

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN

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The destabilization of Afghanistan over the last 25 years has resulted in four major overlapping transformations: 1. the center has collapsed causing the center-periphery relationship to evaporate, 2. the national market of Afghanistan has disappeared, 3, ethnic, sectarian, and regional cleavages have become more robust and assertive, 4. Islamist ideologies have become powerful transparent forces in the construction of self and the political and social life of Afghans. These changes have been induced by the introduction of massive amounts of external material and monetary resources (largely by the USSR, United States, and Saudi Arabia) and radical ideological orientations of the left and right. In pre-1978 Afghanistan political power and surplus economic resources were extremely circumscribed and there was virtually no institutional access available for ordinary Afghans to contend for them. The introduction of vast amounts of new resources and extremist ideologies has modified traditional barriers arrangements and intensified ethnically configured competition for real and potential sources of power.

Academic literature (especially in anthropology) about socio-cultural diversity in general and ethnic groups encapsulated by nation-states in particular, is replete with accounts of the correlation between heightened ethnic, linguistic, and regional tension and conflict and the competitive introduction of new resources from outside. The political dynamics of Afghanistan during the past twenty-five years vividly illustrate and confirm this causal relationship. Policies and programs for the country's rehabilitation and reconstruction do

not seem to be informed by a critical understanding of the relationship between the configuration of ethnic, sectarian, and regional contrasts in Afghan polity and the quality and quantity of external resources that have been (and are being) grafted on these variations. This relationship provides the critical framework for comprehending the current unprecedented contesting political and economic claims and strategies in the volatile political field of Afghanistan.

Pre-1978 Afghanistan was a loosely integrated state with a tenuous national market. Ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and regional idioms of identity superseded conceptions of nation and nationality in Afghanistan. General underdevelopment, paucity of economic resources, absence of effective means of communication, lack of participatory political institutions, and a weak and disinterested center coexisted with this state of affairs. Ethnic and regional contrasts were regularly pitted one against another and brutally suppressed and manipulated by the central government when the latter felt threatened or wished to simply flex its coercive muscles. Notable examples in this regard are the Ghalzi rebellion (1882-1892), the Hazara suppression (1891-1893), the forced Islamization of Kafiristan (1895-1896), the Shinwar (1920s), and the Safi and Shinwar uprisings (1947-1949). For the most part interethnic and interregional tensions were under the surface and those that flared up were held in check by the government. This state of affairs in which the government enjoyed the upper hand dramatically changed in the 1980s when the Afghan center, in spite of its enhanced destructive ability, became increasingly weak, isolated, and unpopular by the opposition posed to it by the

introduction, in the periphery, by outsiders of massive amounts of monetary and destructive resources and new Islamist ideological orientations.

The United States and its local ally, Saudi Arabia, with the facilitation of Pakistan, played the decisive role in the collapse of the infrastructure of Afghanistan. By pouring billions of dollars and massive quantities of weapons into the Afghan periphery through the recruitment, training, and arming of tens of thousands of local mercenaries and inventing the ideology for their assembly line “jihad” (struggle or war [misleadingly translated from Arabic as “holy war”]), the United States radically altered the balance of center-periphery and intra-periphery relations in the country. Tensions between the center and the periphery and within the periphery became open hostility and, in some cases, bloody wounds. The prominence of various warlords in the country today is one dramatic consequence of these resource-induced divisive transformations that has taken the country back to the late eighteenth century when the various political and ethnic pieces that make up Afghanistan were yet to be encapsulated by its colonially constructed borders.

The infusion of new resources not only aggravated social distinctions it triggered new political alignments, strategies, and tactics in the country. As an adaptation to the absence of the center, alternative social and political arrangements for local governance in the periphery emerged and assumed increasing autonomy and self-sufficiency. During the past ten years the Afghan center not only disappeared, it became irrelevant to political and economic life inside the country. As early as summer 1980 these new contrasts and

tensions could easily be seen in the policies and behavior of the umbrella organizations of the “mujahidin” (Arabic, strugglers [misleadingly translated as “holy warriors]), the Afghan opposition factions operating out of Pakistan. Armed confrontation in the field among these groups was frequent earlier but became widespread after 1989 when the Soviets withdrew and the United States substantially downscaled its mujahidin subsidies and supervision. These confrontations quickly gave way to an all out war for power and territory after the central government of Afghanistan collapsed in April 1992. The political format of the Taliban movement evolved out of the anarchy that followed in the wake of the disappearance of the Afghan center. The post-1978 chaotic social conditions throughout the country encouraged millions of Afghan men (including adolescent boys) to participate in various forms of armed opposition to the state as well as in various forms of entrepreneurial economic activities. They experienced firsthand the soft underbelly and fragility of the Afghan state, life without a state, and the viability of local rule and government as an adjustment to the disaster that had struck the country and continues to shape life there.

Presently the United States does not have a clear and coherent policy for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan, with justifiable cynicism, view the U. S. presence in their country solely aimed at control of the energy resources of Central Asia and the eradication of Taleban and al-Qaeda and, when all this is perceived to be accomplished, they believe the United States will leave. Since 9-11 the United States has followed improvised courses that are predicated on an empirically and historically unfounded premise, a premise that is shared by analysts of

Afghanistan among academic specialists, in the government, and the media. This approach assumes that the collapse of the Afghan center and the destruction of its infrastructure could have been prevented had the United States decided to stay in the region and not abandon its mujahidin clients after 1989, especially after 1992. However, the record shows that the dramatic changes in the political economy of Afghanistan and Afghan Islam had begun long before the Soviets left the country in 1989 and shortly after the United States assumed sponsorship of the mujahidin in the early 1980s and encouraged Wahabi fundamentalists and other Muslim fanatics to nest in the country. The withdrawal of the USSR and the corresponding decline of the underwriting of mujahidin by the United States and its allies are events that, *ipso facto*, have little to do with the collapse of Afghanistan, the emergence of Taleban, and the infestation of the country by al-Qaeda. The seeds for these transformations were sown during the early 1980s when the USSR inserted extensive resources into the Afghan center and the United States government countered by debilitating the Kabul machinery through the introduction of massive monetary and destructive resources into the periphery and by creating and manipulating the mujahidin in the framework of a vehement anti-Soviet and anti-Afghan Government fundamentalist Islamist ideology.

By the time the USSR left Afghanistan in 1989 there were daily reports of pitched battles for control of territory among the mujahidin. These conflicts could neither be disguised nor suppressed by the so called Afghanistan Interim Government (AIG) in 1989 and the CIA-ISI orchestrated attack on Jellalabad in April of that year in which the Kabul government forces soundly defeated the thousands of well equipped and well paid but

discordant “freedom fighters”. When the US embassy in Kabul was officially closed in winter 1989 the configuration of ethnic relations had been dramatically altered and fundamentalist Islamist fervor had replaced the traditional patterns of ethnic and religious tolerance and accommodation in Afghanistan. The political passions that were initially (and theoretically) directed towards the Russians were rapidly diverted to hostilities towards other ethnic groups, regions, sects and, ironically (but not surprisingly), the West—especially the United States. And today, when hundreds of millions of dollars are given to the Kabul government and—in a stark contradiction of the public pronouncements by the U. S. government about its desire to unite and reconstruct Afghanistan—to the various Afghan warlords, these passions are more overt and consequently each region remains largely independent of central control and each ethnicity and sect is more aware and assertive about its prospects for direct control of territory and access to power.

What the policy makers and analysts do not recognize is that the main cause of the disappearance of center-periphery relations and the disruption of the traditional balance of interethnic and interregional relations in Afghanistan is the introduction of new external resources, not the withdrawal of the United States from the region and its abandonment of the mujahidin. In fact, had the United States stayed on and continued funding the mujahidin after 1992, ethnic and sectarian contrasts would have assumed even sharper, more violent and articulate form, as they seem to have during the past eighteen months. And the Wahabi terrorists would have driven even wider and deeper roots in Afghanistan.

During the devastation of Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden and his gangs of Wahabi extremists, with CIA support, led the recruitment of thousands of Arabs and other Muslims from around the world for the “Afghan jihad”. The penetration of Afghanistan by large numbers of al-Qaeda started right after the departure of Soviet troops. Alarmed by this trend, the Afghan government of the time repeatedly warned of the infiltration of the country by the Wahabis and the presence of increasing numbers of other Muslim Arabs in the ranks of the mujahidin. By then the armed opposition to the government of Afghanistan had become a mostly Wahabi-led Arabized affair.

Notable in the role of the USSR in the collapse of the infra-structure of the state of Afghanistan was its bolstering of the Afghan center’s destructive ability and radicalization of the thinking and behavior of the local leftists (more anti-Western than doctrinaire Marxists); in a way, the opposite of the role of the United States. In comparative terms, the Soviet Union corrupted the Afghan center by encouraging its revolutionary and anti-Western rhetoric, socialist policies and behavior—thereby moving it to the extreme left of traditional Afghan political discourse and relations of power—whereas the United States corrupted the Afghan periphery by converting its tolerant and flexible folk Islam into inflexible anti-Soviet radical fundamentalist rhetoric and behavior—thus moving it to the extreme right of Afghan political discourse and relations of power. Paralleling this transformation were rapidly increasing intra-periphery tensions and armed confrontations. The center-periphery and intra-periphery courses of armed conflict ultimately caused the demise of the Afghan center and the atomization of its

periphery. These violent confrontations continued and together with the debris of the fall of Kabul in April 1992 frame the 1992 to present political dynamics in the country. The various extreme elements are currently scattered all over Afghanistan and are nested in virtually all organized political groups in the country. They dictate the content, pace and tone of Afghan political discourse. Unless these radicalized factions learn to negotiate their differences without arms and violence and within institutional arrangements, Afghanistan will continue its slide into further instability and potential disintegration. And unless this process is so carefully monitored as to make it gradual, peaceful, and successful, there is a good chance that the country will dissolve into smaller political units. The externally inspired and fueled radicalization of its center and periphery not only destabilized Afghanistan, it turned the country into the training ground for Islamist extremists from Morocco to Indonesia.

Without doubt the USSR and its successor state, the Russian Republic, bear heavy responsibility for the destruction of and corresponding obligation for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. But given the circumstances, and in light of the widely circulated knowledge that Russia is currently promoting some of the Soviet era local extremists (of the left and right), that obligation should be channeled through the United Nations. Similarly, Saudi Arabia bears heavy responsibility for the destabilization of Afghanistan. But for reasons that mirror those for Russia, its obligations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan should be discharged through international arrangements. Within this general framework the following recommendations are made for an alternative approach to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The United States should unambiguously and emphatically embrace its moral and political responsibility for the destabilization of Afghanistan and the collapse of its state infrastructure. It should assure (and convince) the people of Afghanistan and the world community that it is sincerely committed to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country and that it will stay the course in Afghanistan and stand with its people until their country is reconstructed, totally back on its feet, and securely tracked on its way to a stable and self-sufficient democratic state. Patchwork solutions and superficial repair will not help Afghanistan recover its ruined infrastructure. Much of what has been attempted so far by the United States government and its puppets in Kabul amounts to whitewashing and disguising the vast extent and complexity and grave consequences of the breakdown of the Afghan state. The current hasty, ad hoc, and superficial “quick fix” programs along with the gimmicks of a new “constitution”, “loya jirga”, rigged “elections”, and Hamed Karzai’s comical aristocratic public costume will make the situation even worse.

The United States must shoulder its obligation for a substantial material contribution to the country’s reconstruction over the next 10-12 years. It should carefully draw up a long range “Marshall Plan”—in spirit if not in scope—for the country with realistic and specific objective over the next 10-12 years and abandon the existing short sighted, ad hoc, and unfocused “quick fix” speed race. We must remember that Afghanistan is not post-WWII Germany. The latter was advantaged by a long-standing and firmly placed blue print for a strong modern state structure, an articulate sense of nationalism and

foundations on which to build participatory institutions. Present day Afghanistan is a rubble beneath which lies a faint and broken outline of a fragile state format. The absence of a strong, and uncontested national ideology in Afghanistan has left behind a country that is diffuse and desperately in need of integration. In Afghanistan we have the daunting challenge of not only resuscitating a failed state but also the (virtually from scratch) task of forging a coherent sense of nationality to which all Afghans can comfortably subscribe. Obviously, the latter challenge is by far the more complex and difficult of the two. Consequently, the reconstruction of Afghanistan involves an interconnected two-track project that should, when carefully aligned, produce the foundations of a viable nation-state.

There has never been a frank, critical, and open discussion about who or what is an “Afghan” and how an “Afghan” has been conceptualized by various ethno-linguistic groups and governmental elites in Afghanistan nor by academics inside and outside the country notably Western Anthropologists with experience there. This taboo was part of a policy crafted by non-Paxtun, Persian-speaking elite that dominated the state bureaucracy over the last 250 years—especially since the 1890s when the country’s current borders were colonially constructed. Leaving this question unattended enabled the central governments to manipulate one group against another, Paxtuns versus non-Paxtuns, region against region. Any serious attempt at the re-integration and rebuilding of Afghanistan requires open and free discussion of this crucial issue. Avoiding or postponing it will, sooner or later, turn the country into entities in which the categories “Afghan” and “Afghanistan” will have no applicability.

The project of rehabilitating and reconstructing Afghanistan offers a unique historical opportunity for the United States and the international community to help the people of Afghanistan construct a democratic Islamic state format that reflects the best features of their traditional social institutions and cultural values, and the best political and economic elements the modern world has to offer. A firm, sincere, and sustained commitment by the international community to the reconstruction of Afghanistan must be founded in the acceptance of this unique historical challenge and should be independent of foreign military and security operations there. These operations should be phased out as the transitional period gradually evolves into a rehabilitated state and the establishment of a democratically constructed central government. American involvement with the reconstruction of Afghanistan should be in the framework of an international consortium in which it should have a prominent role.

Why the current haste and impatience in the reconstruction of Afghanistan? If we blindly rush into reconstruction, as is presently the case, we will have in Afghanistan, once again, a faith-based country where warlords and fundamentalists rule. The country will be ripe for terrorist infestation and will be dominated by groups that are currently politically organized and have roots in various shades of extremism: radical Islamist fundamentalists and some former Khalqis (Taleban, Hekmatyar, both supported by Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia); former Parchamis in various guises (e. g. Dostum, and others in the Northern Alliance, supported mostly by Russia and Iran); and mainstream “jehadi” or mujahidin factions led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ismael Khan, Abdul Rab Sayaf, Said

Ahmad Gailani, Sebghatullah Mojaddidi, and followers of the late Ahmad Shah Mas'ud (supported by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia in the case of Rabbani and followers of Mas'ud). If we hold elections under the current conditions we will certainly end up with the status quo—Karzai in Kabul and the warlords with their militias in various ethno-provinces. Apparently the United States has resigned itself to this outcome. The U. S. General John Vines, Coalition Commander in Afghanistan, recently stated that the warlord militias are needed in Afghanistan “because there has been no security mechanism to protect the people of an area” (NBC Nightly News, September 9, 2003). This is, on the one hand, an admission of the U. S. government’s logic for collusion with the warlords and, on the other, the echo of the “divide and rule” policy of the United States in Afghanistan.

Why confer legitimacy on arrangements that are arbitrary, corrupt and do not reflect the wishes of the people of Afghanistan? Our aim in Afghanistan should be the gradual but certain dismantling of undemocratic structures and extremist networks throughout the country. If we allow the undemocratic and illegitimate ruling machineries in Kabul and the provinces to make themselves “legitimate” through a bogus new constitution and imposed superficial and, certain to be rigged elections, they will become fixed features of the political landscape of Afghanistan for the foreseeable future.

Much that has been undertaken in Afghanistan during the past two years has been piecemeal, superficial, and in haste because the elite chosen by the United States to govern the country is in a hurry so that they can convert the transitional regime to a

situation in which they and their supporters will become permanent fixtures. The traditional American addiction to a “quick fix” approach complements this hurried and reckless pace. Tracking closely to the United States’ policy is Lakhdar Brahimi, United Nations envoy to Afghanistan. He is presiding over the ill-advised reckless march to the new constitution and elections for neither of which the country is in the least prepared. In Afghanistan we have a golden opportunity to gradually, cautiously, and patiently create the foundations of a democratic Muslim state that will be legitimated by consensus, not force. Anything less would be a great disservice to the people of Afghanistan. If the current rush to a new constitution and elections is allowed to pass, the country will likely lapse into control by a coalition of radical Islamists and warlords or disintegrate into autonomous principalities. Impatience with Afghanistan and putting the cart of democracy before the (yet to be built) social engine will make the situation much worse than it already is. A sincere and realistic commitment to the rescue and reconstruction of Afghanistan requires that its people be first helped to their feet before they are required to walk—before the burden of a new constitution and elections is thrust upon them. Once the Afghan people are on their feet they can then write their constitution and hold free elections under the watch of leaders chosen by themselves not those appointed by and accountable to occupying outsiders.

State building within a democratic framework in Afghanistan cannot be accomplished in a hurry and in a few years. The foundational ingredients and institutional rudiments of a state require measured and gradual development and special human and material resources. The under twenty-five years old population of Afghanistan, the vast majority

in the country, have never peacefully experienced a state structure within Afghanistan. Millions of Afghan men and young boys have participated in the violent deconstruction of their state in recent years; they have learned to manipulate and intimidate a weak state and to view it as an obstacle to their personal interests and something without which they can survive easily. The need for patience and gradualism is especially critical in Afghanistan where the state and periphery arrangements have totally disappeared, where 90% of the population is illiterate, where tribal and local loyalties among the vast majority of its people are the only loyalties, and where the idea of a firmly established nation state and democratic institutions is totally unfamiliar. Realism, patience, and gradualism should be the guiding lights of our approach to Afghanistan. We need a deliberately slow pace with gradual introduction of capital, technology, and political and social innovations. One sure way to slow down the current dangerous rush to reconstruction is to substantially scale down the transfer of external resources to the country, something that is, not surprisingly, vehemently opposed by Hamed Karzai and his interim government.

Moreover, democracy cannot be introduced with rockets, bombs and tanks. It is pure fantasy to believe that democracy and “freedom” can be imposed with massive violent destruction and humiliation. Humiliation breeds contempt, disrespect, and hatred. The people of Afghanistan cannot be expected to forget the painful memories of the humiliating violence inflicted on them during the past twenty five years by the Russian armed forces, by the armed forces of Afghanistan, the U. S. sponsored mujahidin, the Taleban and, in the aftermath of 9-11, the armed forces of the United States. The very

idea of democracy is incompatible with violence and fear induced by coercion or the threat of coercion. Democracy requires informed consensus as the basis of political legitimacy; and democracy is not simply made up of a hastily drafted constitution, superficial elections, and three branches of government. A democratic polity requires foremost a set of sentiments and intellectual equipment about freedom, equality, trust, foregoing one's personal and familial interests for a larger social good, social justice, respect for basic human rights, informed and voluntary participation in political and economic affairs. These requirements can only be gradually learned in the framework of secure, stable and peaceful institutional arrangements (e.g. family, school, mosque, media) over a long haul, perhaps over several generations. The people of Afghanistan have for long been treated as subjects of undemocratic and despotic rulers. They must be helped to gradually move into a democratic polity that will treat them as citizens with constitutionally guaranteed civil and human rights. In a country ravaged by violence as Afghanistan, this will take all the more time. In Afghanistan we have the monumental task of helping the Afghans to unlearn the use of violence in dealing with social and cultural differences and to repair the impact of centuries full of violence. Rushing into these daunting challenges will be counterproductive. The current hasty and heavily coercive process of reconstruction, especially the imposition of the "quick fix" constitution and elections, is doomed to failure. Dependence on coercion must be redefined and given a democratic context, otherwise, it will produce calamitous results that will include what state terror has always produced in Afghanistan, short-term stability but guaranteed long-term instability, fragmentation and collapse.

The people of Afghanistan have never participated in free and democratic elections. It is simply self-serving and counterproductive to impose the heavy and complex burden of a new constitution and elections on a people who are the least prepared for it, and on a society that lacks minimal meaningful institutional arrangements for participatory processes. Moreover, Afghanistan is in a state of lawlessness, and anarchy; it must be secured, stabilized and politically and economically integrated before such things as a new constitution and elections are contemplated. Forcing on the people of Afghanistan a document that is written in haste by strangers and friends and supporters of Hamed Karzai—people who have been alienated from Afghanistan for decades—in an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and uncertainty, will give way to more instability and division. The people of Afghanistan must be provided first with basic social arrangements for the understanding and appreciation of constitutional government and a participatory political system. Basic requirements for this understanding include arrangements for security, education, literacy, and a responsible free press. Virtual universal illiteracy and ignorance have made it possible for corrupt and self-serving regimes and religious fanatics to dominate the country. Today we are in a position not to allow this to happen again. Afghans must experience democracy gradually and in meaningful, smaller, local, and closer to home doses. During the transitional period no national or provincial elections should be held; only local elections dealing with specific non-polarizing issues, not for political offices, should be frequently held. Elections for individual office holders during the transitional period will only strengthen the Kabul clique and the provincial warlords. At the end of the transitional period when literacy has increased substantially and universal compulsory education is firmly established,

Afghans should be able to meaningfully deal with the complex issue of a new constitution and elections for national and provincial offices. No national elections for political offices should be held when the various warlords and their militias have been eliminated and replaced by centrally appointed governors and a centrally controlled army and police force (see below).

The current hasty and unfocused plans for the new constitution and the machinery for drafting it along with arrangements for the spurious “loya jirga” (see below) and national elections should be suspended. The Kabul government’s desire for a new constitution and speedy elections is based solely on its desperate desire for a device with which to perpetuate itself. In so doing, the Karzai government is blatantly exploiting the fears of the people of Afghanistan. The right of Afghans to, by themselves, meaningfully and freely hammer out a document that will serve as the foundation of a constitutional government in Afghanistan should not be preempted by the contortions of a “new” constitution and rigged elections. In fact, the draft of this “new” constitution seems to be essentially the old 1964 constitution of the monarchy with minor modifications. Retained are such monarchical features as the “house of elders” to be appointed by the president. Karzai’s constitutional commission has simply replaced “king” with “president”, “kingdom” with “republic” in the old document. This kind of blatant trickery will not work and should not be allowed to uncritically pass for the permanent founding papers of Afghanistan. However, for practical purposes and with minor adjustments, the 1964 constitution is adequate—not as a “new” constitution but a provisional charter—for the

transitional period in which the focus should be on security, stabilization, integration, and seeding for democratic institutions.

The present government in Kabul is composed mostly of individuals who have dubious ties to the present population of Afghanistan. Several key cabinet members are personal friends of Hamed Karzai and classmates of Zalmay Khalilzad, US ambassador to Afghanistan. Many of these individuals have been away from the country for decades and are connected to the pre-1978 corrupt regimes and the small merchant class that had emigrated in the 1980s to Europe and the United States. Others in key posts are remnants of the disastrous “jihad” and the former leftist groups. They have no commitment to democracy in Afghanistan. Hamed Karzai (accurately called “mayor of Kabul” by Senator Joseph Biden) is an appointee of Washington. His rule does not extend beyond the building in which he lives in Kabul. Karzai was once a supporter of the Taleban. He and his government have accomplished virtually nothing in Afghanistan. The country continues to be in chaos and disintegrated. Karzai is protected by a security detail that is composed entirely of members of the United States’ security forces. There is no head of government in the world other than the U. S. president, who enjoys this privilege. Those who decided to install American bodyguards for Mr. Karzai must be indeed naïve, indifferent, incompetent or desperate for someone to govern Afghanistan for them. The decision suggests only one thing: Karzai is an undisputed puppet of an occupying power and undeserving of the trust of the people he pretends to govern. He is the only head of government in the world who cannot trust his personal security to his own people. He can never mingle freely among them. No previous ruler of Afghanistan, no matter how

unrepresentative and unpopular, has been so isolated from its people. One assumes that, sooner or later, American forces will leave Afghanistan; what will happen when or if Karzai's American security detail leaves the country?! Common sense and a sincere commitment to a democratic Afghanistan require that, if for no other reason, for incompetence and for the reason that he does not trust his own people and they do not trust him, Karzai should be immediately removed and, for his own safety, taken out of Afghanistan. Due, in part, to the incoherence and confusion of U. S. policy, and distrust of local Afghans, Hamed Karzai has become indispensable to United States policy in Afghanistan. Echoing this dependence Robert Oakley, an experienced American diplomat, recently stated that if Karzai dies "it (the Kabul government) could all crash and burn" and "if he (Karzai) goes under we are going to have big problems" (NBC Nightly News, September 7, 2003). The United Nations' Lakhdar Brahimi agrees with Oakley by saying "there is not much of an alternative to him [Karzai]" (NBC Nightly News, September 9, 2003). Why limit our options and succumb to such a dangerous addiction, an addiction that we must, sooner or later, give up? What if Karzai resigns, falls ill or dies? Would Afghanistan then be, once again, relegated to disintegration and imminent collapse?! This being a colonial arrangement of convenience, Hamed Karzai (and Zalmay Khalilzad) must never forget the following historically borne ethnographic fact: Those who rule the United States and control its government will never fully trust those who do not have European roots irrespective of the depth of their loyalty and obedience to their masters. No single person is or should be viewed as indispensable to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Many of the cabinet ministers and their deputies with titles of “doctor” and “professor”, in the Kabul government are strangers to Afghanistan. Like Karzai himself, they have no clear and coherent idea of what Afghanistan was and is, what has happened to it in the last fifty years, and where it is headed. Several high-ranking officials of the government claim bogus academic degrees and titles. As in early years, the real or alleged academic training of these individuals has nothing to do with their administrative and professional responsibilities and duties in various ministries. In many cases the main qualification of these ministers seem to be competence in the English language, the idiom of comfort for most Westerners, especially Americans, in Afghanistan. Apparently the shallowness of U. S. policy mirrors the incompetence of this hand picked ruling group.

The people of Afghanistan do not identify with foreign appointed, estranged and alienated individuals like Karzai, his cabinet and their cronies in the Kabul government and collectively consider them instruments of an occupying colonial power. Instead of supporting corrupt and out of touch expatriates, the United States government and the United Nations should seek competent and respected moderate elements from *within* the country for the transitional government of Afghanistan. The country has ample human resources for leadership and service.

The source for local information (and perhaps the theoretician) for the American government’s approach to Afghanistan during the Reagan and two Bush administrations is Zalmay Khalilzad (a.k.a. Hannah Negaran). He and Hamed Karzai, his long time friend, have put together the present transitional government. An Afghan-American of

obscure background, Khalilzad is behind the choice of Karzai as head of the Kabul transitional government. Khalilzad claims to be a Pashtun and the son of an Afghan government official during the monarchy. But this writer is unaware of any one who knows for certain his tribal, ethnic, and regional affiliations in Afghanistan. He does not speak a coherent sentence of Pashtu, the language of Pashtuns and one of the two major languages of Afghanistan. His claim to Afghan identity is based only on marginal competence in Dari, the other major language of the country. Khalilzad has become famous as an “expert” on Afghanistan even though his academic training has nothing to do with that country. He is apparently the “scholar” in residence for George W. Bush’s policy group dealing with Afghanistan. The poverty and bankruptcy of this policy echoes the elementary school level scholarship of Khalilzad who has not written a single scholarly word about Afghanistan. His understanding of the cultural, historical, and social complexities of Afghanistan is anecdotal, garbled, and confused. His writings, full of Orientalist distortions and misrepresentations, are of journalistic and parochial bent and are uninformed by the scholarly historical and ethnographic accounts of Afghan culture, society and politics. And they contain a decidedly anti-Pashtun bias.

A close associate of Douglas Feith, Richard Perle, Richard Pipes, and Paul Wolfowitz—all avowed pro-Israeli zionists—Khalilzad is rumored to have arranged for the intelligence services of Afghanistan to be developed and organized by Israel. If this is true, Afghanistan is sure to become a pariah among Muslim countries, a status that will guarantee its demise. A careful review of Kkalilzad’s political career in Washington reveals that he is committed to the destruction of existing state structures in the Middle

East and South Asia. His zionist connections and leanings are well known in Afghanistan and do nothing but compromise American credibility there and in the surrounding region. He is admired in the Bush administration for his brazen zionism and fondness of the military option as the first and only option. Until recently Khalilzad worked for Condoleezza Rice as personal representative of President George W. Bush to Afghanistan and is currently the United States ambassador in Kabul.

During Ronald Reagan's presidency Khalilzad was involved in the construction and management of the United States government's involvement with the "freedom fighters", the creation of the Afghanistan Interim Government (AIG) in 1989, and he was actively behind the mujahidin takeover of Kabul in 1992, a takeover that caused the collapse of the Afghan center. For years, during the 1990s, he negotiated with the Taleban on behalf of UNICOL Corporation. (Some have suggested that Hamed Karzai was also involved in these negotiations as well). During his employment with the United States government, Khalilzad has left behind a trail of blood and destruction in Afghanistan. He personifies the devastation of that country and what he has done there since 9-11, confirms this personification.

Zalmay Khalilzad, Hamed Karzai and his cabinet members and other high ranking officials of the Kabul interim government are disconnected from the lives of the people of Afghanistan. The government's ministries are staffed by relatives, friends, and loyalists of the ministers. Corruption in the Kabul government is said to be endemic. One reported common practice involves brothers and cousins of these ministers as "consultants" to

many of the hundreds of NGOs in Afghanistan. As consultants they receive lucrative fees for serving as brokers between the various ministries and NGOs for gaining contracts for reconstruction and development. Many known brokers have become millionaires overnight for arranging sweetheart deals and, in some cases, for extorting from or shaking down NGOs, local business and private individuals. It has been suggested that some of these extortionists are more powerful than high government officials. Instances of such brokerages are well known and some have been reported in the press. A widely circulated report indicates that 95% of the staff of Afghan embassies abroad is made up of close relatives of high-ranking officials of the Kabul government and the various warlords. The present course in which a few uninformed and corrupt Afghans guide the power-struck and ignorant American policy makers (like blind leading the blind) will result in further destabilization.

The United States approach to Afghanistan must be relieved from its blind dependence on Karzai and Khalilzad and other “indispensable” individuals. A new transitional government composed of those who are qualified and have experienced and who are genuinely dedicated to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan and, not simply interested in creating personality cults and ruling dynasties, should compose the government in Kabul. The structure of an alternative transitional government for Afghanistan is briefly outlined below. This model is based on collective leadership and, to the extent feasible, no single high office will be without collective supervision.

A UN-facilitated National Assembly of Afghanistan (Dari—*Shura-ye Meli-ye Afghanistan*, Pashtu—*de Afghanistan Meli Shura*), not the “*Loya Jirga* (sic)”, with five to ten representatives (depending on UN population guesstimates) from each of the 32 provinces, will set in motion the machinery for the transitional government. The *Jerga* (with the first vowel as short/soft ‘e’; assembly, council, gathering) is an informal *ad hoc* Pashtun tribal mechanism for the resolution of specific local conflict. Usually convened adjacent to the local cemetery, it seldom has more than twenty adult *male* members. Decisions are based on *total* consensus. Dissent is strongly discouraged and rarely allowed. During the past century various central governments of Afghanistan, including the current arrangement in Kabul, have manipulated a corrupt distortion of this Pashtun tribal sodality of local importance as a *Loya Jerga* (Pashtu, grand assembly or grand council) to rubber stamp their decisions dealing with major internal and international issues and problems. Members of the *Loya Jerga* were always hand picked by the central government and, in spite of this, its decisions were frequently vetoed or overlooked by the government. Even though members of the *Loya Jerga* held in Kabul during June 2002 were handpicked by the Karzai government, their decision to select the former king as Afghanistan’s leader was sidestepped by the combined agency of the United States and the government of Kabul. The *Loya Jerga* was invented to co-opt and pacify the Pashtun tribes and to deceive and intimidate the non-Pashtun population of Afghanistan with the alleged numerical majority and historical reputation of the Pashtuns—a clever divide and rule tactic of playing Pashtuns against non-Pashtuns. In reality these governments themselves were neither tribal nor Pashtun and it was a mere speculation that the Pashtuns constituted a numerical majority in Afghanistan. The fabrication and

manipulation of the *Loya Jerga* by Afghan governments has served as a major divisive element in the political life of modern Afghanistan and is especially (and understandably) resented by non-Pashtun Afghans. Ironically, the *Loya Jerga* has produced little tangible political and economic benefits for the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan. We should not legitimize and attempt to lay the foundations of democracy in Afghanistan with a divisive political instrument that, in its essential and traditional format, does not permit dissent and is restricted to men only. To do so will be divisive and a great disservice to the people of Afghanistan and will, once again, make the Afghan state subordinate and vulnerable to the (albeit imagined) domination and threat of Pashtun tribes. If Afghanistan is to become a viable nation state, it must first discard real or imagined trappings of tribal society. But disingenuously, not only is the *Loya Jerga* not discarded, section 6, articles 110-115 of the current constitution makes it a permanent fixture of the political structure of Afghanistan and declares it the “highest manifestation of the wishes of the people of Afghanistan”. However, in the long run, the people of Afghanistan will not be manipulated again by the contortions of the unrepresentative and illegitimate Kabul government. They will undo all that the manipulation of *Loya Jerga* has imposed on them as soon as rampant violence and the threat of force are removed from their lives and they are able to take part in genuinely free participatory electoral processes.

The National Assembly of Afghanistan will consist of people who have lived continuously in Afghanistan for at least the past ten years and who have not served as members of the policy making councils of previous governments. Members of the assembly should be literate and at least 35 years old. This assembly will set up its own

rules and choose its own presiding and executive officers. The assembly will create a nine member Supreme Council for the Unity and Reconstruction of Afghanistan (Dari, *Majles-e A'la-ye Etehad wa Baz-sazi-ye Afghanistan*; Pashtu, *De Afghanistan de Etehad aw Beya Jorawulo A'la Tolana*) from a list of Afghans who are not members of the assembly for a one twelve year term.

The Supreme Council for the Unity and Reconstruction of Afghanistan (SCURA) will be the policy-making and executive organ of the country and will have invested in it the powers assigned to the king and prime minister in the 1964 constitution. Members of SCURA should be at least thirty years old. Other criteria will include at least a high school education, good citizenship, non-involvement in policy-making councils of previous governments, and ethnic background. SCURA will elect its own chairperson who will act as Prime Minister (chief executive officer and head of government [not head of state]) for a term of one year renewable once at the discretion of SCURA. Women will be eligible to serve on SCURA. There will be no head of state during the transitional period. Replacement of members of SCURA (in case of illness, removal for cause, resignation, or death) will be chosen from a ranked list of 20 alternate members prepared by the National Assembly of Afghanistan. The position of Prime Minister will rotate among members of SCURA and no member may serve for more than two, one year terms. The prime minister will form a cabinet and will be accountable to SCURA which will review and approve his/her major decisions, including those involving appointments to the cabinet and provincial heads of government. Four non-voting international experts

(preferably with fluency in Dari and/or Pashtu) selected by the United Nations should serve as advisors to SCURA with full rights of participation in its deliberations.

The Supreme Council for the Unity and Reconstruction of Afghanistan will establish 5-6 supervisory boards, each with five members. Members to these boards will be appointed by SCURA. Each board will regularly review and audit the fiscal and personnel affairs of 3-4 cabinet ministries. For example, there will be a supervisory board for the ministries of interior, justice, and defense; another board to supervise the ministries of education, higher education, and public health, etc. Two non-voting international experts (preferably with fluency in Dari and/or Pashtu) selected by the United Nations should serve as advisors to each board with full rights of participation in its deliberations. Decisions of these boards will be subject to review by SCURA.

Governors, military commanders, and high ranking officers of provinces will be appointed by the prime minister with the approval of SCURA. Provincial governments will be overseen by the Ministry of Interior which will channel funds for their budgets and monitor their personnel, security and fiscal affairs. No provincial government in Afghanistan should receive or accept direct assistance from foreign states, international agencies, or NGOs.

So far, no persuasive case has been made for a large standing army in Afghanistan. For the interim period Afghanistan needs only a compact, well-trained, and well-equipped professional army consisting of two to three divisions. Its primary responsibility should

be to secure the political and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. This army should reflect the ethnic composition of the country and its command should be rotated between major ethnic groups. Traditionally, the armed forces of Afghanistan have been used by corrupt and despotic governments to intimidate and terrorize the people of Afghanistan. Formal safeguards against such abuses must be put in place. The command of the Afghan army during the transitional period should rest with SCURA. Large segments of the current Afghan army are heavily involved in drug trafficking. These forces must be disbanded and replaced by new units. The reason the current Kabul government is seeking a large and expensive army is that it plans to remain in power irrespective of the wishes of the people of Afghanistan and to continue what previous governments have done with the armed forces of the country.

All existing militia and other local security forces in Kabul and under the control of various warlords should be dismantled and replaced by international security forces. For its internal security Afghanistan should, with the help of the United States and international donors, develop a large (40-50 thousand), well-trained and well-paid national police force. Until the Afghan police force is fully developed the internal security of the country should be the responsibility of the international coalition. This responsibility should involve all of Afghanistan, not only the city of Kabul. As the Afghan national police force develops, it will gradually replace the international security forces. At the end of the transitional period when the national police force should be large enough to replace all international security forces and after its first democratically

elected government is in place, Afghanistan should regain its political sovereignty. Only then may the country expand its armed forces.

Transferring large amounts of capital to Afghanistan during the transitional period is counterproductive and tantamount to pouring salt over wounds of existing divisions. We should wait for these wounds to close before undertaking such transfer. The country does not have the ability to absorb and properly process large amounts of external resources. In the absence of a coherent plan for reconstruction and since there are no effective administrative structures and mechanisms for checks and balances, much of it will be wasted or otherwise stolen by the officials currently in power. Until the foundations of institutions for free and compulsory universal education, healthcare, food, resettlement of refugees, security and communication have been firmly established and until the country is sufficiently, disarmed, secure, and integrated in such a way as to have reclaimed at least its pre-1978 level of security and national market, the transfer to Afghanistan of large amounts of capital and modern technology are to be postponed. During the transitional period a concerted international effort should be made to disarm the country, eliminate the warlords and their militias, and to eradicate the production of poppy in Afghanistan. As in Turkey, Afghan farmers should be helped in growing alternative cash producing crops. Turkey received about ten billion dollars from the United States for this purpose.

Kabul streets have recently been described as “one big toilet”. The cities of Afghanistan should not be rebuilt until modern underground water, sewage, and other utility systems

are laid out and urban development plans are firmly in place. It makes no sense to build high-rise hotels and office buildings in Kabul (as is presently the case) without these systems. All such construction and the building of new private homes—especially those in violation of official standards for safety, sanitation, and public health—must be halted.

The gradual development of basic institutions and urban infrastructure should take about twelve years or one (grades 1-12) school cycle. At the end of the transitional period the people of Afghanistan should be able to stand on their own feet prepared to freely and securely participate in hammering out choices of their own for the structure of a state and the configuration of democratic institutions in their country.

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