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The Strategic Quagmire: Why Nation Building in Afghanistan is Failing

A Policy Update Paper

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NATO finds itself mired in quicksand in the Middle East. The goal of removing the immediate threat of terrorist- or rogue-state use of weapons of mass destruction has morphed into the push to create stable regimes that will not only behave more responsibly but govern more democratically. Yet there seems to be no overarching strategic direction about how to accomplish these goals, revealing the logical limitations and fallacies of strategic interventions. Using Afghanistan as an example we see that the only logical road to success in nation-building, should we choose to continue it, is long-term occupation.

HOW WE STUMBLER INTO STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

The unexpected disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989 presented a new challenge on many levels to those who analyze international relations. While the postwar achievements of Germany and Japan were considered successful cases of transformation, there was no general lesson drawn from them about the potential benefits of occupation on political and economic development. In general the fall of the iron curtain and the rocket growth of China by the early 1990s led to great optimism about the possibility that a golden age of global economic growth and general peace is upon us as reflected in Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" and Thomas Friedman's hyper-optimistic *The World is Flat*.

The post Cold War period of strategic intervention began in this optimistic mode with U.S. and European support for the NATO-led "humanitarian" intervention against Serbia's campaign in Kosovo, following the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1999. Such action was viewed as a "new" sign of "morally-based" intervention, as claimed by U.K. PM Tony Blair during a speech to the Economic Club of Chicago on April 24, 1999.¹ Lessons and humiliation at the lack of action during the Rwanda genocide suggested a new possibility for moral intervention in international relations. The deemed "success" of intervention in the Balkans, reflecting the short-term memory of policy makers and advisors, gave rise to the school of "human security" interventions, ironically given its parallels to colonialism, on the basis of universal individual rights spanning physical to economic rights. Ironically, it was this new context of human security that provided the cover for the neo-Con realists in the U.S. to create its current "experiments" in Iraq and Afghanistan. The new context included the U.N.'s own declaration of its new role in international affairs and led directly to Kofi Annan and the U.N. being awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2001. The optimistic moment was enshrined with the "responsibility to protect" principle being forwarded as a new principle of international relations, namely the idea that where a state fails to protect large segments of its population the U.N. Security Council is obliged to move towards humanitarian intervention, some even claimed preventative action could be justified (ICISS 2001; Totten 2005; Weiss, et. al, 2007, esp. 83-4). As subsequently revealed, the principle was not embraced by other major powers, particularly China and Russia, who maintain that the principle of sovereignty proscribes "meddling" in the internal affairs of a nation, and the severe political, bureaucratic, and resource constraints on the U.N. have revealed its inability to act upon it.

The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, supported by most of the world outside the region, did not spark a great outcry in terms of the puncturing of the supposed norm of international relations, sovereignty; however, the invasion of Iraq two years later revealed the contradictions of strategic intervention. According to President Bush, the invasion was premised on the need to remove weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and followed in the wake of the regime's ability to maneuver around post Gulf War oil sanctions through a corrupt U.N. administration, and to stymie the attempts of U.N. inspectors to determine if Iraq did indeed have WMDs. Thus, the precedent of intervention on moral grounds was hybridized into a premise based on removing WMDs and removing support for terrorists. The action enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support in the U.S. The implicit view was that defeating regimes that harbored terrorists was not enough, but that states had to be rebuilt to reflect legitimate, sovereign and well-functioning states in order to close the harbours where terrorism was developing. This went far beyond the previous punitive actions against terror-friendly Libya in 1986, because of the change in context, and beyond the originally-stated intentions for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, to punish a regime harboring terrorists and to remove WMDs respectively. Why has this experiment in

¹ See <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page1297> for the text.

making democracy abroad go awry in Iraq and Afghanistan, after the encouraging success in Kosovo?

THE PARADOXES OF STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

When to Intervene?

The essence of the problem is that both interventions have been done without a theory of how to construct a more friendly regime and/or address the underlying causes of dissent that create legitimacy for renegades; but, what precisely is meant by nation-building? The analogies with Japan and Germany after World War II are not apt. In both instances the nations being rebuilt possessed a well-defined industrial-bureaucratic complex and a relatively homogeneous and literate population. The occupying power applied a heavy concentration of long-term occupation forces. In addition, immediate external threats and conflicts related to the struggle with Communism meant that there was a strong foundation from which to work in both cases. Up to today, the U.S. military maintains a strong presence in both countries. Equally, if not more important, is the fact that Japan and Germany had been solidly unified independent countries, created through historical integration, rather than colonization processes, over decades. Thus, intervention in the Middle East brings freshly to mind neo-colonialist action in the minds of the rest of the world, essentially becoming an un-winnable war in psychological terms. The psychological context of the Middle East revolves around a sense of status deficiency due to the failure of development schemes, autocratic leadership and the humiliation of the imposition of Israel and its consistent triumph with U.S. support. In this context, the long-term loss of “face” and independent control mount with such interventions. As a result, the rage of the Arab population is sympathetic towards terrorists not necessarily as a method to return to pre-colonial Islamic fundamentalism, but as a way of striking back at the existing international status hierarchies which have them pictured towards the bottom, despite oil wealth and what should be accompanying increases in geostrategic influence (Rusciano 2006).

There are at least 3 logical problems with deciding when to intervene. The first of these problems is the presumptive moral high ground of the intervening state. If there is no clear consensus about moral values and political systems in the first place,² then under what circumstances is force legitimate? Would it be legitimate, for example, to intervene into a democratically-elected state that supported terrorism or violated human rights, such as a democratically-elected fundamentalist Islamic party? When is a state failing beyond self-repair? When does it pose an imminent international threat? Since the very definition of democracy and human rights is subject to debate, it is not surprising that what states should look like after intervention is similarly clouded in ambiguity.

Second, what combination (accumulation) of internal and external perceived deviations from Western norms leads to intervention, and what level and duration of intervention is adequate? Obviously with the bypassing of the U.N. in the Iraq and Afghan situations there was no clear way to say who should be “the decider” despite claims otherwise. If China deems, for example, internal strife in Nepal is intolerable, then does it have a legitimate right to intervene, despite its heavily-criticized track record in Tibet? If intervention on moral grounds is legitimate, why would it necessarily be limited to states, when there are a large number of oppressed minorities who would claim the same legitimacy?

² For example, there has been a vociferous debate about whether Asian values differ from Western ones, particularly in regard to the human rights debate. See <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/asian-values.html> for UN conference proceedings on the topic.

Last, but certainly not least is the related point of whether states are the effective arenas for attacking what are effectively transnational networks, including sleeper cells in the attacking countries themselves. This question is at the crux of the debate over the legitimacy of American intervention in Iraq, that Bush linked not only to WMDs but also to ties with al Qaeda. This would apply equally to non-terrorist threats, such as narco-trafficking, the given reason for US intervention to remove Noriega from Panama in 1989, and even to migration, as US intervention in Haiti was motivated in part by the actual waves of boat refugees.

A legitimate response can be made to these criticisms that the failure to intervene may have even more dire consequences in terms of both humanitarian costs and internal and regional conflict. Early intervention can prevent or reduce violence; lead to a promotion of compromise; and possibly open the way for a reconfiguration of the conflicted state and the regional powers egging on internal conflict.

How to Intervene?

The argument though, is not that we should give up on all forms of interventions due to the ambiguity of legitimacy, but rather that inadequate thought has been given to how to create effective strategies of when and how to intervene, and what types of international intervention might be successful in what types of cases. Thus, the spectrum of strategic questions goes well beyond the question of occupation/peace-making forces to all sorts of interventions.

For example, it is a well-known fact that international aid and financial flows are often used to support corrupt and violent regimes. The response by international financial institutions (IFIs), for which they are much reviled, is to create conditionalities on aid and loans initially to follow mainstream economic prescriptions, such as balancing budgets, and more recently to reduce internal corruption and develop more effective and accountable institutions. In some instances, such as refugee and AIDS crises in Africa, Western donors have bypassed host governments entirely insisting on delivering direct aid to affected populations. Yet the bypassing and conditionality strategies have not led to any clear successes. In general one can say that where there has been wholesale regime change, such as the case of Chile, which is becoming a well-performing economy and thriving democracy albeit with some lingering problems, the political and economic change was almost exclusively through internal dynamics.

This leads to several strategic possibilities for intervention, the choice of which should naturally depend on the magnitude of domestic failures and the implications of both the failure and possible intervention for the region and international arena. First, one can cooperate with host governments, pushing conditionalities and bypassing where possible to try to push for internal reform. This level of intervention creates dissonance, to be sure, in the sense that there is no clear consensus around the policies that donating governments and the multilateral and non-governmental aid agencies they support are pushing. Moreover, the aid regime has serious weaknesses in terms of both accountability and effectiveness: it is doubtful that aid can work in transformative ways without serious “buy in” by all levels of the target government and society. The problems of corruption and ineffectiveness at the U.N. are well-publicized after the “Oil for Food” debacle in pre-invasion Iraq, and reflect a hyper-politicized overwrought bureaucracy related fundamentally to its dependence on donor contributions. While the U.N. has had some success in reducing open conflict in El Salvador, Cambodia, Kosovo, East Timor, the Congo, and the Sudan, it is a far cry from creating a situation of democratic political consensus with economic prosperity to back it. Nor, as we see in Iraq and Haiti, does an international occupation force have the means to establish civilian police control. These efforts lack the long-term resolve needed to cause changes in social perspectives and values, not simply an institutional and constitutional makeover.

As Rotberg points out, “State failure is largely man made, not accidental” (Rotberg 2004, 25), thus a pure aid or security approach, or even a combination, misses the politics, leadership, decision-making, and culture, including the stress of Westernization, behind crises and ineffectiveness. In cases such as Darfur, where the idea is to let regionally-based peacekeeping forces with greater local knowledge run the show, there is a failure of resources and training, as well as the fact that soldiers from regional countries will still be viewed antagonistically as outsiders and may still not understand the local context.

Instead of just conditional aid, as a second alternative, one can choose to support internal candidates, as the U.S. has done with the al-Maliki regime in Iraq, who have some internal support. As in the case of the parade of ineffectual regimes in Viet Nam, the principal problem with this strategy is that the government comes to power, in part, due to foreign support, and its association with the foreign support results in a clear lack of legitimacy. It then may turn to repressive or corrupt methods of support to shore itself up. The hope is that it eventually will be strong enough and smart enough to engage in legitimacy reforms, such as holding elections, once the situation has stabilized.

A third way is to link human security and other issues to a basic failure of state institutions rather than a particular government. In this case some bulldozing and rebuilding of institutions may be necessary. This is the idea behind occupation in Haiti, the dissolution of the Baathist party and army in Iraq, and the potential for regime change in North Korea.

One could go even deeper and suggest that the colonial creation of states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria, Sudan, and the Congo, with ethnically and politically-divided factions, can never be stable (Katz 1996, 29); hence, the calls for dividing Iraq, which in limited form has yielded benefits to the Kurds (Rafaat 2007). On the other hand, the fact is that such groups are rarely cleanly divided along geographic lines, and resources may be concentrated in a particular region. This also brings up the complication of when to stop granting some territory or autonomy to any number of minority groups clamoring for it. It may relieve the tension, as seems to be the case for the moment in E. Timor, but it might also fan the flames of threat through proxies as in the case of the semi-autonomous region in Northwestern Pakistan where the Taliban and al Qaeda have safe haven, and where local tribes continually challenge the Pakistani government’s sovereignty and control. Moreover, ethnic conflict is usually accompanied by outside support, as in the case of the Sudan. The idea that viable states must be mono-ethnic also goes against Western liberalism and the experience of nation-building, albeit over long-periods of time, in multi-ethnic states such as Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, immigrant-based states such as the U.S., and the more recent immigrant waves throughout the West.

Yet, we should not forget the fourth possibility, that some form of intervention is possible but not worthwhile. It may whip up further tensions, weaken neighboring states and weaken local governments. Even in states of chaos, there is no necessary argument that foreign intervention can restore a balance of forces towards some form of equilibrium.

In the broadest sense of states lacking the ability to provide for the basic welfare of their citizens, and/or not providing basic human and civil rights, the scope of the problem is enormous: many, if not most, states are presently failing. For the moment, Northern states are reluctant to move beyond treating only the symptoms, and interventions tend to be unusual, short-lived, and only where strategic interests related to terrorism, or global economic or massive humanitarian crises loom.

The costs of intervention suggest a more logical alternative, such as creating a more forceful international peacekeeping and nation-building force either through the UN or independently; however, absent any mechanism for legitimate independent action, or a source of revenues, such an international force would be stymied in the same ways as the U.N. from independent, forceful, and long-term activities. One could argue instead that one could use a graduated scale of intervention, based on a set of measurable policy goals and performance, and the degree of will of the government to engage in such reforms, but this would be subject to the same problems as the economic conditionalities discussed earlier.

Case in Point: Afghanistan

Afghanistan provides a perfect example of the strategic quagmire in action, that is the lack of clarity of when and how to intervene leading to the lack of a plan for how to accomplish the goals of state-building. The Western-backed and funded Karzai Government faces a number of daunting long-term challenges, even if it should survive the accusations of fraudulent elections and governance. First is the problem of creating a truly national Afghan Armed Forces. The Government relies heavily on U.N. and multinational security forces. As of Oct. 22, 2007, there were an estimated 41,144 foreign troops in Afghanistan. Recent reports suggest that leaders from European countries are wary of increasing troop presence. In several countries, there has been strong domestic opposition to having troops in Afghanistan. There are strong tensions as well over burden-sharing in the various zones of control, with the U.S., Dutch, and Canadians being stuck in the hot spot Taliban areas while German and French troops are in relatively quiet ones. Canada has also wavered on the length and time of its commitment to Afghanistan, with the Harper Government changing its position over time to its present position of staying until 2011. Harper recently stated, "I don't think it's viable, knowing the history of Afghanistan, what we know about it, to believe that foreigners are going to be able to run Afghanistan or Afghan security on an ongoing basis." The departing British commander for U.K. forces in the country said in Oct. 2008, "a military victory over the Taleban was 'neither feasible nor supportable.'" Estimates of how much progress has been made in terms of the build up are not promising, and the continuing presence of foreign troops undermines the government's legitimacy.³

Second, Afghanistan is often at the bottom, or near the bottom, in a variety of development measures; in 2007 Afghanistan was ranked 174th out of 177 countries according to the U.N. Human Development Index. The Government has attempted to rebuild basic infrastructure key to reigniting the economy. This effort has also occurred in stops and starts given the lack of security in most areas of the country, especially the South. Third, with the levels of actual aid disappointing, and the lack of security, the resurgence of opium cultivation has renewed as the only logical alternative source of income (Glaze 2007). The Government has not been able to embrace this as it goes against the drug policies of its allies. Quick fix solutions, such as the international aid community suggestions to purchase morphine for legal medicinal use, are met

³ "German Foreign Minister Wants to End 'Enduring Freedom' Participation," 10/6/08, Der Spiegel <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,582374,00.html>, Caroline Wyatt and Rob Watson, Nato at pains to dismiss Afghan tensions, *BBC News*, Feb. 7, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7233971.stm; Canada says Afghan mission can't last indefinitely Reuters Tue Oct 7, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE4968W920081007> Tom Coghlan in Kabul and Michael Evans, We can't defeat Taleban, says Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith *The Times*, Oct. 6, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4887927.ece>, Tony Paterson, Germany Rejects US Demand to Increase Afghan Deployment, Oct. 2, 2008, *The Independent* <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-rejects-us-demand-to-increase-afghan-deployment-777239.html> all accessed Nov. 3, 2008.

with skepticism. For example, there may not be enough effective demand, and such promises create the perverse effects of incentives for even greater poppy cultivation.

The borders with Pakistan and Iran are key. As is well known the border area with Pakistan is not only poorly demarcated, but also porous to Afghans who readily flow across Pakistan's autonomously-ruled Northwest Frontier Provinces. Pakistan and Iran have continually meddled in Afghan affairs from times even before the Soviet invasion (Bajoria 2007). Afghanistan is largely Sunni, thus it is supported not only by Pakistan, but also by other Sunni backers, such as the Saudis, as a buffer against Shi'ia Iran's growing regional prominence. It should be remembered that the Eastern "leg" of Afghanistan extends deeply to north of India and hotly disputed Kashmir. Thus, India has also taken great, if skeptical, interest in efforts to Westernize Afghanistan. As in the case of Iraq, it is not possible to isolate Afghanistan, or the solution of its problems, from its regional context.

The ineffectiveness of the Karzai government and the renewal of the Taliban insurgency have been well-documented for some time. Barnett Rubin writes:

Afghanistan has made...progress....[Yet] Afghanistan has become more dependent on narcotics production and trafficking than any other country in the world, and initial counternarcotics efforts were misdirected and ineffective. Afghanistan remains one of the world's most impoverished and conflict-prone states, where only a substantial international presence prevents a return to all-out war. The modest results reflect the modest resources that donor and troop-contributing states have invested in it.

He notes that the costs of the Afghan National Army figure to be \$1 billion per year, approximately 17% of GDP at the moment (vs. a norm of 3%). Elections are to be held every 3 years for municipalities, and every 5 years for the legislature and presidency; each election costs more than \$150 million to run, or half the government's revenue (Rubin 2006, 146). Analysts note that the levels of assistance to Afghanistan have been relatively low compared to other operations such as Bosnia-Kosovo and, of course, Israel and Iraq (Jones 2005, 70-71 & 82-4). In 2004, the U.S. contributed \$2.1 billion to Afghanistan, half of which went into security. By contrast, the U.S. is estimated to be spending \$10 billion per month in Iraq. International troop levels are also far less per capita than almost every major nation-building effort since World War II, including Germany and Japan after World War II, Namibia in 1989, Somalia in 1992, Bosnia and Kosovo in 1995 & 2000; and East Timor in 1999 (Jones 2005, 70-71 & 82-4, CBC). In Iraq, 162,000 troops were stationed in 2008, while there were just 47,000 total foreign troops in Afghanistan, of which 17,000 were U.S.⁴

As of 2007, an estimated 30,000 recruits were part of the Afghan Army, far short of the target of 70,000, along with 55,000 police officers with a concentration in the Kabul area. Unsubstantiated reports also suggest that there are ethnic fault lines in security forces, with Tajiks dominating top army posts, though efforts are being made to create ethnic mixes. Rubin (2007), among many others, calls the Afghan police corrupt and incompetent, perhaps not surprising given the temptations for local payoffs related to the drug trade. It is obvious then why security has not been achieved, with a variety of insurgent groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, shifting their targets from coalition forces to civilians and

⁴ Tom Englehardt. "What 'Progress' in Iraq Really Means." in *The Nation*. Aug. 13, 2007, www.thenation.com/doc/20070827/engelhardt and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_invasion_of_Afghanistan both accessed Nov. 3, 2008.

NGOs (Jones 2005, 91). Warlords and tribal leaders continue to have vast influence in rural areas. Even in secure Kabul, progress is an uphill struggle. Corruption indices by the World Bank put Afghanistan near the absolute bottom in scores.

Compounding all of these problems is the lack of coordination of the donors themselves. There is no effort to incorporate political analysis or push forward political debates or compromises on the national level. There is loose and haphazard coordination with the Afghan Government and amongst the donors, who seem to be operating on different strategic premises and in different spheres of influence. In fact, there is evidence of “spoilers” within the Karzai government who act as warlords in terms of doling out aid and maintaining separate and local spheres of influence; therefore, aid, and hijacked aid convoys, have the ironic effect of helping to fund insurgencies and dissonance and pushing aid agencies to begin bargaining with warlords in the absence of security or other alternatives.

Considering a realistic level of resources puts the present efforts at a level of almost sure failure. Yet, it seems incredibly difficult to “sell” home publics on the idea of massive increases in aid. Despite billions of dollars spent in Iraq, there is no clear progress made in terms of creating long-term stability among the warring factions. Indeed, the best efforts in Afghanistan can not take away from the key sources of enmity in the Middle East towards the U.S., and indirectly, the West generally: support of Israel; presence of foreign troops; support of authoritarian regimes in the region; and nearby countries with little or no control over their territories and in some cases complicit or hostile intentions towards the Western foothold there. All of these factors and others underscore the lack of consistency in Western efforts in the region and paint our best efforts in a self-interested light.

The stakes in Afghanistan are extremely high for both geopolitics and the fortunes of its people. A renewal of the Taliban would mean not only the renewal of a terrorist harbour, one with a hardened hatred of the West, but also the loss of key progress made, such as the education of women and the semblances of free and fair elections. As in Iraq, where the Kurds have been able to make remarkable progress, Northern and Central Afghanistan are the major winners of the present intervention as they are relatively stable and increasingly prosperous sub-regions. They speak to the important, if uncomfortable, bottom-line that some level of political consensus is necessary for peacekeeping to reap benefits.

Strategic Choices in Afghanistan

Reviewing the untenable situation that presently exists in Afghanistan we see several things: porous borders with regional state interests on all sides and non-state actors regularly intervening; a weak minority government with little control over large portions of territory that is tied to foreign powers; an economy dominated by drug trafficking, with few alternatives in sight; and a set of aid donors and military advisors that are coherent neither in objectives nor in activities, we now examine 3 logical possibilities from the point of view of Western governments:

1. Pull Out. In this case, Western governments would conclude the futility of the situation and the inadequate compensation for the loss of soldiers and material. This might allow them to focus more efforts on “containing” Afghan problems through building closer relations with Pakistan (as the U.S. is already doing) and the Central Asian states to the North. A variation on this scenario would be to declare a gradual withdrawal in line with the Karzai, or its successor, Government starting to fend for itself.

The consequences of this action carry some upside in the sense of stemming unpopular losses (the aforementioned opposition in Europe and Canada could likely spread to the U.S. among

those disaffected with the costs of Iraq) and forcing some sort of political and economic equilibrium to prevail in Afghanistan; however, it also contains the echoes of failure, as in Nixon's program of "Vietnamization," and goes against the stated objective at the time of intervention: ensuring that Afghanistan could no longer serve as a haven for terrorists. It would also mean the significant progress made in certain areas, such as women's rights, would be lost. Finally, it might likely reignite the civil war between North and South and the renewal of oppression of minorities such as the Hazara.

2. The second alternative consists of continuing to muddle through and make adjustments to help out the Karzai Government to gain legitimacy, recognizing that the road to democracy will be long and that significant progress has already been made. For one thing even donor agencies recognize that there simply are not enough resources coming in to address basic problems in education, health, infrastructure, etc. Other adjustments presently being discussed include: accelerating the democratic and operational capabilities of Afghanistan's institutions; coordinating aid donors around common objectives; slowly extending out a cordon of control to areas outside of Kabul, recognizing that the lack of security impedes all progress; and that a professional army and police are of the utmost urgency.

The obstacles of continuing with the status quo are multiple. Western populations and militaries have not shown the stomach for long, protracted loss of life overseas when there are no clear objectives being reached, whether the case is Vietnam, Iraq or Somalia. The current government has an original sin of association with foreign occupiers, a sin that is reproduced in its complete dependency on outsiders for security and aid which in turn reduce incentives for it to create an independent economic and governing strategy. For example, it continues to follow a policy of poppy eradication, even though it offers no viable alternative, because of its donors' priorities. The government is overburdened in its ability to carry out policies, both because of corruption and because aid donors impose their own agendas. More importantly, Western countries lack regional and local specialists, who know the area, history, culture, and languages in order to properly carry out their mission (Baer 2006). Afghans are not likely to give up their social ties to family, clan, and region, or their social and religious values, to become Western-style citizens. As Rashid points out, even local Afghans employed by NGO's, if not from the same province, will get the expected response from potential beneficiaries who are ready to tell donors whatever they want to hear in order to wring resources out of them (Rashid 2004, 30-58).⁵

How can one find a way to cooperate productively with a society where prominent members do not recognize the legitimacy of a strong central state, much less the need for a secular state, including the Western-inspired rights of women, or the desirability for the population at large to participate in decision-making? From that point of view one can argue that persuading the Taliban, the de facto rulers of large parts of southern Afghanistan, of the error of their ways is the best way to proceed without creating more damage; however, it seems unlikely that we could win any battle for basic human rights and secular and civil liberties in the foreseeable future as nice diplomatic outsiders. Accommodation with the Taliban seems far-fetched in the foreseeable future and would carry a stench of defeat. That leaves us with our last choice, massive intervention.

⁵ Corruption is rife, even admitted to by Karzai. Robert Marquand. "Nations offer Afghanistan aid, demand accountability: Afghans sought help for its \$50 billion five-year plan as donors met in Paris June 12A." *Christian Science Monitor*. June 13, 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0613/p05s01-wosc.html> accessed Nov. 3, 2008.

3. Escalate massively. As noted earlier, there are major differences between the Japanese, German and Afghan cases. The former were unified politically, controlled for close to a century by a central authority, and industrialized. They were given strong opportunities for aid and trade enabling them to improve their economies rapidly; however, one thing stands out that could be understood: the occupying forces instilled certain political changes on the polities, including democratic practices; used overwhelming force to smash the opposition and remaining vestiges of the old guard; and were determined to stay for the long-run. In the case of Afghanistan, the weakness and lack of long-term vision and planning of our efforts almost assuredly doom Western governments to failure and in fact embolden those who would, and do, resist with little in the way of consequences. While both McCain, and Obama, have called for increases in support to Afghanistan, one can be skeptical given the financial crisis and the huge commitment to Iraq, as well as the lack of interest by U.S. allies, of a sustained augmentation.

Yet, with massive escalation the West could secure the territory; ensure that a precedent of strong central government control is created; and provide economic benefits that would create a sense of adherence and stakes by the various groups in the success of the government. It could also secure the borders and thereby benefit regional stability instead of the reverse situation where as foreign occupiers with short-term interests we only fan the flames of anti-imperial sentiment. It could unite the forces in Afghanistan under a NATO commander, who would be responsible, a la MacArthur, for creating a clear vision and action plan for a 10-15 year reconstruction project with clear and measureable milestones of achievement, including the gradual development of a central government with legitimacy, authority, and infrastructure. Such an authority could make serious structural changes to the economy, enforcing land reform as we saw in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, and thus breaking the back of regional warlords and inequities; creating infrastructure that would transport energy from the Middle East eastward and recreate Afghanistan as a major regional trading and energy transportation hub; and creating a strong enough authority that would command respect through its monopoly on authority and its offerings of superior resources. To be sure the changes go well beyond those in postwar Japan and Germany, but on the other hand, the weariness of the Afghan population with an endless (2 decade +) combat situation might allow for patience with occupying forces that offer stability and prosperity, as well as the individual freedoms that the Taliban attack.

This would provide the foundations for a more genuine, as opposed to superficial, democracy. Such an effort could also tailor solutions a la the middle way, for example by creating a more federal system that recognizes ethnic differences while preserving universal rights, while at the same time professionalizing institutions, particularly the police and army. Professionalizing the tax system and reigniting the economy are equally important so that the Afghan Government can be an independent and sustainable pro-active force able to win over and maintain loyalty to the nation; this can never happen in the haphazard and piecemeal planning, salaries, and negotiated project stream that presently exists. Most importantly, it might give Afghans time to create a new generation of leaders, ones not as tied to historical ethnicities. Ultimately, it would allow for a new type of Afghan civil society that will provide the base for democracy. Such a plan avoids the kinds of side deals and compromises that often water down and de-legitimize the foreign presences, such as corrupt officials or army recruits who have other loyalties that are rife with the middle way.

While this road makes the most logical sense and has the best chance of success there would be a great deal of skepticism that locals would "buy in" on any level, understandable given the historical experience of transient interventions and central authority. One can conclude, on the other hand, that the fragmentation of the situation allows buy in to occur primarily for the purpose of garnering foreign monies, and that the Taliban are in effect filling a vacuum by the

lack of an adequate offer of security and prosperity by the Western powers and their local crony. The West could fill the vacuum with a more attractive alternative. This would require far more than the current fragile “progress” in Iraq based on the bribing of Sunnis and the Shi’a along with the surge. Bribery on that scale is both unsustainable and fails to create the political loyalty and informal acquiescence to the state needed for compromise, including the ability to accept defeat in elections and work out resource allocation, to create peace. The view would have to be towards re-shaping a new generation that would take power in 20 years time, and who would have lived an experience not of conflict and poverty, but of peace and prosperity as Afghans, for the first time.

One must be skeptical because the divisive and costly nature of the Iraq War will create tension around another open-ended major escalation and financial commitment once it begins. Yet, the fact that the West is doing “half” the job, i.e. not having enough troops to provide security or enough aid to provide alternatives to drugs, makes us look both ineffectual and hypocritical to the southern population.⁶ Thus the West ends up looking like aspirant wannabes who want a friendly government, but are not really up to the challenge of creating the underlying conditions for it to succeed. The end result is predictable: muddling through in the short-run; pull-out in the medium-run; and not much to show in the long-run other than even greater fatigue in Afghanistan of imperialism and at home of foreign adventures that end up with our boys dying for people who resent us. Yet, one only has to think if the Bush Administration had avoided the illegitimate war, Iraq, and concentrated those resources on the legitimate one in Afghanistan, or any one of the myriad of easier cases around the world requiring similar re-structuring, we might be telling a different tale, one of great optimism for the remaking of the world into prosperous democracies with the West as a leader, not an imperialist. But that is the difference between soldiers and peacemakers: the former know how to fight wars, not win peace, the latter are neither trained and organized, nor resourced enough to make a difference.

⁶ A 2006 Gallup poll found that just 25% of Southern Afghanis felt that the security situation was better than under the Taliban; 68% said it was worse. See <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/269.php?lb=bras&pnt=269&nid=&id=>, accessed Nov. 3, 08.

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