

Ending the Agony: Seven Moves to Stabilize Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The January 2010 London Conference refocused the world's attention on Afghanistan, with donors renewing commitments and presenting new strategies to combat the Taliban, improve governance and limit corruption. However, progress, as always, will remain contingent on Afghan leadership and ownership. This paper proposes seven policy initiatives designed to refocus Afghanistan's domestic reform agenda, overcome post-electoral distrust, and lay the groundwork for a re-galvanized partnership or compact between the Afghan government and international Community. By making these bold moves the Afghan government and international community can still overcome the current crisis in Afghanistan, stabilize the country and end the agony of the long-suffering Afghan people.

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ASCI	Afghan Civil Service Institute	IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ADB	Asian Development Bank	ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
AMF	Afghan Military Forces	JCMB	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board
ANBP	Afghan New Beginnings Programme	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy	NSP	National Solidarity Programme
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund	NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
CERP	Commanders Emergency Response Program	PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
ECC	Electoral Complaints Commission	SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization	UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance	USCENTCOM	US Central Command
IEC	Independent Election Commission	USSOCOM	US Special Operations Command

About the Author

Christopher Alexander was Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Afghanistan from December 2005 until May 2009. In this position he was responsible for political affairs, including elections, disarmament, governance, regional cooperation, rule of law and police reform, as well as cooperation with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Prior to this assignment he served as Ambassador of Canada to Afghanistan from August 2003 until October 2005. He was number two at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow from 2000 to 2003 and second secretary at the same mission from 1993 to 1996. A career diplomat, Mr. Alexander joined the Canadian Foreign Service in 1991.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the January 28, 2010 London Conference, the effort to stabilize Afghanistan is at a potential watershed. For the first time since 2001, thanks to US and allied commitments, the Afghan and international force structure has a real prospect of meeting the requirements of successful counter-insurgency. At the same time, there is a countervailing risk over the next 18 months that external support may peak, and then begin to subside. Paradoxically, it is Afghan performance on the two parameters most stressed by President Karzai at London — Afghan leadership and ownership — that are likely to determine the outcome.

The following paper sets out seven policy initiatives which, building on London, deserve urgent consideration prior to the next major international conference on Afghanistan to be held in Kabul this spring. In 2009 Afghanistan saw its security situation worsen and its international partnerships fray. Taken together, these seven proposals could refocus the Afghan domestic reform agenda, overcome post-electoral distrust and lay the groundwork for a re-galvanized partnership to turn the corner on insurgency over the next few years.

THE NATURE OF THE AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

The causes of Afghanistan's current misfortunes — poverty, insurgency, poor governance and corruption — lie in the 30 years of conflict that began with a Soviet-backed coup in 1978. But they have deeper roots in the post-1947 rivalry between India and Pakistan; in US-Soviet competition throughout the Cold War; and even in the Frontier Policy of the British Raj, which sought to dominate Afghanistan not as a colony but as a buffer state, prevent substantial Persian or Russian influence and as a consequence isolate Afghan society from the ties of commerce and transport, then bind diverse states into imperial networks.

Since 2001 the effort to overcome the legacy of conflict and isolation has suffered from both incoherence and under-resourcing. The relatively costless expulsion of the Taliban leadership from Afghan territory in October and November 2001, followed by the political success of the Bonn Conference that November and December, generated palpable euphoria, which made it possible for US and other

policy-makers to justify a *de minimis* approach to restoring Afghan institutions.

The Bonn process failed to address two key prerequisites for peace and stability. First, it glossed over the legacy of “negative symmetry” — a policy pursued by several neighbouring states since the 1988 Geneva Accords, whereby militia proxies within the country have received arms, ammunition, support, training and direction from state structures outside its borders. Second, it failed to launch a process of internal conciliation and adjudication within Afghan society to ensure all groups came to a shared understanding of the legacy of three decades of conflict — an issue still unaddressed in the new school history curriculum.

In addition to these structural oversights, the state-rebuilding process was hamstrung from the start by a lack of scale and a “light footprint” — a means of engagement that was falsely elevated to an end-in-itself. Incompetence and factional dominance of individual ministries and provinces were tolerated, even encouraged. A comprehensive campaign of score settling and confiscation of assets went unaddressed. By the time the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)¹ — a blueprint for ending this drift — was presented in interim form at the last London Conference in January 2006, implementation was held back by both a paucity of political will and a dearth of administrative talent.

A new order, based mostly on the spoils of the 2001 victory, had asserted itself, and would not be easily undone. When the Taliban re-launched their insurgency in earnest in spring 2006, the Afghan and international response once again combined both pathologies. The international force structure was constrained by the *de minimis* approach and by the distraction of Iraq. Afghan civil institutions, with their slender base of management talent and implementing capacity, remained under-trained and under-equipped to meet the demands of an impoverished society, new democratic institutions and a nascent market economy. In such circumstances, success was almost certain to remain elusive.

A first crisis of confidence was not long to emerge. By the end of 2007 it was being driven by three factors: (i)

¹ The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is a medium-term strategic document completed in 2008 that outlines Afghanistan's social, economic, governance and security agendas over a period of five years. It represents a comprehensive set of development priorities for Afghanistan and a tool for synchronizing strategies between different ministries.

international failure to properly appraise the gravity of the situation on the ground — both the mendacity of existing institutions and the rising threat of Taliban-led violence; (ii) the absence of truly shared reform and institution-building priorities within the Afghan government, aggravated by competing agendas from international partners; and (iii) a continuing shortage of both resources and implementing talent.

The first steps towards overcoming these constraints were taken at the Paris Conference in June 2008 and The Hague Conference in May 2009 — exercises which drew over US\$20 billion in new commitments, mainly to new civilian initiatives. Over the 12 months between these conferences the Afghan cabinet was strengthened to a degree not previously seen: shared priorities were identified and pursued. But these efforts failed to stem the tide of receding confidence in the international project to stabilize Afghanistan, aggravated by intensifying violence and the fraud committed during the August 20 presidential election.

As President Obama moved in 2009 to articulate his strategy for bringing peace to Afghanistan he had to contend with four contradictory assessments: (i) a military view that counter-insurgency in Afghanistan cannot be prosecuted successfully without much larger force levels — both to cover populated areas and to accelerate the training of Afghan security forces; (ii) a civilian view that, with a very few exceptions, Afghan state and civil society structures are insufficiently accountable and motivated to lead the campaign and manage large infusions of resources; (iii) an Afghan view that the sources of the conflict are outside Afghan borders, particularly in those areas of Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where the Taliban have established large-scale bases of support, and (iv) a view among other key members of the international community that military and civilian effort should be concentrated in individual provinces, undercutting unity of effort. Obama has also been faced with the inescapable conclusion that, if they are to succeed in Afghanistan, both institution-building and counter-insurgency require strong, charismatic leadership — despite poverty and heavily attenuated state power.

The United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have faced similar challenges. They have been consistently called upon to deliver leadership to ensure a coordinated approach applied consistently across the country. Yet from the start in 2001 they have been denied the resources necessary to accomplish this task, as well as the authority to direct

resources towards new priorities — from national development programs and Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP)² funding to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and UN agency funds and programs. Finally, they have been prevented — both by issues of mandate and the ebb and flow of mutual confidence — from partnering with the government of Afghanistan on a basis that would have enhanced military and civilian leadership, for example by creating joint strategic planning and operational capacity.

Over the past six months, the UN and NATO have been saddled with two additional challenges: first, public division at a crucial stage in the response to the August 20 election results, and second, misunderstanding and disagreement over how to engage Pakistan over the now obvious threat of Taliban leadership and networks operating from its territory, which constitutes the principal threat to peace and stability within Afghanistan.

In fact, the regional dimension of Afghanistan's challenge has received scant focus and insufficient support. While the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have taken separate initiatives with regard to Afghanistan, there is as yet no overarching effort to fashion these overlapping agendas into a consistent whole. As a result, World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) investments in regional rail, road and energy infrastructure are not yet matched by a corresponding level of political support. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Peace Jirga,³ effectively dormant since the summer of 2007, has failed to bring about serious political dialogue between the two countries, consigning vital issues such as cross-border interference and the border itself to triangular US-Afghanistan-Pakistan military and security fora⁴ where discussion of Taliban leadership and sanctuaries is now effectively deadlocked.

² CERP is a funding mechanism designed to provide US commanders in the field with the ability to respond quickly to urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs. US-led PRTs are funded primarily through CERP. The CERP budget for Afghanistan has increased from US\$40 million in 2004 to US\$1 billion in 2010 (National Defense Authorization Act, 2010: 329).

³ Held on August 9-12, 2007 the Peace Jirga was attended by more than 700 delegates from both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (BBC, 2007). It resulted in a declaration, signed by Presidents Musharraf to Karzai, which affirmed the desire to “further strengthen the resolve of two brotherly countries to bring sustainable peace in the region” (Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Peace Jirga Declaration, 2007).

⁴ The central forum for dialogue on military and security issues for the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan is the Tripartite Commission, which brings together senior military representatives from the NATO-led ISAF operation, Afghanistan and Pakistan. On January 23, 2010, the Commission held its thirtieth meeting to discuss intelligence and border control issues.

As a result, almost nine years after the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan faces a threefold crisis. First, elections and political pressures on cabinet formation have failed to extend the political authority of its domestic institutions, posing potential challenges for nation-building and any counter-insurgency campaign. Second, the insurgency itself has remained resilient in spite of redoubled efforts to scale up military and civil resources aimed at countering it. Third, in spite of resurgent regional trade and political activity on all fronts, there is not yet any serious peace process underway which brings together all the principal actors from Afghanistan and Pakistan, including representatives of the self-declared Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as well as an appropriate level and quality of international facilitation.

This crisis has become acute enough to mask recent gains, which nevertheless deserve mention. In the wake of the electoral fracas, confidence in the future is now more robust among Afghans than among their international partners. With the completion of the presidential elections and the announcement of the new US strategy calling for a military surge, public opinion in Afghanistan has rebounded to levels of national confidence last seen before the insurgency began to return with deadly force in spring 2006. The quality of the cabinet's core reform team, confirmed by the Wolesi Jirga in January 2010,⁵ remains unprecedented. Despite limited numbers, Afghan security forces continue to lead front-line resistance to the Taliban-led insurgency, preventing infiltration and spectacular attacks. Dynamic sectors such as telecommunications, construction and finance continue to follow impressive growth paths. Poppy production has ended in twenty provinces, while registering a nearly 40 percent decline from its 2007 peak (UNODC, 2009). In isolated cases, provincial and district governance, prison and court performance, even agricultural processing have made major strides in spite of limited and fragmentary support.

In order to overcome this crisis and extend the circle of success to include new sectors and regions, Afghan leaders will need to focus on the core issues they have neglected for too long: competence and delivery. Their international partners should lay less emphasis on opaque and amorphous vices — such as poor governance and corruption — and

focus instead on implementing programs with clearly defined results, rolled out nationally on the basis of the best available means of delivery, drawing on the genuine strengths of government, civil society and the private sector. It is the strengthening of the most robust and effective delivery channels that will strike the fastest blow against corruption, fed to date by fragmentation of effort as well as the inherent vulnerability of weak institutions.

Existing means of delivery, including PRTs, should be refocused in support of such an effort to deliver a clear result on two or three reform priorities. The United Nations should look carefully at which of its agencies, funds and programs have track records of success with a view to combining forces behind large-scale efforts in support of top priorities. International military forces must resist the temptation to assume responsibility for fields in which they have little or no proven expertise, such as civilian justice institutions. In place of a skin-deep and fragmented civilian approach, donors should seek to back nationwide delivery via the best available institution, and to fund these efforts by pooled arrangements.

Unity of effort is unlikely to emerge without a clear centre for strategy and planning in which all international actors have a voice. The international conferences on Afghanistan held since 2001 — starting at Bonn and Tokyo, but now stretching to dozens of further capitals — have served to sustain a broad consensus and even to broaden the level of international engagement in Afghanistan. But they have not yielded a strategic approach to deploying resources on the necessary scale, or for holding Afghan partners accountable for clear results.

Building on the pattern of coordination launched within the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB)⁶ since 2006, there should be a combined and joint strategic planning staff bringing together the best talent available to the Afghan government, UN, NATO, US and other key partners in one central location. It should serve as the permanent secretariat both to coordination bodies in Kabul and to those international meetings where members of the Afghan cabinet meet their international partners.

⁵ On January 2, 2010 the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of Afghanistan's Parliament), rejected 17 of the 24 candidates from President Karzai's first slate of cabinet nominees, but confirmed key reformists including Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, Interior Minister Hanif Atmar and Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal. Two weeks later, parliamentarians rejected 10 of 17 names on a revised cabinet list, approving the ministers of justice, foreign affairs, religious affairs, economy, rural development, social affairs and counter-narcotics.

⁶ The JCMB's purpose is to monitor progress on the benchmarks agreed to in the Afghanistan Compact, signed at the London Conference in 2006. The JCMB provides high-level oversight, coordination, and regular reporting. It is made up of members of the Government of Afghanistan, and representatives of the international community, and is co-chaired by Afghanistan's Senior Economic Advisor to the President and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) to Afghanistan.

In the final analysis, there will be little or no enduring progress towards stability and development in Afghanistan unless the challenge of insurgency is met. The following seven proposals each require two key elements to succeed — Afghan leadership and joint implementation by international partners. Several are clearly domestic priorities, requiring vigorous effort by Afghan state institutions. Others are more clearly priorities for regional partners or the international community as a whole, with the UN, NATO and the United States each playing key leadership roles. All future conferences on Afghanistan should be focused on delivering concrete results under one or more of these headings, unless new priorities emerge deserving separate consideration.

The consequences of failing to address these issues would be stark. The insurgency still has wind in its sails — particularly in its “home base” in Baluchistan and elsewhere in Pakistan, and in its online and media presence, which remains formidable. In much of Pakistan, and in parts of Afghanistan, the general perception is that the Taliban will return to Kabul — sooner or later. Efforts to launch high-level reconciliation continue to lack an ability to compel the other side to sue for terms and to risk encouraging hedging behaviour at a variety of levels. The leverage of potential spoilers will remain considerable.

Recrimination over the presidential elections has weakened government credibility, and sapped international resolve to increase the scale and unity of its effort. After seven years of nearly continuous expansion of its coordination, humanitarian and institution-building programs, the United Nations was obliged to relocate a large number of staff to cities outside Afghanistan following a savage October attack on one of its guesthouses — a direct result of the continuing impunity of networks preparing suicide attacks in North Waziristan and elsewhere in Pakistan.

There is now a disconnect between internal and international perceptions of the situation in Afghanistan. While western audiences focus on deteriorating security and higher casualties, Afghans see a show of will and influx of resources that are long overdue, but which nevertheless instil confidence. Inside Afghanistan, the Taliban are increasingly seen as the crux of the issue, the driving force behind the conflict. This shift deserves to be displayed more broadly.

The moves advocated below would help to build and sustain the forward momentum generated by current military

deployments. But each bull must be grasped by its horns. Effective strategic priority-setting and communications are no longer secondary issues. They are key to capitalizing upon the current window of opportunity generated by the presence of increased international forces. They are also pivotal to the emergence of a dynamic national economy and a climate of deepening regional cooperation.

It is easy to give rein to excessive pessimism, and to take current negative trends as irreversible. This is already occurring in certain national settings. In fact, with a new approach to seven key issues, Afghanistan can over the next few years begin to chart a demonstrable path towards peace and stability.

SEVEN MOVES TO PEACE AND STABILITY

1. Hold Credible Elections

The fall electoral crisis was triggered by insecurity, which led to fraud, and was aggravated by an inadequate response. Afghan institutions proved unable either to prevent ballot-stuffing, or to address it legally once it had been detected. The international community magnified the controversy before finally engineering a solution by means of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). The Independent Election Commission (IEC) showed partiality — a common failing for new institutions.

But the principal cause of the election’s shortcomings — the continuing conflict itself — has been under-emphasized in the ensuing debate. Instead, the Afghan side has blamed the international community for mishandling the situation while the donor capitals have blamed President Karzai for countenancing fraud. Both are right. But both should move on. Finger pointing to date has benefited no one so much as the Taliban.

There is at present little or no prospect of high quality elections being held in Afghanistan so long as insecurity remains widespread. Yet there is no plausible alternative to holding elections, though the institutional capacity to do so, especially in such challenging conditions, remains slender and deserves widening.

For parliamentary elections to succeed in 2010, Afghanistan and the international community must agree on a realistic operational plan, with a clear

division of labour. The IEC should be reconstituted to restore confidence: those responsible for fraud should be removed and punished. All sides must agree well in advance on the location and security arrangements for all polling stations — to prevent the “ghost voting” of 2009. Finally, with international support, the government should present a multi-year plan for (i) IEC capacity-building and accountability; (ii) completion of a national voters’ list; and (iii) improved counting and verification practices, as well as permanent complaint and dispute resolution procedures and capacity.

2. Plan Together

With the growth of Afghan state responsibilities and capacity and expanded donor commitments, combined with an enlarged counter-insurgency campaign, the structures now governing strategy and planning for Afghanistan are diffused among a range of coordination bodies, multilateral headquarters and national capitals. This inchoate strategic environment has made it difficult to realign resources behind the Paris, Hague and London priorities, undercutting unity of effort. With the emergence of Afghan government leadership on a wider range of priority issues, the JCMB has taken on vigour and direction that represent a major advance over its tentative start in 2006. There is also strength and resilience in the diversity represented by over 60 donors and over 40 troop contributing nations, particularly given the democratic debate to which almost all are subject. But there is an emerging requirement to plan and implement together, particularly with regard to top priorities, without stifling the drive to innovate and adapt in meeting the needs of particular sectors and regions.

The civilian and military sides of the effort to stabilize Afghanistan have grown in scale and complexity, but without any concomitant effort to unify the planning processes now undertaken in support of them. With the exception of a very few Afghan ministries, there is almost no strategic planning capacity in the Afghan government, either to implement key reforms or to provide the political leadership so crucial to the success of counter-insurgency. Among donors, strategy and planning are distributed among a host of authorities from UNAMA and ISAF in Kabul through a variety of headquarters across at least one dozen major capitals – from Tampa, Washington

and New York to London, Brussels and Brunssum.⁷ With the proliferation of demands for priority-setting and strategic direction within the Afghan cabinet, JCMB and international conference settings, the need for a unified joint strategic planning body has never been greater.

A full-time joint civilian and military planning body should be established — staffed by both Afghans and internationals — in one agreed-upon central location, preferably Kabul. It should be mandated to support and respond to direction from both the Afghan government and JCMB. It should link UNAMA, NATO-ISAF and regional organizations (including SAARC, the ECO and SCO), as well as the main coordinating bodies of the Afghan government — the Cabinet Office, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, National Security Council, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG).⁸ It should ensure coherence in all lines of effort not related to military combat operations and should support all future international conferences on Afghanistan. It should have representation from principal partners such as the US, European Union and neighbouring countries. This planning body should be accountable to the co-chairs of the JCMB.

3. Renew the Public Service

The building blocks are in place for a more successful Afghan civil service: pay and grading reform has advanced; the ANDS has set goals and mandates for each ministry and agency; and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)⁹ — already the largest pooled fund for a single country — is set to grow sharply on the back of fresh US commitments. A new performance-based fund is set to enhance the subnational leadership governors can provide. Yet the public servants assigned to most agencies remain in many cases unsuited to the responsibilities they are given. As three new priority areas come into focus — rural development and agriculture; skills training;

⁷ Tampa is home to the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Brunssum, Netherlands is the site of NATO’s Joint Force Command Brunssum, and serves as NATO’s headquarters for the ISAF mission.

⁸ The IDLG is responsible for supervision of provincial governors, district governors, provincial councils, and municipalities except Kabul Municipality.

⁹ Established in 2002, the ARTF is designed to provide coordinated financial support to Afghanistan. The fund has received US\$3.6 billion since its inception. At the London Conference in January 2010, donors committed to US\$2.6 billion in funding for the ARTF over the next three years (Reuters, 2010).

and infrastructure and economic development — it will be vital for the Afghan government to continue to show increasing levels of leadership and competence across these sectors and at the subnational level.

In return for increased donor funding of agreed priorities through the ARTE, the government of Afghanistan should agree to an enhanced framework for public service development. This should involve root-and-branch renewal of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission,¹⁰ the IDLG and the Afghan Civil Service Institute (ASCI), as well as the institutions now training entry-level public servants. World Bank, UNDP, US, European and PRT governance programs should be re-oriented to support this initiative.

As part of this reform, the next phase of growth in the army and police — beyond the current combined target of 300,000 by 2011 — should be linked to promotions and renewal in the senior ranks of both ministries to reward merit, reduce corruption and eliminate linkages to factions and drug cartels.

4. Empower the Provinces

Provincial service delivery continues to suffer from an absence of resources, weak focus and poor coordination. The national budget has been slow to integrate provincial priorities. Private sector development has lagged in the absence of area-based approaches, despite the vital importance of stimulating enterprise formation and employment at the local level. The assets already developed at the provincial level by national and other development programs, by PRTs, and by local business justify an accelerated move to the provincial level for economic development planning.

Under provincial government leadership, economic and budgetary planning should be aggressively supported at the provincial level by the IDLG, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with an emphasis on area-based approaches to

¹⁰The IARCSC is an independent commission consisting of nine members appointed by the President. Its overall mandate is to create a modern, well-functioning, and efficient government administration. The commission is responsible for capacity building within the civil service and for setting and monitoring policies relating to civil servant hours of work, salaries, promotion, retirement, as well as matters of equity and discrimination.

the three clusters now given priority within the ANDS. UNAMA, donors, regional partners and PRTs should have a strong supporting role.

5. Reintegrate the Taliban Base

In spite of the announcement of a new Afghan peace, reconciliation and reintegration initiative before the London Conference, and donor commitments to a Trust Fund to support it, insurgent fighters today have no way of exiting the fight. There will be major obstacles to implementing a new program at the provincial, district and village levels, where tribal and community groups remain divided and alienated by nine years of Taliban pressure, unfulfilled promises and plummeting living conditions. Local capacity is weak and vulnerability to spoilers remains high. But success is nonetheless possible. The program will have to set clear timelines for compliance, as well as consequences for failure to participate. It should work with Afghan *ulema*, media, civil society and community groups to refine incentives at the provincial and district levels and remind the population of the costs that Taliban-led violence has exacted in terms of casualties, lost economic opportunity and slower development. It should also emphasize the need to mobilize communities against the threat of IEDs, suicide attacks and other asymmetric insurgent tactics that pose a major threat to life and limb for Afghan civilians. It should be combined with a major, dedicated public information campaign to promote the cause of peace and reconciliation through drama, dialogue and debate.

Building on the legacy of the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP)¹¹ and the Peace and Reconciliation Commission¹² and under the leadership of the National Security Council and the Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, a major program should be launched to reintegrate 10,000 or more Taliban members by offering them opportunities for new livelihoods and protection in return for a commitment to renounce violence and surrender weapons and ammunition.

¹¹The ANBP was a UNDP-administered, multi-donor-funded and Afghan-led disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program that targeted the members of the Afghan Military Forces (AMF) — an assemblage of government allied militias primarily tied to the former Northern Alliance. The program demobilized more than 63,000 former combatants between 2003 and its conclusion in 2006.

¹²The National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission was established by Presidential decree in May 2005 “to end inter-group armed hostilities, resolve unsettled national issues, facilitate healing of the wounds caused by past injustices, and take necessary measures to prevent the repeat of the civil war and its destruction” (see: <http://www.pts.af/>).

6. End Interference

The principal drivers of the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan continue to be insurgent leadership, technical expertise, funds and materiel entering the country from neighbouring Pakistan, especially North Waziristan and Baluchistan. Without an end to this influx, the insurgency in both countries is likely to grow.

A coordinated multilateral political effort should be made to convey to Pakistan the necessity of ending its support for the leadership of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on its territory, which continues to cost Afghanistan, and increasingly Pakistan itself, so heavily. In every possible case, assistance to Pakistan should be conditional on increased cooperation to this end. Efforts to curb interference should be rewarded by concrete steps to enhance bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in historic respects, including on the crucial but potentially divisive issue of the border itself.

7. Attack Impunity

Nearly one decade after the Taliban regime fell, Afghanistan continues to face a critical inability to prosecute major crimes, from corruption and drug offenses to crimes of terrorism and past atrocities. New capacity announced at London is unlikely to result in more than incremental progress. Without a credible institution charged with prosecuting high-level crimes, the absence of the rule of law may continue to pose a critical handicap to counter-insurgency efforts and state effectiveness.

The Afghan government and its key partners should consider establishing a special investigator and special tribunal for one or more of the following fields: terrorism, corruption, counter-narcotics and civilian casualties. Both bodies should be based on hybrid Afghan and international staff compositions and mandated both under national law and by the UN Security Council.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The achievements since 2001 are far from insignificant. The consent of the Afghan population has been maintained and the Taliban remain a marginal political force. Basic social services — from the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and micro-finance to schools and clinics — have been provided, even if they are not yet objects of universal pride. Development and economic indicators have moved in the right direction. Humanitarian action and protection of civilians have been strengthened. The counter-insurgency is now being properly resourced; the need for political leadership is more clearly understood. Commitments made at Bonn, Tokyo, Berlin, London, Rome, Paris and The Hague have been regularly reviewed, priorities reset and delivery measured. In many parts of the country, even the drug industry is on the defensive and institutional frameworks have emerged.

But the effort to date continues to suffer from a lack of visibility and unity, as well as a transparency and accountability deficit. It needs to be explained and refined as part of a dialogue that moves out of military headquarters and into villages and communities. This work cannot be led by internationals: it must be championed by Afghans at the local level who understand the challenge of community mobilization. It must also be effectively reported at cabinet, in parliament and to the JCMB. The moves advocated above all seek to make the new Afghanistan more responsive to local needs. By easing capacity constraints (plan together; renew the public service); by moving the centre of implementation gravity to the district level (hold credible elections; empower provincial development; reintegrate the Taliban base), and by isolating spoilers (end interference; attack impunity), the effort to stabilize Afghanistan can regain genuine popular support, including by elders and religious leaders, and form a basis for substantial regional cooperation.

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The Centre for International Governance Innovation is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate, builds capacity, and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events, and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI conducts in-depth research and engages experts and partners worldwide from its extensive networks to craft policy proposals and recommendations that promote change in international public policy. Current research interests focus on international economic and financial governance both for the long-term and in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis; the role of the G20 and the newly emerging powers in the evolution of global diplomacy; Africa and climate change, and other issues related to food and human security.

CIGI was founded in 2002 by Jim Balsillie, co-CEO of RIM (Research In Motion), and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. CIGI gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Government of Canada to its endowment Fund.

Le CIGI a été fondé en 2002 par Jim Balsillie, co-chef de la direction de RIM (Research In Motion). Il collabore avec de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et exprime sa reconnaissance du soutien reçu de ceux-ci, notamment de l'appui reçu du gouvernement du Canada et de celui du gouvernement de l'Ontario. Le CIGI exprime sa reconnaissance envers le gouvernement du Canada pour sa contribution à son Fonds de dotation.

