

Afghanistan: Donor Inaction and Ineffectiveness

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The fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in November 2001 presented the international community with an unprecedented opportunity to restore peace and security to a perennial trouble spot. Almost one year later it appears that it has failed.

A rise in insecurity in Afghanistan, marked by a number of high-profile attacks against the central government and occasional interethnic fighting, has appeared to place the new regime's future in jeopardy. There was hope and promise that insecurity would cease with the inauguration of the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA), led by President Hamid Karzai. Yet despite the tremendous strides made by the ATA, the lawlessness and fragmentation that have undermined so many previous Afghan regimes has reemerged. It is time for the international community to recognize that the deterioration of the security situation can, in part, be attributed to the failure of major donor states to fulfill the commitments they made to Afghanistan.

Four aspects of international involvement in Afghanistan illustrate the ineffectiveness, and at times irresponsibility, of aid donors: the slow pace of internationally directed security-sector reform, the flawed nature of the U.S. military strategy to eradicate Al Qaeda and Taliban forces, the slow and irrational disbursement of aid, and the seemingly innate reluctance to consider the expansion of peacekeeping operations outside Kabul.

The fear of many Afghans, that the international community will gradually lose interest in the country to the detriment of ongoing recon-

struction efforts, appears to be justified. With a possible U.S. strike against Iraq looming, such a shift of global attention would have disastrous consequences for Afghan security and stability. With its economy stagnating and its infrastructure in ruins, Afghanistan lacks the capacity to rebuild itself without sustained international support. Major donor countries should avoid the natural temptation to disengage from Afghanistan as time passes and international attention shifts to other trouble spots.

Security Reform: A Striking Failure

Some blame for deteriorating security conditions should be attributed to the international donor community. The most striking failures of the international community can be found in the area of security sector reform, which has progressed at an unexpectedly slow rate due to mismanagement and the inadequate provision of resources. Progress in internationally directed military reform exemplifies the deficiencies of donor action.

The U.S. was accorded a lead role in supporting the reform of the nascent Afghan National Army (ANA) under the auspices of the Geneva process. In April 2002, it implemented a training program in conjunction with the ATA but it has been beset by problems of transparency and effectiveness. The U.S. allocated \$50 million to train and equip 18,000 Afghan soldiers over 18 months. U.S. instructors have already conceded that they will not be able to meet

these troop projections. According to General Tommy Franks, chief of the U.S. Central Command, under current conditions, only 3,000 to 4,000 soldiers will be trained by the end of this year and 13,000 by the end of 2003. Such a force will hardly meet the daunting security challenges that confront Afghanistan during the 18-month transitional period before democratic elections are held. Other problems facing the training process include: a lack of ethnic balance, shortfalls in resources, tepid support offered by the Ministry of Defense, and exceedingly high desertion rates (1/3 of the first battalion).

Intensifying these problems is the fact that the U.S. has established a separate training program, independent of the ANA, to produce units that can be utilized as U.S. proxies in the war against Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. The government in Kabul has not been involved in or consulted about the establishment and operation of these units. The formation of these units has had a deleterious impact on the creation of a national army for two reasons: First, the rates of pay for soldiers in these American-led units, up to US\$150 per month, is three times what is offered to troops in the ANA. This has fostered resentment and dissension in the ranks of the ANA and has prompted many capable soldiers to abandon the national army in favor of these covert units. Second, the provision of training and equipment to rural militias loyal to recalcitrant warlords has strengthened them at the expense of the ATA.

Inflaming Internal Rivalries

A second area in which international intervention has had an adverse

impact involves continuing U.S. military operations to uproot remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. U.S. operations have inflamed internal rivalries in the Afghan political sphere, weakened the central administration, and alienated the populace. Although the U.S. government has repeatedly affirmed its determination to bolster the central government of Hamid Karzai, its policy of allying itself with regional warlords has, in contrast, contributed to the country's fragmentation.

Another example of how the United States military strategy destabilizes the country relates to its use of air power. On 1 July 2002 an American air strike on four villages in southern Afghanistan, believed to be harboring Al Qaeda operatives, killed 54 people and wounded over 120. The American aircraft that carried out the attack claimed to have been fired upon by anti-aircraft batteries in the vicinity of the towns; however, a UN investigation could not find any evidence to corroborate the claim. This was by no means an isolated incident.

On 21 July 2002, the *New York Times* published a report detailing on-site reviews of 11 locations in Afghanistan where air strikes killed as many as 400 people. According to the report, the American air campaign has produced a pattern of mistakes that have killed hundreds of Afghan civilians.

The slow and cumbersome nature of the aid regime established at the Tokyo conference is probably the most obvious failing of the international community. Of the \$1.8 billion promised to Afghanistan this year, only about \$1 billion had been dispensed by September 2002.

Afghan Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah warned that

Afghanistan would slide into chaos if the money pledged for reconstruction were withheld. Just 16% of funds for 2002, roughly \$87 million, goes directly to the Afghan government—the rest flows primarily via UN agencies and NGOs. By the end of September 2002, the ATA's 2002 budget deficit had reached \$166 million. The international community should fulfill the pledges made at the Tokyo Conference. Until the ATA can make good on its development promises to the Afghan people it will not secure their allegiance.

The obstinate position toward the prospect of expanding the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) mission is a final area where the international community has displayed inflexibility and a lack of inventiveness. The ATA, UN Agencies, and aid organizations operating in Afghanistan have pleaded with the UN Security Council to extend ISAF's geographical mandate to areas outside Kabul. The United States and major European countries have consistently dismissed such appeals, stating that the costs associated to the force's expansion in terms of resources and personnel are prohibitive. The sharp rise in instability in Afghanistan has seemingly made donor states, particularly the United States, more amenable to the idea. However, this apparent policy shift has not translated into firm commitments.

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