extremists, and we remember the fate of Najibullah."

31. "Afghanistan Copper Deposits Worth $88 Billion Attract Chinese Investors," *The Times* (of London), May 15, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3941656.ece.

32. See, for instance, then Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor, remarks on "Terrorism and South Asian Security," The Century Foundation, October 16, 2009: "A sense of defeatism has been pervading some sections of international opinion [which] runs the risk of encouraging insurgent groups into thinking they might actually triumph." Tharoor detailed the medical assistance, food aid, infrastructure construction, and education aid India has provided—"the largest skill and capacity development program offered to Afghanistan by any country in the world"—and emphasized "we have no military activities." Video available at http://tcf.org/videos/2009/terrorism-and-south-asian-security-discussion.

33. The communist government prohibited women from wearing the *burqa*, made primary education for both girls and boys compulsory, abolished bride price, and raised the minimum legal marriage age for girls to sixteen. "Most of their reforms provoked tremendous backlashes because they simply ignored and overlooked the context and reality of Afghan society—the Afghan people's deep cultural and religious sensitivities" above all. Orzala, "Afghan Women at the Crossroads," 10.

34. Even today, Russian officials express dismay about the American underinvestment in training the Afghan security forces. "The international forces neglected the ANA [Afghan National Army] and ANP [Afghan National Police] for nine years," according to the Russian ambassador in Kabul, and even now they "are not much better now than they were in 2001." The Soviets recruited Afghan cadets into Soviet military academies for four-year training programs that produced a professional officer corps, ambassador Andrei Avetisyan asserts. "You cannot make an officer in two weeks. It's not about teaching them to aim a gun. It's about science." Many Soviet-trained Afghan officers fled to Russia when Najibullah's

government unraveled after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Jean Mackenzie, "Afghan War: Let the Transition Begin," *GlobalPost*, November 5, 2010, http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/afghanistan/101104/afghanistan-war-ashraf-ghani.

35. RIA Novosti, September 6, 2010. Lavrov declared in New York this fall that Russia «is ready to consider various forms of cooperation" with NATO to "tackle this problem together because this is not a regional but a global threat," and proposed to deliver helicopters and other ways of supporting Afghan "law enforcement structures.» RIA Novosti, September 25, 2010.

36. "Victory is still achievable," writes Max Boot; "it is only in the past year that they [U.S. and allied forces] have begun to wage war in earnest." Paul Miller, National Security Council director for Afghanistan (2007–09), affirms, "Although serious challenges remain, victory is attainable—if the troops and their civilian counterparts are given time to complete their mission." For Mackubin Owens of the Naval War College, the shift to a counterinsurgency strategy has squandered the U.S. military's advantages, since, "as the old Texas saying goes, some people actually 'need killin'.' . . . The U.S. must do what it has to in order to prevail in Afghanistan." The ranking Republican on the Senate armed services committee and his party's 2008 presidential nominee, John McCain, is equally emphatic: "We're not going to leave until we win," noting, "The fundamental object of war is to break the enemy's will to fight." The party's 2008 vice-presidential nominee, Sarah Palin, affirms that "We can win in Afghanistan. . . . And we must do what it takes to prevail." Max Boot, "Afghanistan: The Case for Optimism," Council on Foreign Relations, September 2, 2010; Paul D. Miller, "Finish the Job: How the War in Afghanistan Can Be Won," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011; Mackubin Owen, "What It Will Take: Mackubin Thomas Owens Reviews *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way Out of Afghanistan*, by Bing West," *National Review*, March 7, 2011; "John McCain Visits Afghanistan, Calls Kandahar Key to Victory over Taliban," Associated Press, July 5, 2010,; "Afghanistan: McCain's War," *National Review* Online, July 7, 2010; Sarah Palin, "We Must Win in Afghanistan," Facebook, October 6, 2009, http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=148604603434.

37. In the waning days of the Bush administration, Karzai told Britain's then-foreign secretary David Miliband that "he had consulted 'the whole Afghan people,' and they were all in favor of reconciliation," according to notes of the meeting shared with American diplomats. "They wanted to 'bring over the good guys, while excluding the bad guys.' Karzai realizes that the U.S., Russia and Iran had doubts about reconciliation, but this was something that the Afghan people wanted, and which he was bound to press ahead." Cable # 08LONDON2964, U.S. Embassy, London, published via WikiLeaks in "Afghanistan: President Karzai Not Confident on Elections," *The Telegraph*, February 4, 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/london-wikileaks/8304809/AFGHANISTAN-PRESIDENT-KARZAI-NOT-CONFIDENT-ON-ELECTIONS-CLAIMS-FINANCIAL-RESERVES-BEST-IN-WORLD.html.

38. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Remarks at Asia Society, February 18, 2011, http://kabul.usembassy.gov/sp-021811.html (emphasis added).

39. O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index."

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