Afghanistan

4th Edition

Edited by Edward R. Girardet & Jonathan Walter
Co-Editor William Dowell

CROSSLINES ESSENTIAL MEDIA, LTD

ESSENTIAL FIELD GUIDES
to humanitarian and conflict zones

Afghanistan

Fourth Edition--Fully Revised
2014

Edited by Edward Girardet and Jonathan Walter
Co-Editor William Dowell

"The 4th edition of the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan is dedicated to Alfredo Witschi-Cestari (1948-2012), an inspirational and moving force behind international efforts to help Afghans bring peace and prosperity to their country."

Crosslines Essential Media (UK), Ltd
Geneva & London
www.efgafghan.com

First published in Geneva, Switzerland by CROSSLINES Publications
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Co-editor: 2014 editions. William Dowell
Cover Photo Credit: Edward Girardet
Design and layout: Crosslines Essential Media, Geneva and London.

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Distribution by Crosslines Essential Media (UK) Ltd and Partners.

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ISBN: 978-2-9700923-0-8

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Publicity

Acknowledgements

The Editors would like to thank the following sponsors and co-sponsors for their generous support since 1998.

Principal Sponsors and Co-Sponsors

- The Smith Richardson Foundation, Westport, Connecticut
- Embassy of the Royal Government of the Netherlands in Afghanistan
- Swiss Development Corporation, Kabul, Afghanistan & Bern, Switzerland
- The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Kabul,
- Media Action International (MAI), Geneva, Switzerland (Now the Media Action International Journalism Network)
- The Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, MI., USA
- US Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan

We would like to thank all the aid agencies and their representatives, journalists, donors, peacekeepers, human rights lawyers, academics and private citizens, including numerous Afghan friends and colleagues, who have assisted with suggestions, critiques, a bed at night, food and tea at the most unexpected moments, transport, protection, and other forms of support and hospitality.

While we cannot even begin to name all those who have gone beyond the call of duty, we would like to thank the following for guidance in putting together this and previous editions:

Ali Wardak, Andrew Wilder, Ascension Martinez, Bahram Barzin, Dan Kelly, Dawn Greene, Desmond Charles, Farhana Faroukhi, Firoten Ghausuddin, Ian McClellan, Jan-Erik Wänn, Jim Williams, Jo de Ber- ry, Lala Gul, Mark Rowland, Tim Winch. We would like to thank Jeff Danziger for sharing with us his great cartoons, Joe Crowley of AIMS for supplying maps, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the use of Thorkell Thorkelsson's wonderful photographs, and Wolf Marloh for his slide scanning services. We'd also like to thank the tireless and largely voluntary efforts of Beth an Montague-Brown, Isabelle Lehouck, Katja Flueckiger, Kristen Eichensehr, Mohammed Shuaib, Nora Geiger, Sue Pfiffner, Smruti Patel, Todd Biffard, Voltaire Casino,Nikki Meith, Amaury Coste and Marilu D'Onofrio. Many thanks, too, to Charles Norchi for his constant advice and support and a special thanks to Emily Pantalone and Mark Rafferty, enthusiastic interns from Tufts University, Boston.

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Preface

Welcome to the 4th edition of the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan (EFGA). The EFG has evolved considerably since the launch of the first edition in London by the Reuters Foundation in 1998. Back then Alfredo Witschi-Cestari, who at the time headed UN operations in Afghanistan, expressed concern over the international community's lack of information and neglect concerning rapidly developing events that resulted in the rise of the Taliban. Witschi-Cestari, to whom this 4th edition is dedicated, approached Media Action International. He wanted to galvanize a more global focus on Afghanistan and to respond more effectively to its most urgent needs.

The result was a two-day brainstorming in Morges with some 30 highly experienced Afghan and international experts. One of several initiatives to emerge was the concept of a pragmatic field guide that anyone, ranging from aid worker to diplomat and journalist, could use. The first edition, edited by Edward Girardet and Jonathan Walter, was published in 1998. .

Today, in late 2013, with continued war and insecurity in at least 70 percent of the country, Afghanistan once again faces an uncertain future not unlike the end of the 1980s.

Despite donor pledges to continue funding Afghanistan's recovery process, at least until December, 2015, Afghans are astute enough to realise that most foreign electorates want their governments to get out. Much of the responsibility will fall on the shoulders of Afghans themselves, which, in the long run, could be a good thing. If anyone can resolve Afghanistan's ongoing political and security quagmire, it has to be the Afghans. But they still need the internationals, if only for development and other support, including persuading Pakistan, India, Iran, Saudi Arabi and other regional players to halt their meddling in Afghan affairs. It is in everyone's interest, particularly economic, to have the fighting come to an end. Afterall, Afghanistan is not referred to as the crossroads for Central and Southern Asia for nothing.

So, more than ever, the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan – and its accompanying website (www.efgafghan.com) - has a role to play.

First, we hope that at least part of the handbook can be made available to Afghans with Dari and even Pashto editions.

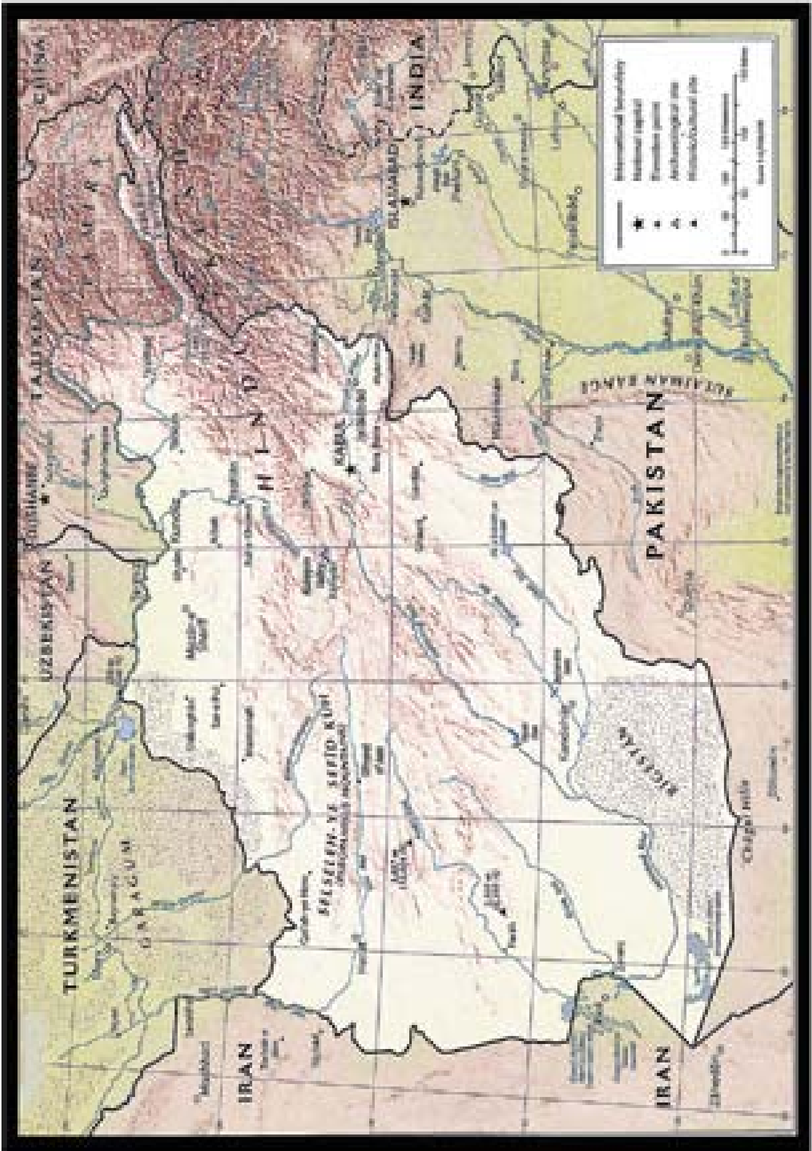
Afghans deserve to know what is going on in their country and to have the sort of information at their fingertips to make informed decisions about their futures.

Second, we welcome the participation of our readers in updating future editions of the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan. In a sense, the current edition is intended to serve as a foundation for an increasingly comprehensive guide to Afghanistan today. By contributing, your ideas, insights and criticisms, you will become part of a select network of experts and passionate friends of the Afghan nation. This network will become increasingly interactive through the companion website, www.efgafghan.com.

This edition also marks the first time that the Essential Field Guide is being distributed in both print and electronic formats. Anyone, who purchases the paper edition, will automatically receive the electronic edition, plus access to updates for the next six months.

Finally, unlike the previous editions, this new and fully-revised version can only explore select aspects about Afghanistan today. The only way to keep on top of things is to follow basic trends online. With your support, we can assure putting out new, updated versions on a regular basis. Afghanistan and its people deserve peace. We trust that our effort is a small step in the right direction.

The Editors (Geneva, London and Kabul)
October, 2013



(click on map of use 2 fingers to enlarge)

UZBEKISTAN
DUSHANBE
TAJIKISTAN
CHINA
TURKMENISTAN
IRAN
INDIA
ISLAMABAD
PAKISTAN
HERĀT
GHŌR
FARĀH
Farāh
NĪMRŌZ
Zaranj
HELMAND
Lashkar Gāh
KANDAHĀR
Kandahār
BĀDGHĪS
Qal'ah-ye Now
Maimanah
SAR-E PUL
Sar-e Pul
BALKH
Mazār-e Sharīf
Sheberghān
Aibak
SAMANGAN
BAGHLĀN
Pul-e Khumri
Kunduz
Tāloqān
TAKHĀR
BADAKHSHĀN
Fayzābād
Chaghcharān
Bāmyān
Tarin Kot
URUZGAN
DAYKUNDI
GHAZNĪ
Ghaznī
ZABUL
Qalāt
PAKTIKA
KABUL
Kabul
Chārīkār
Maydān Shahr
Pul-e Alam
Gardēz
Khōst
Jalālābād
Asadābād
Mahmūd-e Rāqī
Bāzārak
Panjshir
Mehtar Lām
Sharan
International boundary
Province (welāyat) boundary
National capital
Province (welāyat) capital

OVERVIEW

photo© Edward Girardet

"For me, the end of March has always been the time when you cannot hear your voice for the sound of the migrating cranes... I have not heard a single crane since being here. Have we even killed all the cranes?"

--Massoud Khalili

Introduction: Over a decade of lost opportunity

By Edward Girardet and Peter Jouvenal

The pledges of international support for nation-wide Afghan recovery following the US-led invasion in October, 2001 and the temporary displacement of the Taliban brought renewed hope that Afghanistan might finally witness real peace. The sad reality is that the West's involvement since then has had little to do with ordinary Afghans.

Even with the prospect of talks with the Taliban, peace is still more elusive than it was in 2001. Hardly any informed person today genuinely believes that the last decade's efforts at development have been either sustainable or commensurate to the billions of dollars spent by the United States and other donors since the January

2002 Tokyo Conference in which these promises were made. Afghanistan's war is now well into its fourth decade with no end in sight. For many who know this country, Western intervention over the past 12 years has proved disastrous, especially given all that it could have achieved. A better informed international community might have had a far greater impact at a fraction of the cost. Given that the United States alone has spent more than $300 billion (roughly one million dollars for each of Afghanistan's 30 million citizens), some suggest that it might have been more effective to simply hand over 5,000 dollars to each Afghan.

While Afghans bear some responsibility for the current mess, the overwhelming blame must lie with the Americans, Europeans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Arabs, Chinese and other outside players, who have imposed policies, political agendas and economic strategies to suit their own needs, rather than those of the Afghans themselves. If anything, these policies have undermined Afghanistan's own efforts to resolve its internal disputes as well as religious and tribal differences.

In the period immediately after 9/11, both Afghans and expatriates had ample experience on the ground. This was particularly true when it came to a small group of pragmatic Afghan "wallahs" within the American and European diplomatic corps.

Their message was simple: whatever you do, go slow and develop a very long-term strategy (20-30 years at least), do not throw money at Afghanistan, and, above all, do it in direct collaboration with grassroots Afghans rather than privileged elites. Donors, aid strategists and security analysts who were based outside Afganistan largely ignored this group, despite its acquired understanding of Afghan terrain and culture. From the beginning, Western recovery efforts were riddled with "quick fixes" that made little sense, and were often arrogant and out-of-touch. Yet they looked impressive to distant policymakers and bureaucrats in Washington, London or Brussels.

As a result, Afghanistan's future promises to be even bleaker. While well-connected Afghans, warlords, the Taliban and other insurgents jostle for power, foreign companies from China, India, the United States and Europe are hungry for mineral resources including copper, iron, tungsten, gold and even the rare earth minerals, vital for computer chips. When the majority of NATO forces pull out in 2014, ordinary Afghans will hardly be the ones to benefit from Afghanistan's mineral wealth. Bitter ethnic and religious strife may act as a catalyst for an even more ruthless civil war. After seven years working with the International Committee of the Red Cross, Reto Stocker, the organization's chief delegate in Kabul until October 2012, warned: "Life for ordinary Afghans has taken a turn for the worse."

Michael Keating, who headed UN humanitarian operations in Afghanistan until November, 2012 (SEE KEATING'S THE RECOVERY CHALLENGE), suggests that descent into chaos is not inevitable. A more peaceful scenario, however, depends on how appropriate the post-2014 commitment from the international community will prove. Keating stresses that this needs to include encouraging a dialogue among all parties at all levels. Both he and others believe that the West must stop branding the armed opposition as 'terrorists' given that they represent elements of Afghan society that must be brought to the table. At an EFGA co-organized Afghanistan Roundtable in Geneva in early December, Keating was blunt. "This means taking action. Now! Now! Now!" he said.

At the same time, no one can deny that the past few years have achieved some impressive gains. New roads have been built, power-grids re-established, health centres opened and over half the country's children (some seven million) are now in school. (SEE EDUCATION) The state universities are flourishing once again.

Several private institutions, such as the American University of Kabul, have been created. Numerous entrepreneurial and local initiatives have promoted new business, such as improved agricultural extension networks. While the extraordinary urban development in Kabul and other cities now peppered with Dubai-style office blocks and garish villas can be seen as examples of investment confidence in the new Afghanistan, much of this expansion is a reflection of the country's massively artificial aid economy, overwhelmingly supplemented by drug trafficking, thuggish land speculation and graft.

One area where western support has made a marked difference is the media. Scores of radio and TV stations plus newspapers and magazines have been launched since 2002 even though many may not survive as funding dries up (SEE MEDIA). Afghan news outlets are the only truly effective means the public has to monitor transparency and accountability. However, outspoken journalists are increasingly harassed by both the government and the insurgents.

Overkill in donor funding (over $60 billion alone for reconstruction and development by 2013) has encouraged massive corruption. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been misappropriated by privileged government officials, warlords and entrepreneurs. Western companies have sucked up even more through exorbitant administrative overheads, high salaries and costly private security contracts. (SEE ECONOMICS, PRIVATE MILITARY CONTRACTORS).

Numerous contractors have been allowed to operate on the basis of "good enough" initiatives that are shoddy or inappropriate. Many, too, have been granted contracts by Western government officials perfectly aware that such firms could not possibly perform. The main thing was to tick the boxes to show that the work was being undertaken. Few American or European taxpayers are aware of the extent with which such public funding has been misused.

Not surprisingly, Afghans have a hard time finding any semblance of a normal life. Apart from Kabul and a few urban centers, the only really significant improvements have tended to occur in select border regions with Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia, where local initiatives and private investments have ensured bustling economies. Numerous Afghans in Nangrahar and Kunar, for example, retain close trade links with Peshawar or Islamabad, where they have businesses and families. (SEE REFUGEES).

Agriculture has expanded, while many small towns and villages

now boast internet centres, fitness gyms, well-stocked shops and even hydro-electric generators to produce power.

Western support: An imbalance of objectives

Most of this change has little to do with foreign aid or military projects. While some NGOs, such as the Aga Khan Foundation, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan or the French agricultural organization, Madera, focus on the rural areas that are home to 70 percent of Afghans, the bulk of western support has gone to Kabul and other towns. This is despite ample warnings from experienced aid workers and observers that too much money in the wrong place can only make matters worse. By ignoring Afghanistan's countryside, the international community has excelled at avoiding the implementation of successful reconstruction.

Afghanistan is not even close to supporting itself. Since there is only limited investment in rural areas, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have flocked to Kabul, Herat and other urban centres. For the first time, genuine slums have appeared on Kabul's outskirts. The situation has been made worse by the fact that since the end of 2001, international organizations, such as the World Bank, European Union, USAID, and the principal donors began competing with each other to hire qualified Afghans at excessively high salaries. These organizations were repeatedly warned that inflationary employment would prove counter-productive, but they were more concerned about their own immediate needs. The result was a completely unrealistic job market, which has no chance of continuing once the foreign armies leave. While money was injected into the economy, little of it trickled down to the vast majority of Afghans.

Afghanistan is now trying to cope with this short-sightedness. As many as 100,000 jobs are likely to disappear by the end of 2014. Since each person employed is estimated to support up to 20 or more extended family members, the impact will be far greater than is immediately apparent. As many as two million Afghans may be affected. By mid-2012, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a huge source of employment in recent years, stopped handing out new contracts. This created a sense of panic among many Afghans, particularly educated ones, who see their time running out. Senior government officials, ministers and members of the Karzai 'clan', began placing their money outside the country long ago. While publicly voicing confidence, they are now falling over each other to move their families and wealth out.

By early 2013, Afghans were cited as the largest outside group purchasing real estate in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Most expect that once foreign troops leave, the situation will deteriorate rapidly. Even Afghans who previously criticized the West want foreign forces to remain. Although the US, Britain and others are expected to maintain some bases and Special Forces inside the country (estimates vary from 14,000 to 30,000 troops), that is doing little to assuage Afghan fears. Few have any confidence in the Kabul regime. Nor do they trust the insurgents.

For many young Afghans, who represent 60 percent of the population and have now tasted the benefits of renewed education but also mobile phones and the internet, the former Jihadists and neo-Taliban are not what they want. This so-called "Third Wave," who have everything to lose, are now becoming politically active in a bid to unite all Afghans under an Islamic but modernist banner. Whether they can pull together as a non-divisive nation-wide movement that is not solely urban-based is another matter. Clearly, however, they need to be included in any reconciliation process.

Given the current situation, it is easy to forget that the US-led invasion of October, 2001 was broadly welcomed at first by many Afghans. The greatest mistake by the West, and notably by the United States, was to take sides in the brutal civil conflict between the Taliban and the United Front (Northern Alliance). Washington, under guidance of the George W. Bush administration, threw its support behind groups and individuals, such as Abdul Rashid Dostum and other discredited warlords, who had little standing among many ordinary Afghans. The US failure to pay attention to the complexities of the Afghan situation led to many tribal Pushtuns believing that the intervention was intended to pit the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and other ethnicities against them.

By 2003, Washington and London were pushing more for a military rather than a political solution. The Coalition armies quickly ramped up their forces, but it was already apparent that the war they were conducting could not be won. Most western governments soon realised the mistake. The declared intention by Coalition partners to withdraw by the end of 2014 is designed not only to appease voters back home, but to secure a phased retreat without admitting defeat. (SEE "IS AFGHANISTAN A REPLAY OF VIETNAM?"). Canada, for example, "declared victory" – as Paul Watson of the Toronto Star put it – when it pulled out its com-

bat forces in the summer of 2011. “Few Canadians realise what a complete fiasco it’s been.” (Since then, it appears that residual Canadian training missions in Kandahar might still be used in a combat capacity).

The military objectives for a war that did not need to happen were confusing and often contradictory. As western commanders saw it, the mission ranged from killing Osama bin Laden and implementing an ill-defined and ill-fated “Global War on Terrorism” (GWOT) to crushing the Afghan insurgency, countering the narcotics’ trade and providing security for all of Afghanistan. Some military analysts insist that the purpose was always to reinforce democracy and recovery, but this contention is refuted by others, such as one American War College instructor who maintained that US involvement has nothing to do with nation-building. “We went in there to destroy terrorism and this is what we have done,” the instructor insisted. That characterization was reflected by American President Barack Obama’s assertion that now that al-Qaeda has been neutralized in Afghanistan, the rationale behind the US intervention has ended.

The fact that it took a decade to track down and kill the al Qaeda leader or that repeated military operations have failed to quash an enemy that simply disappears only to re-emerge days, weeks or months later are proof that policy planners failed from the beginning to fully grasp what conflict in Afghanistan really means. In particular, they failed to examine how the mujahideen operated during the 1980s and why they proved impossible to crush. The Taliban and other insurgents operate in much the same manner, but have introduced new tactics such as the widespread use of IEDs and suicide bombers, which makes it even more difficult for NATO force to pinpoint their enemy.

A pointless war

Western pundits, including some US military commanders, often appear under the illusion that the current war began in 2001. The American or NATO conflict is in reality just another phase of the extraordinarily brutal and unresolved civil conflict which began in the summer of 1978. The true roots of this dragging belligerency derive from the revolt of mainly conservative, rural tribesmen against an increasingly repressive communist regime backed by Moscow. (Political tensions had already started in the 1960s and

early 70s.) When the Soviets sent troops across their southern border at the end of 1979 it became a national resistance against a foreign invader. The United States, too, heavily backed Islamic fundamentalists as part of the Afghan resistance against the Red Army. Some of these, notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Pakistani-nurtured former resistance politician, and Jalaluddin Haqqani, an extremely able guerrilla commander and later founder of the Haqqani Network, are now fighting against the Coalition forces.

The situation in Afghanistan is further complicated by the fact that Washington, London and Brussels often confuse the Taliban and other insurgent groups with al-Qaeda. The West frequently overlooks the fact that Saudis, Chechens, Pakistanis and other interlopers in the tribal border areas are just as much outsiders as Americans and Europeans. Each has his own purpose for being in Afghanistan. The black and white simplification that many try to impose on this country is a major factor in the failure of programmes promoted by the United States, NATO and other foreigners.

Not unlike the Soviets of the 80s, the West is caught up in a classic guerrilla war that involves a multifarious armed opposition consisting of numerous fronts, some well-organized, others not, that has time on its side and is proving surprisingly difficult to put down. NATO's decision to announce its proposed withdrawal by the end of 2014 has only encouraged the insurgents to keep up the pressure. They can be expected to increase their attacks against Coalition forces but not engage in an all-out war. They may also seek to focus less on targeting Afghan security operatives. Instead, as happened during the Soviet occupation, the Taliban may push for more localised arrangements, such as active collaboration against the government or de facto 'opt-outs' with police and military standing on the sidelines. Much will depend on how involved the Pakistanis become in pressuring their Afghan cohorts or cross-border tribal operatives (many Pakistani and Afghan tribesmen share close family or clan ties) to avail themselves against the Kabul regime.

Washington's announcement in early September, 2012 declaring the Haqqani Network a "terrorist organization" underscored the current administration's inability to recognize the guerrilla nature of Afghanistan's war. This created yet another obstacle to bringing the insurgents to the table as part of an eventual negotiated settlement, which needs to involve all parties on equal terms.

Today, the armed opposition – but also increasingly numerous grassroots Afghans – perceive all westerners as occupiers. Many no longer differentiate among soldiers, mercenaries, humanitarians

and even journalists. They see foreigners as one and the same. This has made it far more difficult for the UN and other members of the international aid community to implement relief and development programmes outside Kabul and the larger urban zones. Over 70 percent of Afghanistan is now classified as "insecure." This includes many previously quiet areas, such as Badakshan, Kunduz and Balkh. (The 'war' only really began in Kunduz, for example, once the Germans were deployed there from 2004 onwards. Until then, the situation had proved relatively calm.)

There is a growing consensus that more than 3,000 Coalition troops and an estimated 30,000 Afghans (military and civilian) have died for nothing, a reality that much of the western media is still unwilling to report. This does not take into account the thousands more believed to have died "out of theatre," after suffering horrific injuries. Others have been maimed for life from the psychological trauma of war. More active US and UK military personnel died from suicide in 2011 and 2012 than were killed in combat during the same periods.

By the beginning of 2013, some proponents of military action in Washington, London and others among the 48 foreign Coalition armies were still maintaining the fiction that the insurgency was being contained – if not thwarted — by targeted operations, the deployment of remote-controlled predator drones and the use of hearts and minds propaganda programmes. These "H & M" initiatives are largely conducted by Special Operations units, who grow beards and wear clothing that look Afghan. While Special Forces, are better informed and more incisive than conventional troops, these tactics have not proven effective despite claims to the contrary by ISAF. The Afghans play along because they have no choice. It is all but impossible for conventional armies to engage the public because these heavily armed foreign troops fear and distrust the local population.

Most of the armies operating in Afghanistan try to avoid experiencing even a single casualty. But catering to political sensitivities at home does not win wars. Many of the 100,000 plus foreign occupation troops in country, including the 3,000 based at Kabul Airport, contribute little or nothing toward counter-insurgency. They are there primarily for show.

In contrast to some of the for-show-only contingents, select British and American units have made determined efforts at understanding the Afghan psyche. The United States operates an

impressive Afghan Training Center in Missoula, Montana, where Special Forces soldiers spend an intensive six months learning Pashto and Dari as well as Afghan culture. Many of these troops are of South Asian background, suggesting that they will be deployed on-the-ground for intelligence or operational purposes in tribal areas on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border. Attempts to penetrate Afghan culture, however, can be frustrating. Afghans will often say what they believe appeals to foreigners – it is part of basic Afghan hospitality – but privately, they may think quite differently.

The bottom line is that — as any general knows only too well – conventional armies are not suited to fight insurgencies. Guerrillas hear helicopters at a distance and are often gone before troops can be landed. Unrealistic political parameters frequently force soldiers to act like occupiers. The Dutch were the first to engage anthropologists in the military, a practise now adopted by other forces. But it may be too late for such cultural sensitivities to have a decisive impact.

Similar to the Afghan resistance against the Soviets in the 1980s, the opposition (who increasingly refer to themselves as 'mujahideen') have infiltrated both the Afghan government and the security forces. So-called "green on blue" killings by Afghan military or police against their American, British and other foreign counterparts are on the increase. This includes the murder of five Australian soldiers at the end of August, 2012. Coalition forces are increasingly unable to rely on their Afghan allies. Attacks by suspected anti-government sympathizers (or soldiers with personal grudges) within the Afghan security forces against their own colleagues have become more prevalent. Hardly a week goes by without an "incident." By late summer, 2012, the Kabul government was purging its forces by ousting of hundreds of Afghan police and soldiers suspected of collaborating with the insurgency.

On a more positive note, ISAF points out that some 5,000 'insurgents,' mainly from the northwest where the Taliban have only a limited presence, have switched to the government since 2010. Such swapping of allegiances usually has more to do with Afghan pragmatism than ideology or the preference for one faction over another. Afghans will generally act according to their best interests at the moment. The changing of allegiances can prove very short term.

The Taliban insurgency: Hardly a spent force

For their part, the Taliban and other insurgents show no sign of collapsing. The past several years have witnessed a steady rise in the use of IEDs against NATO forces, including ISAF headquarters. (SEE IEDs) The Haqqani Network has made a practice of launching murderous assaults in the heart of Kabul, Kandahar and other towns as has Gulbuddin's Hezb-e-Islami. They are conducting an effective, long term and often brutal form of guerrilla warfare that relies on inflicting severe casualties.

This is the major difference between the Taliban and the mujahideen of the 1980s. The mujahideen stayed clear of suicide tactics and indiscriminate booby-traps that were likely to kill civilians. Although US drones have managed to "take out" hundreds of experienced guerrilla commanders and fighters, including Baddrudin Haqqani, one of the Haqqani Network's key assets and a son of Jalaluddin in August, 2012, a seemingly endless supply of hardline operatives with even less interest in seeking a negotiated peace appear ready to take their place, promising even more suicide attacks. Many of these young Afghan militants were brought up in Pakistan and – as tribal elders complain — no longer have any real traditional ties with their homeland on the other side of the Durand Line.

As a disparate and often localized opposition movement, the Taliban does not respond to a single identifiable command structure, nor does it have a unified strategy, even if Mullah Omar still holds considerably sway. This despite insinuations in certain Pakistani circles that not only is the Taliban united, but that the they can assert influence over them. As was the case with the mujahideen, most of the numerous 'fronts' operate independently of each other. These include Talib fronts, the Haqqani Network, and Hezb-e-Islami, but also tribal groups that oppose the Kabul regime.

The reasons can be extremely personal. It might be an affront to personal dignity, or simply anger at having one's opium crops destroyed by the government or the fact that neighbours suffered casualties during a Coalition attack, such as the inadvertent killing of at least eight women in a NATO bombing in mid-September 2012. Animosity has been provoked by the perceived mistreatment of local populations by foreign or government forces. A con-

voy forcing civilian cars off the road or a mercenary rudely telling local Afghans to "fuck off" may be enough to shift a clan or a group to the insurgents' side.

Some groups operate at a district or provincial level; others from the Pakistani side with backing from Islamabad's nefarious military InterServices Intelligence organization, or ISI. Certain fronts make a point of maintaining good relations with local populations, while others conduct indiscriminate terror against foreign soldiers, aid workers, and Afghan civilians. Increasingly, too, some groups function like the rogue mafia-style Jihadist gangs of the 1990s killing, robbing and raping villagers. The ruthless execution by unknown assailants of ten western and Afghan humanitarians in the summer of 2010 is a tragic illustration.

Such incidents have horrified many Afghans, including those opposed to the Karzai regime and the NATO occupation, causing some Taliban to worry about their public relations. In certain parts, local communities have risen up to retaliate against insurgent excesses by hounding down, killing or arresting militants. The blowing up of half a dozen street children near ISAF headquarters in late summer 2012 by a teenage suicide bomber also illustrates how coldly indifferent some insurgents are. For the first time, however, there appeared to be seething anger among ordinary Afghans against such murders, particularly of innocent children.

Perhaps the greatest cause of Washington's failure in Afghanistan was the decision by George W. Bush administration in 2001 to rely on its generals rather than diplomats to call the shots. Most policy decisions have been made through a security lens, which have failed to take into account the widely varying local and regional conditions, and the constantly evolving changes in power. In many ways, this obsession for keeping the military in the lead is one reason why the West's handling of Afghanistan has proved so calamitous. Other aspects, such as incompetence, poor intelligence or the failure to make sufficient effort to understand this country, its people and above all, its history, have acted to prevent any efforts to negotiate peace and reconciliation from succeeding.

The reality is that as Western troops withdraw, the armed opposition – or at least anti-Kabul elements – will return either by force or by pragmatically cutting their own deals with local security forces. That is precisely what happened when the Sovi-

ets, who admitted officially to having lost 15,000 troops, pulled out in 1989. (The Soviets may have lost up to 25,000 soldiers, according to informal sources). Moscow believed that the US had backed the mujahideen during that phase of the war primarily as a way of weakening the USSR. Washington seemed to prove them right, when it pulled the plug on its funding after the Red Army had gone, leaving Afghans to fend for themselves in a political vacuum. The result was a ruthless civil war, that culminated in the Battle for Kabul, the rise of the Taliban, an attack against the World Trade Center in New York, and the quagmire that has Washington pinned down today.

Ignoring history at one's peril

It's common today to talk about 'lessons learned' in Afghanistan. But, for the most part, this is just talk. Few take the time to understand the past. Most foreigners do not grasp Afghan culture, a process that takes months if not years of conversations with the local population, usually over tea.

The West largely ignored the experiences of the British in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, when the Raj tried – and ignominiously failed – to control the country. (SEE FOLLOWING THE RETREAT) Afghanistan during those days was not just a matter of launching a punitive expeditionary force in order to impose one's policies. A key reason why the First Anglo-Afghan war proved such a disaster was that the British failed to pay subsidies to the royal family. They thought they could manipulate matters from the outside without taking into account local sentiment or customs. Afghans, for example, have always sought to 'buy' influence in Kabul and have thus created a dependence on subsidies and payoffs that are just as relevant today as then. The unrestrained and indiscriminate 'dumping' of funds on Afghanistan has only encouraged this.

The lessons from the 1980s, when the Soviets, Americans, Saudis, Pakistanis and others all played their version of The Great Game, were also conveniently put on the backburner. Many who became involved with Afghanistan during the post-2001 period have acted as if history does not exist. Today, there is almost nothing to suggest that the Red Army was ever present in Afghanistan. Some wonder whether, in twenty or thirty years time, the NATO intervention will have the same lack of impact.

Part of the problem is that no player has ever intervened in this country expressly to help the Afghans. Whether the Soviets and Americans during the Jihad period, or the Pakistanis, Iranians, Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and the Coalition forces today, all have done so in support of their own specific agendas. Outside efforts to buy influence have usually corrupted a certain type of Afghan, whether government official, warlord or insurgent, who will do anything for money and usually involves renting his country to the highest bidder. But dealing with a land as traditional as Afghanistan is also a matter of understanding the role of Islam and recognizing that this is what cements Afghans together, whether the government or the Taliban. Numerous Afghans are extremely angry about corruption, yet the way the West has favoured privileged individuals with the right contacts, guns and power has only encouraged such abuse.

Afghanistan today suffers from a severe lack of capacity. The majority of Afghans, 70 percent of whom are illiterate, still lack basic education. Most qualified Afghans fled the country in the 1980s, a brain drain often encouraged by the West. Too much of the international effort has gone to promote government-sponsored initiatives rather than the efforts of ordinary Afghans. Foreign donors need to inspire not only foreign but also Afghan investment. There needs to be greater incentive for Afghans to commit to their own country.

For many visiting consultants, it is far easier to work with government ministries in the capital, sometimes on programmes of questionable impact, rather than more difficult, but in the long-term productive initiatives in the countryside. Why put your money into cumbersome rural enterprises which take time to develop and with the country still at war? Far better to invest in real estate in safe havens such as the Emirates. This is precisely what moneyed Afghans have been doing. For much of the past decade, Kabul itself has proven a highly profitable investment with luxury villas and offices to rent to wealthy international organizations. But with 2014 fast approaching, prices are dropping and many people see the only good bet as moving assets outside the country before everything collapses.

Justice or impunity?

Despite numerous rule of law projects, Afghans still lack confidence in their own legal system. Government judges and police

are widely regarded as corrupt so Afghans see no point going to them. The outcome of court cases often depends on the amount of baksheesh that is paid. Afghan's point out, only half jokingly, that it's the criminals who go to the police for protection. Many police are involved in drugs, either as users or dealers. An effective police force depends on training and proper salaries. Lacking these two elements, the police naturally look to other sources for their finances.

In Helmand province, villagers consider the US marines to be helpful, but they distrust the uniformed Afghan police who accompany them and loot people's houses. Despite frequent pleas to exclude Afghan police from these operations, Coalition forces insist that police participation is part of their handover responsibility. Given a choice, rural Afghans prefer the Talib-backed shar'ia courts. The more culturally sensitive concepts of traditional justice that these courts exhibit are regarded as quick and relatively fair, if at times harsh. Even the Afghans who work for NATO often prefer to use Talib rather than government justice, since it reflects cultural standards that people understand. In contrast, the Western judicial system simply does not work in Afghanistan.

Western dependence on a government that has little credibility is just as problematic as relying on generals to produce military solutions. Afghan government bureaucrats naturally tend to avoid work or to direct their attention to those activities where a financial incentive is involved. Go into any Afghan ministry and you will see people drinking tea, their eyes riveted to a nearby TV.

Some of this is a legacy from the communist era. Rather than continue to employ a huge bureaucracy that is largely ineffective, the international community could work towards cutting away the dead wood, and then doubling the salaries of those who remain, while insisting on greater efficiency.

It has not helped matters that Western donors have blindly funneled funding to the government without checking on how it was actually being spent.

Many USAID, DFID, EU and other aid coordinators are aware that much of what they have provided has disappeared to Dubai or into the pockets of foreign contractors. The number of Afghan officials who have apartments or houses in the Gulf countries or Europe and North America is staggering. This was clearly not paid for with government salaries. Ordinary Afghans are furious, and they are even angrier at the internationals, who allow such abuses to take place. The perception is that there is a symbiotic re-

lationship between corrupt officials and western contractors who were supposed to be doing something for the country. The funding taps are now being switched off, but as the Afghans see it, it is for all the wrong reasons. From their point of view, the West has largely botched the whole process and now simply wants out.

Overall, the biggest problem for the international community in Afghanistan is to grasp what is going on. Deploying troops on a six-month rotation – the current practice – does not allow foreign military to develop a deeper understanding and yet the military is relied on to set policy. What Americans especially need to take on board is that rather than trying to introduce something new, such as western-style democracy with electronic voter IDs, the Afghans really want to embrace their own culture. And to do things their way.

Dealing with Afghanistan effectively requires understanding who is who among this wide array of different factions, whether among the insurgents or within the government. Some are little more than criminal gangs posing as insurgents – or security forces. When a terrorist bombing, kidnapping or armed assault occurs, the first question is often not whether the Taliban are responsible, but which ministry? It is no longer possible to talk in general terms about “the Taliban.” It is necessary to treat each

faction on an individual basis and to know who is really calling the shots and for what reason. The kidnapping of an American doctor (who was rescued by Coalition forces) in the Sorubi region in December, 2012, for example, was blamed on the Taliban. However, Sorubi has been long renowned as an area where groups more concerned by personal profit than ideology have operated.

Every Afghan has his own agenda and local intelligence is often not reliable. This became obvious immediately after 9/11 when much of the information purchased by American intelligence proved bogus. The US Reward for Justice programmes encouraged informants to finger fellow Afghans for cash and they did so, often without evidence. The vast majority of denunciations resulted in grave miscarriages of justice with innocent Afghans sent off to Guantanamo or Bagram. There is a lot of tribal competition and local players will do everything possible to discredit the other.

American predator drone attacks against known associates of the Taliban or Haqqani Network have proven effective in the short term, but these tactics may prove detrimental in the long-run. They destroy the known enemy clearing the way for lesser known insurgents who may be harder to control and who are prepared to use even more violent tactics. The result is to nullify acquired intelligence about who is actually running the Taliban and consequently to make realistic planning even more difficult. Better to deal with the enemy that you know than the one that you don't.

A Swiss-nurtured dialogue: a tenable solution?

A continuing problem is Pakistan's continued support to the Taliban and other insurgent groups. While ISI is frequently identified as maintaining active links to the Taliban, elements of the Pakistani Federal government also have been implicated in the undermining the Kabul regime. During the 1990s, Islamabad helped instigate renewed civil war by supporting Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and then changing its allegiance to the emerging Taliban.

Afghanistan's stability has never been Pakistan's top priority. Its real strategic concern is preventing India from aligning itself with Afghan groups in order to squeeze Pakistan from both frontiers. As absurd as a resurgence of the Pakistan-India dispute might seem to many Westerners, the fear is still very much alive in the minds of Pakistan's aging military leadership. As a result,

Pakistan's strategy is to keep a working relationship with those insurgents that it thinks might rise to power once the international community loses interest and abandons Afghanistan. In short, Pakistan is doing everything possible to keep its options open, and that means promoting a political situation in Afghanistan that is essentially fluid.

Afghanistan's other neighbors, Iran and the Central Asian Republics, have similar concerns. The bottom line in this scenario is that much of what will happen in Afghanistan will depend on how the West deals with Pakistan – as well as Iran and the Central Asian Republics.

For many who know the region, the only clear way out is to engage in broad-based reconciliation in a manner acceptable to all Afghans, and not just the warring parties. Islamabad's proposal in late 2012 to assume 'responsibility' from the departing Americans for talks is a worrying one. Pakistan is clearly not a neutral player. Nor are the Americans and other NATO countries. Qatar, another venue that is frequently mentioned, is viewed as favoring Pakistan. One of the few countries capable of promoting, if not overseeing, transparent (a firm need for most Afghans) rather than secret negotiations just might be Switzerland.

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Both Jouvenal and Girardet began reporting together from inside Afghanistan in early 1980. They have also worked in other conflict zones such as Somalia, Liberia and Sri Lanka.

The Great Game revisited: Beyond 2014

By Ahmed Rashid

Left to their own devices, Afghans might have resolved their differences long ago. For decades, however, outside agendas have ensured that this war-shattered country remains a playground for foreign protagonists. British-Pakistani writer Ahmed Rashid, contends that any long-term solution to Afghanistan will need to involve all regional players, including Afghans themselves,

As the US and ISAF coalition forces get ready for a massive withdrawal by 2014, not only Afghanistan but the entire region is in a state of turmoil. Relations with Pakistan and Iran are increasingly unpredictable. Tensions are increasing among Pakistan, Russia and the Central Asian countries. Iran's cat and mouse game over whether or not it is actually developing a nuclear bomb has undermined any hope of Teheran providing a stabilizing influence in Afghanistan. The near breakdown of relations between the US and Pakistan further complicates the situation despite slight improvements in mid-2012, followed by the election of Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, who in September 2013 appeared ready to establish a new openness..

Escalating violence not only jeopardizes the western military withdrawal. It also makes the future of any-long term commitment to recovery doubtful at best. In short, the region is in chaos, yet it is clear that any long-term solution will need to involve the regional players.

Relations between the United States and Pakistan are at their lowest point since 2001, when the Islamabad government openly supported the Taliban regime. In November 2011, Pakistan closed US and NATO supply routes through Pakistan after a US air strike killed two dozen Pakistani soldiers at a border outpost. (Pakistan has since reopened the routes, but is demanding that the US pay more for the access). In the meantime, still angry at the US raid that killed Osama bin Laden, the Pakistani army has threatened to shoot down any US planes crossing into Pakistani territory.

Alternate routes that avoid Pakistan are problematic. The fledgling Republic of Kyrgistan appears ready to embrace democ-

racy, but its neighbours are a different story. Tajikistan is a rear base for Islamic extremists fighting in Afghanistan. By late 2011, the Northern Distribution Network, which runs through Uzbekistan, had become the main (and extremely costly) supply route for US and NATO troops in Afghanistan. In order to keep the supplies flowing in spite of Pakistan's obstinacy, the international community appeared ready to overlook Uzbekistan's reputation for wholesale abuses of human rights. Hardly anyone seemed to notice the contradictions or outright hypocrisy of making massive pay-offs to a dictatorship that freely engages in torture in order to build to build a supposedly democratic government in Afghanistan. Despite international appeals to show more discretion, Uzbek President Islam Karimov has blithely ignored requests to halt the use of torture. Human Rights Watch notes that Uzbekistan authorities regularly engage in a wide range of barbaric practices, including pouring boiling water over detainees.

At the centre of the crisis is a history of years of American neglect combined with the fact that Pakistan was instrumental in helping create the Taliban in the first place. Washington is still reluctant to break off relations. By mid-2013, Pakistan was still refusing to expel Afghan insurgents based in Pakistan. The Taliban can mobilize some 25,000 fighters – the same figure they had in the 2005-2006 campaigns. Hardly anyone questions the fact that the Taliban's survival depends directly on the sanctuary and support it receives from certain factions in Pakistan, notably the military IterServices Intelligence agency, or ISI.

Pakistan is not the only country providing support to the insurgency. Iran regularly backs various Shia and Sunni groups that can be called on to strike in Afghanistan if the US or Israel bombs Iran's nuclear installations.

Non-state actors add to the confusion. The Haqqani Network, which operates from Pakistan's northwest frontier, has been launching spectacular attacks into Afghanistan. The result is an increase in assassinations of political and tribal leaders on both sides of the border. Any affiliation with the Afghan or Pakistani government can easily turn into a death sentence, which further complicates the process of trying to put together a negotiated settlement. The rise of bombings in 2012 and 2013 by the Pakistani Taliban against targets on Pakistani soil is one example of this.
In the middle of all this, the US is multiplying its drone attacks against key Taliban and al-Qaeda figures in Pakistan. While ramping up its efforts to kill any perceived enemy, the United

States has ignored the fact that the rationale for Pakistan's support for the Taliban was Pakistan's fear that India might try to use Afghanistan to squeeze Pakistan in a pincers movement. The US has virtually ignored the continuing tensions between India and Pakistan, or the implications of India's involvement in Afghanistan. In January, 2013 tensions rose again between the two countries with mutual attacks in Kashmir against each other resulting in the deaths of soldiers from both sides.

For its part, Pakistan's military is highly selective about who qualifies as a terrorist. The ISI refuses to clamp down on anti-Indian militants that use Pakistan's territory as a rear base. That includes the Kashkar-e-Taiba, which launched the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and is still based in Punjab province. The army admits that after 2006, it effectively stopped going after al-Qaeda.
Pakistan's neglect on that score has allowed foreign militants to radicalize Pushtun tribes, which have now established links with armed activists in Punjab. All of these groups have the same objective: to overthrow the government in Islamabad in order to establish an Islamic state. Despite these threats, the government's strategists in Islamabad are still convinced that they can carry off a two-pronged approach in which they crush home-grown militants on Pakistani territory while continuing to rely on the Afghan Taliban to serve as a proxy in negotiating a final settlement in Afghanistan.

US failure to deal with Pakistan

If this sounds delusional, it is no more so than the self-deception and hypocrisy demonstrated by the US when dealing with Pakistan. For seven long years, former President George W. Bush ignored demands from Pakistan's public for genuine democracy. Instead of pushing for reforms, the US openly treated ex-Pakistani military leader Pervez Musharraf as an ally and hero. A more calibrated – and realistic - policy might have averted many of the problems that Washington faces today. Bush's successor, President Barack Obama, recognized the problem, which he described as a "cancer" likely to produce an eventual US failure in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Obama, like Bush, failed to move Pakistan towards a more sound political footing.

Washington's most glaring mistake has been its failure to recognize Pakistan's fatal obsession with India. Both the Bush administration, and the current Obama leadership, seem unaware

that Pakistan's army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and his corps commanders are even more consumed than their predecessors with fears of Indian expansionism in the region. Kayani is particularly concerned that Indian investment and development programmes in Afghanistan, and especially military training, are constantly expanding.

General Kayani likes to describe his security philosophy as "India-centric." He has repeatedly refused to launch an offensive in North Waziristan, where most Afghan insurgent leaders are based, on the pretext that Pakistan's army should not risk depleting its strength on the Indian front. The alleged Indian threat is a convenient excuse for Kayani. It offers a politically popular argument for ignoring the Pak-Afghan frontier, and it makes Kayani a hero to his junior and middle-ranking officers who are increasingly angry over what they see as fighting America's war. But Kayani's fears about India are also deeply rooted in Pakistan's military mind-set. It will require major overtures from India before that changes.

Although President Obama identified lowering tensions over Kashmir and reducing the rivalry between India and Pakistan as important priorities, insurgent attacks on Indian diplomats and road workers in Afghanistan continue to anger New Delhi,

while Islamabad maintains that India is now fomenting unrest in Pakistan's southwestern province, Baluchistan. For change to succeed, India and Pakistan need to forego their proxy war and discuss a common approach for both Kabul and Kashmir.

Need for more than an exit strategy

Before this can happen, Washington needs to give full support to negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Merely facilitating talks through Qatar or other third parties, including Pakistan, is not enough. The United States is the only player that can actually enforce a deal, but US generals are resisting deeper involvement until the Taliban is further weakened, which is clearly not happening. The danger is that this strategy is removing the more experienced and moderate factions within the Taliban and effectively sweeping the decks for a more radical and extremist Taliban leadership to take control. As US drones kill off mid-level Talib commanders, younger, more radical candidates are taking their place and the tone becomes even more prone to violence than it was before. This failed strategy only makes future negotiations all but impossible. It will eventually lead to closer ties between the Taliban and al Qaeda.

What happens in Pakistan – the main regional stakeholder - will have an enormous impact on Afghanistan, particularly as the US-led Coalition forces reassess their roles and their commitment to Afghanistan's future. Most of the Coalition's 48 armies are determined to withdraw regardless of what happens. Western electorates are increasingly disillusioned. The US and NATO transition strategy for 2014 transfers control to government representatives at the district level. Their protection will depend on the newly-trained Afghan security forces who are expected to number 352,000. In reality, this is an exit strategy not a political one.

What is lacking in the efforts to guarantee the future stability of Afghanistan is a political strategy. The Afghan people are exhausted by war. Increasing numbers are beginning to agree with the Taliban that that the western presence in Afghanistan is nothing less than an occupation. It is prolonging the war and only causing more misery and bloodshed. The hundreds of civilians killed since early 2012 by insurgent attacks are almost forgotten in the aftermath of children killed by a 'farengi' or foreigner.

Both Washington and Kabul are entangled in a series of strategic conundrums which have not been adequately addressed.

The United States and the Afghan government want to maintain US trainers and Special Forces, including military bases, well beyond 2014. The Taliban are vehemently opposed to this. They realize that these forces are likely to be directed at them. The Taliban have made it clear that all foreign troops, including trainers and advisors, must leave before they will make an agreement with Kabul. In contrast, many ordinary Afghans want NATO to continue to guarantee security, particularly in the cities. The result is that President Karzai's efforts to obtain a security agreement with Washington and hopes for a reconciliation agreement with the Taliban are mutually exclusive. Neither the US nor the European Union seems to fully understand this strategic conundrum.

... and for a regional agreement

The Pentagon's strategy, as pointed out, is to weaken the insurgents further before beginning peace negotiations. The US State Department sees things differently and wants to focus on a political solution that includes talks with the Taliban. It is clear to both sides that direct negotiations with the radical Islamists are the key to any kind of lasting Afghan and regional stability.

The opening of a Taliban office in Qatar and the willingness to hold talks with the United States could be a major breakthrough for the political process, as well as for Afghanistan's internal stability and it could help create the relative stability needed for the US and NATO to make a face-saving, orderly retreat with minimal bloodshed. The talks are not only necessary, but given the current public disillusion with the war, no other option will end the war. A first step in this direction appears to have been the Paris talks in December, 2012, where senior Taliban officials met with Kabul representatives. More recently, there was also a push to hold proper talks in Switzerland as a neutral and non-NATO country.

Pakistan will seek to dominate any future settlement. Yet it will also come under heavy pressure from Islamic elements within Pakistan itself to water down any demands. The problem is the Pentagon. If the generals have their way, the war could drag on indefinitely, even if the bulk of Coalition troops leave. Pakistan will dig in its heels, as will other regional powers, and insurgent attacks will increase. At the same time, the US military and the CIA will escalate their operations along the border as well as inside Pakistan, leading to even broader regional chaos.

For a political strategy to succeed, there must be an agreement among Afghanistan's neighbours to restrict their interference in Afghan affairs. Apart from India, all the other states in the region – China, Russia, the five Central Asian republics, Pakistan and Iran – oppose any long-term presence of US troops in Afghanistan. As long as the US retains bases in Afghanistan, there can be no guarantees of non-interference from Afghanistan's neighbours.

Pakistan is crucial to any settlement, but it is also trying to deal with its own extremists. Taliban and Sunni extremists in northern Pakistan regularly persecute Ismailis (a small Shia sect headed by the Aga Khan). Pakistani extremists applied pressure to have another group, the Ahmadis, proscribed as non-Muslim in Pakistan's state constitution.

Pakistan's Christians were alarmed by the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in the Federal cabinet. Bhatti's murder came just two months after the assassination of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab and one of the country's leading liberal voices. Both deaths had a chilling impact on voices for moderation or reform. The anti-blasphemy law, which both Taseer and Bhatti had opposed, was enacted in the 1980s by General Zia ul-Haq. The law lets anyone make an accusation that blasphemy has been committed and it authorizes the automatic arrest of the suspect by the police. Not only is proof of actual wrongdoing not required, but evidence of the transgression is often excluded from court hearings on the grounds that it is blasphemous. Minorities are particularly at risk because no one dares speak up on their behalf. All of Pakistan's religious minorities, including the country's tiny Hindu population, have been targets of religious intolerance. The much larger Shia Muslim minority (15-20 percent) and mainstream Sunni sects are also at risk.

The Pakistani Taliban and other extremist groups

The Pakistani Taliban, based among the Pushtuns of the Northwest, are primarily responsible for the armed expression of this intolerance which has spread through an alliance with extremist groups in Kashmir, Punjab and Karachi. Many factors contribute to this growing radicalism: the US-led war in Afghanistan heads the list. Another factor is the fact that over the last three decades, Islamabad has used the extremists to promote its own foreign policy aims in Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir.

Behind Pakistan's silence and its apparent inability to take a stand against these groups lies something more sinister. For

decades, the Pakistan army and the ISI have supported the extremists groups in exchange for their services as proxy forces in Afghanistan and Kashmir. But in recent years, the Pakistan army appears to have lost control, and the militants have begun striking at targets of their own.

Despite the fact that the army and the ISI itself are now targets for attacks, the army refuses to crack down on its protégés. Since 2006, the extremists have been responsible for the deaths of more than 2,000 Pakistani military personnel. Divisions in the army over how to handle the extremists are especially ominous in view of the fact that the military commands half a million men, another half a million reserves, 110 nuclear weapons and one of the largest intelligence agencies in the world, the ISI, which has an estimated 100,000 employees.

The ISI's complex and at times surrealistic strategy has sought to manipulate extremist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT), which are officially banned by Islamabad and United Nations sanctions. By covertly supporting the extremists, Pakistan sends a powerful signal to all extremist groups, those that hate Christians, that they can do what ever they want.

The ultimate objective is for the Pakistani army to exercise control over future peace talks with the Taliban. The fact that the US is now circumventing ISI by trying to start its own negotiations clearly irks Islamabad. What counts from Pakistan's point of view, is to ensure that American arrangements do not leave India in a stronger position inside Afghanistan. The ISI clearly believes that it is manipulating the Americans in a geopolitical chess game, but the unintended consequence is that it is steadily ceding ground to the extremists. Pakistan, in fact, may soon become an army without a country.

At least some elements in the Pakistani military are now trying to reverse this trend. The future, however, does not look bright. In 2010, the army did hit hard at the Pakistani Taliban in the border regions, but the Taliban in these areas have returned with a vengeance. They have seized territory in the northwest and they have escalated suicide attacks across the country. They have added mosques to the usual targets that include government officials, army soldiers and civilians. The Islamic parties have been particularly adept at exploiting the widespread anti-Americanism that has resulted from the war in Afghanistan, US drone attacks and increasingly virulent anti-Western propaganda in the media.

In April, 2011, the White House openly admitted to Congress that "there remains no clear path toward defeating the insurgency in Pakistan despite the…deployment of over 147,000 forces." The report described a rapid deterioration along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan and concluded that the Pakistani army has no ability to "hold and build" insurgency-hit areas, such as North Waziristan. Pakistan absolved itself from blame, insisting that Islamabad cannot be held accountable for the "failings of coalition strategy in Afghanistan." Europe and the United States are understandably concerned that recently uncovered global terrorist plots aim at recruiting European citizens of Pakistani origin as well as graduates from training in Taliban camps in Pakistan. This includes the cold-blooded murder in March 2012, of several Muslim French soldiers who had served with NATO in Afghanistan, and of Jewish children outside a school. The assassin was a French militant, a former petty hoodlum who after several run-ins with the law had received training as a terrorist in Pakistan.

Pakistan: A state in meltdown

Pakistan is not a failed state – yet. But it gives serious signs of approaching a meltdown. As indicated by large-scale demonstrations in Islamabad led by Muslim cleric Tahir al Qadir, calling for the government to step down, Pakistan remains a corrupt, run-down, semi-functional democracy with a powerful army, a more or less independent judiciary, and a reasonably efficient police force. Pakistan performs outstandingly well in the arts, television, fashion design, pop music, and of course, cricket. Its weakest points are social services, health care, education, population control and jobs. As with Egypt, Algeria and other Middle Eastern countries, Pakistan faces a demographic bulge with 60 percent of its population under the age of 25. For these young people who face a life of seemingly inescapable poverty, powerlessness and humiliation, an Islamic extremist philosophy, not only offers a ready-made dream for a brighter future, but it also provides a recipe for action. The more the state becomes dysfunctional, the more the dream becomes the only acceptable choice.

The situation for young Afghans who have been raised in Pakistani camps as refugees is similar. Any attempt at a replay of the "Arab awakening" would not lead to a new dawn of democracy in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Any mass uprising would quickly be dominated by Islamic extremists, who would then try to overthrow

the Pakistani state. (While critical of the Islamabad government, Muslim cleric al Qadir is loathed by the Pakistani Taliban for his anti-corruption stance and promotion of real democracy and accountability).

For the moment, the only narrative that Pakistan's leaders have been able to offer is to accuse the troika of India, the United States and Israel for the country's problems. Pakistan seems incapable of objective self-analysis. The various conspiracy theories that abound in Pakistan paint the country as a victim, maligned and wronged at the hands of foreign powers – especially the United States and India. Almost no Pakistani political leaders will publicly acknowledge that the country is really being destroyed by its acquiescence to selective terrorism. Instead, the state argues that it is the presence of American forces in Afghanistan that has undermined Pakistan over the last decade. This line of reasoning suggest that once the US leaves, the Pakistani Taliban will go home, the suicide bombings will cease and everything will go back to normal. If this were really the case, then why did Pakistan feel it was necessary to allow the revival of Afghan Taliban in 2003?

Since January, 2011 street agitation and public anger have escalated in Pakistan. The Islamic parties and their extremist allies have seized upon several issues in a bid to redefine the state. The first is the controversial and outdated law on blasphemy. Members of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) would like to reform it. However, the religious right have seized on even the slightest hint of reform as a reason for castigating the government as a tool of the West and for attacking liberals, such as Taseer and Bhatti, as anti-Islamic forces. Bhatti, had tried to change Pakistan's intolerant fundamentalist-backed laws against alleged blasphemy. A voice for moderation, he had declared that: "The forces of violence, militants, banned organizations, Taliban and al Qaeda, want to impose their radical philosophy in Pakistan and they threaten anyone who stands against it."

Rather than take a stand, the government found itself bending over backwards to appease the Islamists. General Kayani refused to publicly condemn the killings. Any public statement, he hinted, could endanger the army's unity.

Meanwhile, the CIA has been embroiled in a long-running fight with its Pakistani partner, the ISI. They have clashed over a number of issues, including CIA penetration of the ISI and the CIA's own monitoring of extremist groups. For its part, the ISI

appeared to be acting on its own fears that the United States might be trying to bypass Pakistan in order to engage with the Afghan Taliban directly in talks. The crisis came to a head when Raymond Davis, an alleged CIA hit-man, killed two Pakistanis. Davis' arrest triggered an anti-American maelstrom. Despite diplomatic immunity, the Pakistanis held him for 47 days. As events unfolded, it became clear that Davis was part of a cover CIA-led team collecting intelligence on military groups inside the country. He was eventually freed after the US agreed to pay more than two million dollars worth of "blood money" to relatives of the deceased – in return pardoning him, which is legal under Pakistani Sharia law.

The anti-American campaign by the Islamic right is only the tip of the problem. Even as militants clamoured for Davis to be hanged, posters appeared in all major cities demanding an Islamic state. Extremist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba came out into the open to lead some of the demonstrations. They even held rallies in government-own buildings. No one in the government seemed willing to stop them.

Pakistan remains extremely dependent on American goodwill for its economic survival, and not only for the 3 billion dollars worth of annual military and economic aid provided by Washington. Since January 2011, the Zadaki government has broken with an IMF stabilization programme and its 11.3 billion dollar loan to Pakistan. Islamabad was not prepared to carry out the IMF's requested economic and taxation reforms. The country's economy has tanked with GDP growth at 2 percent and inflation running at 16 percent. The Pak Rupee has been devalued with the government forced to print hundreds of billions of bank notes every week to keep the administration afloat. All this has helped impede productivity and increase joblessness. The recent White House report described the economy as the "greatest threat to Pakistan's stability over the medium term."

The 30-odd Islamic parties and groups make no bones that they want to topple the government and create an Islamic state. The fundamentalists have made the economic crisis an effective rallying cry, targeting the government and the elite for their widespread corruption. They have been making it an issue of rich versus poor (Islamabad has been unwilling to tax the rich or the landlords who constitute the majority of the PPP members of parliament, and the Islamic way versus dependence on the West. To their religious war, they are now adding a class war.

At the same time, as British writer Anatole Lieven points out, there are other issues, rarely mentioned by Pakistanis, that threaten to have a damaging impact on the country in the future, notably lack of water, explosive population growth, and the country's failure to deal with natural disasters or to harness the enormous waters released by floods as in 2010. "Of all the countries in the world that are acutely threatened by climate change, Pakistan will be one of the most important," Lieven writes. All the above issues need to be taken into account before a realistic solution to Afghanistan can be negotiated.

A rash of dangerous political events are scheduled in Afghanistan in 2014 and afterwards. These include the US and NATO troop withdrawals, the test of whether the Afghan security forces can hold their own, and a new Afghan presidential election now that Karzai is constitutionally obliged to step down.

An additional possible complication is that that Karzai could seek to stay on for "reasons of security." All this needs to be seen against the backdrop of a loss of public confidence inside this fledgling state and a lack of agreement among its neighbours. For the moment, Karzai has failed to inspire a national consensus on supporting talks with the Taliban. And he has not managed to offer a vision for a post-2014 Afghanistan. With many Pushtuns supporting reconciliation, but most non-Pushtuns, including the Shia minority, against it, the ethnic and religious divide has widened dangerously. Such tensions could explode after 2014, and civil war is a definite possibility.

In addition, there has been little preparation by the West or Kabul to prepare for what is going to be a huge economic downturn in the country once international forces pull out and the money that was going to support them stops. There is already economic panic, and investment has dropped. Businessmen, regime politicians and others who can afford it are moving their families abroad. Tens of thousands of Afghans who presently work for US or NATO forces will be rendered jobless.

At the December, 2011 conference in Bonn, the international community publicly committed to pay a substantial part of Afghanistan's security and governmental costs as part of the proclaimed "Transformation Decade" from 2015 to 2024. The West, however, has to provide real guarantees that such sums will be available for several years to come. At a time of global economic recession, the US, NATO and the wider Muslim world must obviously share such a burden.

To cope with this plethora of uncertainties, all the players will have to be far more constructive, proactive and flexible. A far more coherent regional strategy needs to be articulated publically so that the ever-burgeoning swell of conspiracy theorists can be thwarted. But Afghanistan and its backers have a long way to go before all the pieces needed for Afghan stability and a successful political exit strategy can fall into place.

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Exploring the origins of the Taliban. John Butt, known as the “white Talib”.

Exploring the origins of the Taliban

By John Butt

The present-day Taliban have moved a long way since late 1994, when a tiny group of 35 students captured Kandahar and then went on to control most of Afghanistan. The original Taliban were madrassah students, reacting to the chaos and anarchy that followed the fall of the former Soviet-backed regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1992. Today's Taliban is a very different organization, and few Afghans – least of all the Taliban themselves – expects them to promote peace in Afghanistan. The movement's primary objective is the expulsion of all foreign troops. The current insurgency incorporates other groups (the Haqqani Network, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, etc.), who have their own reasons for opposing the US-led occupation. ***John Butt,*** *a British former BBC producer, journalist and writer, explores the origins of the Taliban as a movement.*

Throughout the 1980s, loose groups of Afghan Taliban began organizing themselves to fight against Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The organizational model was the structure commonly found in madrassahs. Traditionally, the term "madrassah" referred to a school that could be either secular or religious. These days the term is usually taken to mean an Islamic educational institution. Students naturally tended to organize themselves in groups, known as *anjumans* (societies) according to where they came from. In Pakistan, the societies are also known as "madrassahs".

Afghan students traditionally referred to their societies as *jameeyats* or *jamiats*. Since Afghan madrassah students living in Pakistan felt obliged to join the fight against the Soviets, they were even more prone to the madrassah style of organization. The societies, composed of religious students, were generally affiliated with either the Hezb-e-Islami of Maulvi Mohammad Yunus Khalis or the Harakat-e-Inquilab-e-Islami of Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. Both groups deployed mujahideen, or Islamic warriors, to fight against the communist regime in Kabul. Eventually, these societies spawned the Taliban movement.

Realizing, in April, 1992, that law and order was likely to breakdown in Afghanistan after the fall of President Mohammed

Najibullah's People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the Kandahar Taliban briefly debated seizing power, but then decided against it. Instead, in 1994, they limited themselves to wresting control from various and often lawless groups of former mujahideen. They received considerable assistance from Pakistan and especially from Pakistan's military InterServices Intelligence agency, or ISI. Pakistan wanted to promote the Taliban as a fighting force inside Afghanistan that would still feel some loyalty to Pakistan. The latter also needed to provide a focus on the other side of the border for the hundreds of thousands of highly motivated Afghan refugee students who had grown up as refugees in Pakistan and were now seeking action.

Taliban in power (1994-2001)

No one could have predicted the spectacular success of the Taliban when they seized power in Kandahar in late 1994. Their professed goal of establishing peace and order struck a chord with Afghans everywhere, and particularly in the Pushtun south and south-east, where people had been reeling from a total breakdown of any semblance of security. The Taliban's great appeal lay in the fact that they not only promised instant law and order, but they also delivered it.

Even the predominantly Dari-speaking – and relatively stable – city of Herat fell to the Taliban quickly. In less than two years, the Taliban had taken over all the southern and south-western provinces of Afghanistan, in addition to the eastern provinces of Nangrahar, Laghman, Kunar and Nuristan. In September 1996, they captured Kabul. Their government was recognized by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan, all three of which continued to support the movement until the US-led intervention in October, 2001. *(Editor's Note: The Americans, including US oil interests, maintained relations with the Taliban right up to the events of 9/11. In April, 2001, former US Vice President Dick Cheney made a 40 million dollar grant to the Talib regime in Kabul for allegedly collaborating with American efforts to crack down on opium production.)*

The Taliban's progress proved slower and more difficult in the northern part of the country, especially as the movement's character became less Islamic and more Pushtun. In the predominantly Pushtun south, the Taliban were able to banish warlords; in the north they had to do deals with former Uzbek and Tajik commanders. A number of key former supporters of Ahmed Shah

Massoud and other northern and mainly Tajik or Uzbek leaders accepted Talib payoffs and either allied themselves with the Taliban or left the country. But these transactions also made the Taliban vulnerable to betrayal. A Talib alliance with General Malik, a disaffected associate of the Uzbek commander General Dostum, ended in disaster when the Taliban tried to capture Mazar-e-Sharif in early 1997. Up to 3,000 Taliban were slaughtered in the streets of Mazar. This led to ever more uneasy relations with other ethnicities, especially the Shiite Hazaras in northern and central Afghanistan.

Eventually, the Taliban became victims of their own success. As they established control over greater swathes of Afghanistan, they had to call on more Pushtun militias for support. The militias were more interested in an ethnic, tribal agenda, than in the purely Islamic one that the original Taliban had supported.

Jalalludin Haqqani (R) founder of the Haqqani Network. Photo © Tim Weaver

The Taliban's relationship with the international community was bedevilled by mutual incomprehension from the start. The initial rift between the Taliban and the West was over the education of girls and the employment of women. In retrospect, it would have been more constructive for the international community to deal with the Taliban in the context of the movement's own terms of reference, rather than to try to impose foreign ideas, particular-

ly when Islamic culture was the movement's driving force. More experienced NGOs did adopt this approach, but they were soon drowned out in the cultural battle that followed.

When the Taliban took power in Kandahar, they issued an edict banning women from being seen in public without a *muhrim*, a close male relative. Widows appealed to the Talib authorities, arguing convincingly that they did not have any male relative and consequently couldn't go outside. The Taliban modified their policy, and allowed women to go out on their own.

Similarly, when the Taliban first put curbs on women being employed, it was obvious that female health workers would be unable to work. *New Home, New Life*, a BBC radio soap opera, dramatized the fact that the lack of women health workers meant that there would be no one to treat female patients in clinics. The Taliban reassured the BBC that women could work in health facilities.

Women, banned from working in Kabul, were less fortunate. They were left with the United Nations to intervene on their behalf and the international organizations tried to force the Taliban to bend to international cultural values. The Taliban naturally resisted. A more traditional approach, pointing out that the women had no one else to support their families and would maintain whatever dress and behaviour-code that the Taliban authorities prescribed might have been far more successful.

Cultural misunderstandings with the international community eventually led the Taliban to establish warmer relations with the Arab fighters who formed the nucleus of what was to become al-Qaeda. These relations had initially been lukewarm. The Taliban were reluctant hosts to fighters who had taken refuge with former mujahed commanders. But as the rift with the international community widened, links with al-Qaeda grew stronger. The result was a further alienation from the West. Closer affinity to the hardline Wahabi ideology espoused by al-Qaeda led to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas – something that the Taliban had earlier given assurances that they would never do.

In 1997, a BBC correspondent pressed Taliban authorities concerning a statement attributed to one Talib commander, who had said that when his forces reached Bamiyan, they would destroy the Buddhas. The Taliban leadership insisted that their movement had no intention to destroy the statues, since they were no longer being worshipped – nor was there any danger of them be-

ing worshipped – in Afghanistan. Clearly something had happened to change that policy by March 2001, when the Taliban actually did blow up the Buddhas. (SEE Bamyan Buddhas)

The empty caves that once held the Bamiyan Buddhas Photo©Edward Girardet.

The Taliban since 2001: Following their fall from power in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the Taliban began regrouping in Pakistani camps and in the tribal areas. Since then, there has been an ever-growing spiral of increased violence. The influence of the Taliban has been steadily growing in the Pushtun south and southwest, but also in northern enclaves, such as Kunduz, where transplanted Pushtun populations had been forcibly resettled during the late 19th century by King Abdul Rahman Khan.

There are a number of reasons for this. Foreign forces have often been tricked into settling scores, and that has led to an increase in civilian casualties. In some cases, clumsy operations, or as some observers put it, a total misunderstanding by international forces of on-the-ground realities, have led to targeting civilians. It has suited some – usually those with the ear of the West - to demonize the Pushtun south as a den of Taliban and al-Qaeda support.

As civilian casualties have increased, so has opposition to international forces in Afghanistan. Deteriorating security in Pushtun areas has degraded development and economic opportunities, leading to more and more young people joining the ranks of the Taliban. Increasingly, other opposition groups have taken up arms for their own reasons. Since the West has superior weap-

ons, the Taliban, in an attempt to redress the balance, have often resorted to methods of doubtful Islamic legality, such as suicide bombings. Largely a foreign import, such tactics were never used by the mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s. The result has been a sharp rise in civilian casualties from the Talib side. In May 2010, in an attempt to reassert control over its own insurgent forces, the Taliban leadership issued a code of conduct for its fighters, stressing the need to avoid civilian casualties. (Editor's Note: Select insurgent fronts, such as the Haqqani Network, have largely ignored such pleas. So have groups, which operate according to their own norms and purposes. These may be linked with outside backers, notably the Pakistanis or al-Qaeda affiliated bodies, or operate more along criminal rather than political or religious lines).

Afghan Taliban/Pakistan Taliban

The Taliban movement is divided on two fronts (this does not count a number of groups that operate under the smokescreen of the Taliban, with no direct affiliation to the movement),

There are now distinct Taliban movements in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban are united in their resolve to remove what they see as foreign invaders. The Pakistani Taliban are more complex. Some are focused only on Afghanistan, while others see Pakistan as complicit. The latter group targets the Islamabad government along with American and Afghan interests in Afghanistan. The fact that Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leader, was able to live for so long in the shadow of the Islamabad establishment most likely means that although he probably wanted to target the West and the Afghan government, Pakistan itself was not part of the equation.

Negotiations with the Taliban: The fact that the Taliban leadership is based inside Pakistan makes it nearly impossible to negotiate a meaningful peace without the support of Pakistan.

The current attempts to try to wean "moderate" Taliban away from the main body of the movement is unlikely to produce positive results. The tactic will merely isolate the moderates, while the main body of the Taliban continues to fight. In other words, dividing and conquering the Taliban will not work, especially with Western forces withdrawing from the country. A more realistic approach is to stop the growing cycle of militancy and radicalism that has its roots in the anti-Soviet war of the 1980s. Stemming

the tendency to extremism requires movement and concessions on all sides—the West as well as the Taliban and Pakistan. For Pakistan, it means ceasing support for militants, even if such fighters appear to be promoting Pakistani interests in Afghanistan. On the Afghan government side, it means genuinely including the Taliban in a truly democratic political process, even if this means that the latter may gain some administrative power in certain parts of Afghanistan. For the international community, it means sticking to a realistic withdrawal plan and ensuring that after the Western pullout all sides have a stake in ensuring a secure Afghanistan – at peace with itself, its neighbours and the world.

John Butt, *an English convert to Islam and madrassah graduate, has worked as a journalist and broadcaster in Afghanistan for 25 years and is currently writing a book based on his experiences as a student and broadcaster in the region.*

International aid has become a major pillar of Afghanistan's GDP.
The question is what will happen when it is gone. Photo courtesy ISAF

The Recovery Challenge
By Renata Dwan and Michael Keating

Before war broke out in the late 1970s, Afghanistan seemed to be gradually moving towards a more developed society. International aid programmes contributed to education, basic health care and a more technologically adept agricultural system. The Soviet war halted any real development for the next two decades. Apart from a few clandestine humanitarian operations, mostly in Kabul, it was really only with the Western intervention from October 7, 2001 onwards, that most Afghans began to feel that they could finally pick up where they had left off. Despite vaulting expectations, however, the recovery promised by the international community has been uneven, tentative and reversible. ***Renata Dwan*** *and* **Michael Keating** *examine the conditions needed to achieve more effective development.*

As the international community prepares for an accelerated withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan by 2014, facts and figures about development feature prominently. The statistics are striking. Afghanistan is one of the world's largest recipients of development assistance: total international aid in 2010-2011 was estimated to be approximately $15.7 billion, roughly the size of the country's entire gross domestic product. According to both the World Bank and the Afghan Ministry of Finance, total aid disbursed between 2002 and 2010 stood at $56.8 billion.

There have been significant advances over the past decade. The mortality of children under-five dropped from 257 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 134 deaths today. Furthermore, 83 per cent of children are now vaccinated. Enrolment in primary school has jumped from one million to seven million, 2.5 million of them girls. Over 2,000 kilometres of paved highways, secondary and tertiary roads have been built with the support of international donors and aid agencies.

Yet despite more than a decade of historically high levels of aid, the overall impact on human development is limited. Over half of Afghan children are stunted, and more than a third are underweight. Only Somalia is ranked lower than Afghanistan in

Afghan money changer in Qeshem Photo©Edward Girardet

human development indices. Infant and maternal mortality statistics remain the highest in the world. Nearly half the estimated 30.6 million population (this official UN figure includes refugees in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran) is estimated to live below the poverty line and average life expectancy is 48.1 years. Three out of four Afghans are illiterate.

Why has such massive investment in development not produced better results for people in Afghanistan? Certainly, rebuilding a war-torn and traumatised country in a volatile neighbourhood is not easy. More fundamental, however, development efforts in Afghanistan have been largely supply-driven. They have been used as a tool in a broader political enterprise of mixed agendas, notably to eradicate al Qaeda, to build a strong centralised state and to contain insurgency. Decisions and expenditures have not been based on a vision of development-based recovery that is defined or owned by Afghans and that is responsive to basic needs and expectations of the population. The end result, according to growing numbers of analysts, is that billions of dollars have been wasted, while the obsession with security has overshadowed the need for recovery. The on-the-ground perception among ordinary Afghans, particularly living in the countryside, is that the much-vaunted change has not been forthcoming.

Massive amounts of international aid have encouraged the idea that an effective, efficient central state could be built in decades, rather than centuries. Sheer volumes led policymakers to be less and less constrained by the realities of Afghanistan's history, political economy and social structure. Instead, development resources were seen as a means of strengthening the credibility and legitimacy of the government and to overcome armed opposition to a centralized Kabul.

Ironically, high levels of international aid have produced, in many cases, the opposite: entrenched corruption, increased abuse of power, inequality and disaffection, all of which have fuelled the insurgency.

With the projected withdrawal of most foreign troops by end 2014 and diminishing public support in donor countries, international aid will decline significantly in the next few years. By 2012, ambitious aid projects were already being cut back, particularly in rural areas, where the majority of Afghan people live. The expected closure of around 700 international military bases across the country by the end of 2013 has led to the loss of jobs of Afghan jobs and, by the end of 2014, the decline of the transporta-

tion sector which has relied on international military contracts. Uncertainty about the future, and lack of confidence in Afghan economic institutions, particularly after the collapse of the country's biggest bank in 2011, is being reflected in slowdowns in the construction and private sectors. An estimated 500,000 Afghan job-seekers are entering this troubled economy every year. All this adds up to anxiety about Afghanistan's future.

The question now is how to sustain development gains that have been made. Both Afghans and the international community need to agree on the nature and levels of assistance to be expected over the next decade. Above all, they need to put in place concrete steps to increase the effectiveness of dwindling resources so as to manage the economic and social impact of ISAF's withdrawal. To accomplish this, a more inclusive development vision is needed, one that takes into account Afghanistan's political, economic and social realities.

The United Nations, in particular, needs to assert itself now as a long-term partner and advocate of Afghans. Expectations of the UN need to be realistic but concerns about whether it has the capacity to meet greater demands as other actors depart need to be accompanied by a vision of what the international community including the UN can and will do to support the Afghans in the post transition period. For this to happen, member states must also be prepared to provide the appropriate support. UN commitment must be underpinned by an inclusive political process that involves all Afghans, including the opposition, and which is supported by Afghanistan's neighbours. In Afghanistan, as in most other countries, politics and development are inseparable.

The scope of development in Afghanistan

The initial vision for Afghanistan set out in the December 2001 Bonn Conference was of a centralized state with only limited regional or provincial authority supported by an export-led economy and a progressive muslim society. For much of the international community, this seemed to be the best way to respond to the root causes of many years of conflict. Given widespread international political fervour for sweeping reforms following the September 11th attacks, the suggestion that an effective central state could quickly overcome a history of largely independent and often competing tribal and ethnic groups had wide appeal. Many Afghans favoured the approach. The overthrow of the Taliban

regime put emphasis on more liberal and secular governance arrangements, notably the rights of women. Even under the best of circumstances this vision would involve momentous social change. Living in a country with diversified geography that includes mountains and deserts, and a widely dispersed, predominantly rural population (estimated at between 70-75 per cent), Afghans have a long tradition of local autonomy and rule with only limited control by Kabul. Historically, central control was limited to cities and agricultural plains. Local interests vigorously opposed any efforts to expand rule beyond them. Although the late 19th and early 20th century witnessed periods of unitary state-building, the creation of formal state structures remained relatively limited. Afghans looked to local communities and tribal institutions, not the capital, for security, delivery of basic services and the administration of justice. Many regions remained relatively isolated and heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture with wide disparities in development. This affected not only the country's growth, but regional trade and economic links.

Despite today's emphasis on Afghanistan's traditional role as a regional transit hub and its potential for promoting economic growth, international trade has not been a critical source of development since the sixteenth century when overland trade routes, such as the Silk Road, went into decline. Pre-2001 Afghanistan was largely self-sufficient in food, without a distinct commodity to export in a region of similar agriculture-based economies and with high political barriers to integration.

In the context of these structural realities, Afghanistan's geography and demography suggested the need for a development model that was community-based,to promote an agrarian economy with trade hubs centred around its main cities. Closer economic collaboration with its neighbours, such as the former Soviet Central Asian republics to the north (largely cut off from Afghanistan since the 1920s) plus Iran, Pakistan and China coupled with extended outreach to the Gulf and India could be a future avenue for growth. For their part, the Central Asian Republics are keen on opening up new trade routes to the south with countries such as Azerbaijan stressing new possible road and rail links to Europe via the Caspian Sea and the creation of high-speed ferry services. This could eventually release Afghanistan somewhat from its East-West, Iran-Pakistan, constraints.

For their part, Afghanistan's resource-rich neighbours are keen to explore possibilities for new trade and energy transit routes to the

south through Afghanistan. Concern over security in Afghanistan and continued regional rivalries remain major obstacles, however, for significant investment in the infrastructure, customs facilities and trade agreements required to make regional cooperation a reality. Even under the best of circumstances, a Kabul-centric vision of an institutionalized public administration extending down to village-level across all 34 provinces and 400 districts would prove a massive and multi-generational undertaking. It would require widespread political consensus with a leadership capable of directing its construction. While the political window for this vision existed in 2001, key obstacles soon emerged. These included diverse armed groups, insufficient infrastructure to enable country-wide access, only a small, educated workforce to serve as the core of the new administration, and a legacy of resistance to intrusive interventions by central authority at the local level. International assistance has not taken these obstacles sufficiently into account.

Development aid as an enabler

One of the reasons for the ambitiousness of Afghanistan's development vision was the extraordinary degree of international backing. That backing, however, was driven largely by short-term political goals and mounting security calculations. It also lacked a comprehensive analysis of the appropriateness or feasibility of the agenda, which to many people, both foreign and Afghan, was also confused. It failed to take into account local public opinion and a nation exhausted by so many years of war. International attention contributed to a burgeoning development agenda that hampered a more limited – and realistic - strategy.

The themes of successive international conferences on Afghanistan illustrated this: in 2004 a comprehensive development framework was agreed at Berlin; two years later the focus was on elimination of the opium trade; by 2007 implementation of rule of law reform was the priority. In Paris in 2008 Afghanistan's first five-year National Development Strategy was endorsed with agreement to prioritize strengthening institutions and economic growth in the agriculture and energy sectors. Conferences in 2009 and 2010, however, saw attention fixed on governance amidst growing concerns at corruption The Kabul Conference of 2010 was heralded as the moment when the Afghan government assumed full leadership and presented a refocused national strategy for peace, security and development. But the core of this agen-

da, over 20 "national priority programmes," only underscored how un-prioritized the country's development agenda had become.

That few Afghan or international development experts believed all these proposed programmes would see the light of day, much less have an impact on the country, gave some indication of just how much of a political tool the development agenda had become. Huge levels of aid were accompanied by increased pressure from donors for results, often undermining inclusivity and ownership among Afghans. One example of this was the provision of technical assistance to ministries in Kabul. Frustration at weak capacity and the slow pace of state institution-building encouraged many donors to finance qualified external advisors – by 2011, an estimated 7,000 including many expatriate Afghans - at significantly higher salaries and often with little knowledge of the country. In many government ministries a "second civil service" of skilled outsiders have effectively become substitutes for the officials they are advising. This has created resentment among existing cadres, and it has diverted attention away from the development of a core state administrative capacity. Above all, it created a state model that is fiscally unsustainable. (SEE ECONOMICS)

The sheer quantity of aid highlighted another obstacle to Afghanistan's development: the weak capacity of the state institutions to absorb and channel funds. Budget execution in 2010 was less than 40 per cent. There were also mounting concerns of corruption among Afghans as well as foreign contractors. This limited donor willingness to channel funds through the state budget. Of the $15.7 billion aid provided in 2010-11, only $1.9 billion went directly to the government. The remainder was disbursed directly by international donors, through a myriad of aid agencies, subcontractors, local authorities and non-governmental organizations, according to donor priorities. Ordinary Afghans quickly understood that much of this money was not going to them or their country, but rather to support the costly administrative overheads and high salaries of foreign consultants and aid officials.

Rather than contributing to the implementation of a capable Afghan state, international support often provoked increased competition over aid between different power centres whether government ministries or local administrators. Presidential-appointed provincial governors competed directly with ministries for international attention and funds. In some cases, they ran multiple lucrative private companies subcontracted to interna-

tional military and development actors. Development activities outside Kabul were often seen as a threat by government power brokers: the attempt by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in 2010, for example, to curb the relative autonomy of the country's most successful community development project, the Afghan National Solidarity Programme (SEE NSP INFO-BRIEF), reflected this tension.

Development in conflict

Western political priorities drove aid levels up as a means of stemming growing violence. The renewed insurgency had begun to take hold in 2003. By 2009, ISAF's adoption of a 'population-centric' counter-insurgency, which centred on weakening insurgent capacity while building Afghan security forces and effective governance, put development at the heart of the international military effort to "clear, hold and build" village by village.

This trajectory had a huge impact on the nature of development. International military forces became central players in aid delivery. The military forces brought in significant resources, and in many cases, these operated outside the usual ODA channels and practices. Military-delivered assistance, notably by Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, centred on winning over local authorities and elders to the idea that the Afghan state could eventually provide security and development. (SEE PRTs) In some situations, particularly where there is a well-resourced international military presence, this has worked. Local condi-

Into the abyss...

tions for the population have measurably improved. But by directing aid to specific areas and operating largely outside national development channels, military development assistance has also detracted from support for the Kabul government. Much criticized by humanitarian actors on multiple grounds, it has led also to unsustainable expectations as to what the Afghan authorities can deliver at local level.

Moreover, by concentrating on volatile areas, military-directed aid spending has perpetuated disparities between different parts of the country, undermining the argument that a centralized state leads to more equitable development. External assistance between 2002 and 2010 in Kandahar, Nangarhar and Helmand provinces was over one billion dollars each. In contrast, comparatively peaceful poor provinces in the Central Highlands and northwest of the country - Jowzjan, Ghor, Dykundi, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul - each received significantly less than $100 million. Such wide disparities led to perceptions of unfairness across the country with regard to the actions of Kabul authorities as well as the priorities of international donors.

Many of the projects undertaken by individual PRTs had limited if not questionable impact. Most were focused on construction, usually secondary or tertiary road paving, schools and health clinics, but with little consideration of how these projects would be maintained and financed over time. (By 2012, British government sources indicated that many of its DFID-backed PRT initiatives, including schools and health centres, in the south would have to close for lack of funding). It took until mid-2010 for ISAF to issue guidance on the importance of aligning development projects with national and provincial development plans. The guidance also stressed the need to consult with local authorities in advance on the maintenance and upkeep of any new construction. Even then, neither ISAF nor the Afghan government had a detailed overview of development activities, their costs or impact on the population.

Military-led development assistance provoked increased competition for influence and resources among tribal elders, municipal, district or provincial councils, and central authorities. Although most PRTs sought to consult with representative local institutions, time pressure and expanding insecurity severely limited the ability of international actors to maintain a consistent level of on-the-ground engagement. Many relied on contracts

with individual powerbrokers – often provincial governors or local warlords – to advance projects. Often, this only shored up the role and influence of actors with little sense of loyalty or dependence on central institutions.

In some cases, international actors created new and competing local institutions: as part of ISAF's prioritization of one hundred of Afghanistan's four hundred districts through the District Delivery Programme, ISAF and donors supported the establishment of district-level shuras. These are elected, paid and administered by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). In many parts of the country, these shuras are now seen as competing with already-established provincial and community development councils. Competing visions over roles and responsibilities at (and between) provincial, district and community levels has further undermined commitment to Kabul.

Perhaps the greatest impact, however, has been the growing emphasis on building up the Afghan security forces. As the insurgency increased in strength, the projected size of Afghan national army (ANA) and police (ANP) forces was revised progressively upward, from an initial figure of 70,000 for the army and 62,000 for the police in 2005 to 195,000 and 157,000 respectively by 2011. While external off-budget assistance currently finances the bulk of costs, spending on security currently absorbs more than 50 per cent of the government budget.

As transition proceeds toward declared withdrawal, security financing and sustainability have become key issues. In many ways, the policy choices for the Kabul government and its partners are already clear. Either the international community continues to fund the vast bulk of security costs over the next few years, which, at this point, seems politically impossible, or Afghans themselves will have to assume these responsibilities. If the Afghan government does accept full responsibility, it will need to reduce spending significantly through security cuts at all levels. The only other option is to redirect funds away from development programming. Both will have major security, economic and humanitarian implications. Whichever scenario is chosen, the cost of maintaining the army and police will fundamentally define the future capacity of the Afghan state.

The need for 'political' development

The priorities for most Afghans are not surprising: they want jobs and economic opportunity; access to basic services such as education, health and water; and security, not only from physical violence but also from abuse of authority. ISAF's drawdown and the decline in development assistance will sharply reduce economic opportunities and capacity to deliver these services. The absence of rule of law and pervasive corruption are already major sources of insecurity, particularly for women and minorities. They are also considered the biggest drivers of criminality and the insurgency.

For their part, Afghans are turning increasingly inward. Many are disappointed with over a decade of international intervention, which they believe, rightly or wrongly, has contributed to more violence. They also perceive the Kabul government as having failed to deliver. Recent polls, although not always reliable, suggest that two-thirds of the population prefer to rely on their local shura or jirga to resolve disputes. An estimated 70 percent also want religious leaders to assume more decision-making roles. This makes the need for dialogue among all Afghans on how they see the future state, its constitution and development objectives more urgent and more difficult.

A partnership between the Afghan authorities and the international community is likely to continue, but its effectiveness will depend on the consensus that finally emerges from this dialogue. For the current development model cannot be sustained, either politically or financially. As international aid declines, Afghanistan will have to move away from a strategy that depends on the volume of assistance to one that is oriented toward the quality of development and its effectiveness. This new strategy will need to balance support for the state that Afghans want with greater investment in community-based development. It will also require a more genuine emphasis on what ordinary Afghans need, notably jobs, justice and services, while the government should focus on realistic growth areas that will enable the country to sustain itself.

Even if on a more limited basis, the international community still needs to be involved. The scale of its involvement will depend upon many factors, including the degree to which the Government is seen as vigorous in its pursuit of governance reforms and the perceived legitimacy of upcoming Presidential and other elections. But whatever the scale, its approach needs to be based

on a more solid analysis of economic needs and what the Afghans consider to be their priorities, notably a refocusing on rural-based employment and community development initiatives. This would enable authorities in Kabul to focus centralized resources on a limited number of large-scale initiatives such as basic infrastructure, nation-wide vaccination programmes or tertiary and vocational education.

A more sensitive challenge for international partners is how to support inclusive Afghan dialogue about the future of development and to recognise the dangers of creating a system in which only the elites are seen to benefit. The international community should make it clear that future financing is contingent on consulting and involving all groups, especially young people and women, and responding to real priorities; in turn, it must agree to support initiatives that reflect expressed needs, even if they do not necessarily respond to donor preferences.

Greater awareness by international partners of how donor financing impacts relations between Afghan political and economic elites could help create incentives for cooperation or at least limit competition over diminishing aid resources between Afghans. All of this would, however, require a high degree of international cohesion, which, for the moment, does not exist.

Finally, donors must manage declining volumes of aid effectively and transparently. This also means avoiding sudden shocks, such as unforeseen policy changes. In particular, international support should incorporate critical sources of stability, such as civil service salaries or community-level financing arrangements, as among its main priorities. Above all, however, it should prevent security costs from dominating Afghanistan's entire public finances.

A clear international strategy, one that brings together political, military and development perspectives, is vital. As the dominant actor both on the military and civilian fronts, the United States is central to any such strategy. The question is whether it can succeed in downsizing its commitment in a manner that does not create further instability. To date, it has proved to be the most generous of the aid donors but also the least coherent in its actions. Crucial to Afghanistan's future stability will be for Washington to substantiate its commitment to medium term development objectives.

By 2012, relations between the international community and the Afghan authorities were increasingly strained. Inci-

dents involving Coalition forces, chief among them night raids, the burning of Korans and the killing of civilians have brought long-simmering resentments to the fore. Members of the Afghan security forces were also increasingly involved in the killing of Coalition personnel. The Afghan public is questioning the motives and activities relating to the international presence, And the international community is divided on the scope and timeline for withdrawal from Afghanistan. None of this makes continued international involvement easy. Yet the limited legacy of a decade of massive development assistance makes a fundamental re-thinking of its political strategy essential.

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Essential reading

• *World Bank, Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014.* The Afghan Ministry of Finance's (MoF) 2010 Development Cooperation Report notes that 2010 was the peak of development assistance with an estimated USD 16.79 billion committed of which USD 10.90 was disbursed.
• *Afghanistan Ministry of Finance Development Cooperation Report.*
• *Asia Foundation, Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People*
• Astri Suhrke, *When more is less: The international project in Afghanistan* (London, Hurst & Co, 2011).
• *Asia Foundation, Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People.*

The face of international military assistance. Photo courtesy ISAF

ISAF:
Who calls the shots post 2014?
By Peter Foot and Victoria Porell

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
And the women come out to cut up what remains,
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

--Rudyard Kipling

When American and British forces began bombing Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, few expected that the Coalition invasion would lead to a new war. Once the Taliban were ousted, it was thought, a democratically-elected regime would be established leading to peace, political stability and recovery following more than two decades of brutal conflict. Unfortunately, despite numerous warnings by informed Afghans and long-time foreign aid workers, diplomats and journalists, the West indulged in a host of mixed agendas and inappropriate policies. This included a new war in Iraq in 2003, coupled with a general failure to understand Afghans and Afghanistan. All this resulted in the emergence of a new insurgency inspired by the Taliban. It also gave rise to a growing perception, whether justified or not, of increasing numbers of ordinary Afghans – many of whom had initially welcomed the Coalition intervention - that their country was – once again – being occupied by foreign forces and interests. Peter Foot and Victoria Porell of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) explore the development of NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

The international community's commitment to Afghanistan until now has been characterized by unrealized hopes, ambiguity, and impatience. At the NATO Summit, November 2010, NATO's Secretary General said, "Here in Lisbon, we have launched the process by which the Afghan people will once again become masters in their own house."

On the surface, it appeared to be a brave declaration. NATO, its Afghan partners and it allies were finally on the point of achieving the desired end that promised to put Afghans back in control of their own destiny. But the declaration could also be interpreted

as a tacit acknowledgement that members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had simply had enough. Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen in early 2011 moved the focus from Afghanistan to North Africa. Just as the carnage in Bosnia was marginalized in late 2001 by the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, so Afghanistan has been nudged out out of the limelight by the significant events of the Arab spring.

Was the changing attitude to Afghanistan the result of a remarkable change of heart on the part of the international community, or was it the result of NATO and the US missions to clarifying the ambiguities that have always dogged the NATO/US missions? Clearly, the terrorist attacks on September 11 were the major impetus behind the military actions that followed in Afghanistan. However, they are not responsible for the problems that have followed. Nearly 35 years of war, occupation and turmoil have brutalised Afghanistan's national processes as they would have done in any country facing the social, political, ethnic, and tribal factors that characterize life in Afghanistan today.

The United States, angered at the Taliban's refusal to prosecute the master minds of the attack, including Bin Laden, decided to adopt a new military strategy which called for defeating the Taliban and in the process drive out al-Qaeda.

As a result, Washington found itself embroiled in a civil war with warring factions eager to accept support from anyone willing to provide it. For the Taliban, that turned out to be Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda.

The irony is that even if the Taliban had wanted to, it is doubtful that they possessed the capability to remove al Qaeda from Afghan soil as quickly as the US had demanded. Most Taliban were illiterate and it is doubtful that they cared about international politics. They certainly did not have the global vision of Jihad that bin Laden was trying to promote.

The US's Operation Enduring Freedom, launched in retaliation in October 2001, began with a US air campaign targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban training centres, strategic bases as well as command and communication facilities. Both the US and the United Kingdom relied on CIA and Special Forces operations coupled with a close working relationship with the Afghan United Front (or Northern Alliance, a coalition of Afghan warlords and former resistance commanders). Enduring Freedom successfully forced the Taliban from power and succeeded in seizing Kabul within a

matter of weeks.

There were almost no Western casualties. Air power had proven decisive. By December the Taliban had been forced from their final stronghold and their leadership had been driven underground or fled across the border to Pakistan. Osama bin Laden had also vanished. The job appeared almost done. The overall security situation in Afghanistan, nevertheless, remained precarious. That precariousness allowed the Taliban to launch an insurgency campaign from 2003 onwards. Targeting foreign military personnel, Afghan forces and civilian aid workers, it had a major destabilising effect on the entire country.

ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) was born out of these conditions: delegates proposed it at the Bonn Conference in December 2001 and in the same month, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386 turned it into a reality in order to support the Afghan Transitional Authority and to stabilize the security situation. After an awkward series of six-month rotations at the head of ISAF, NATO took over command in August 2003. The objective was to provide more consistency both in leadership and in the mission's ultimate vision. Unfortunately, ISAF's mission was never fully harmonised with that of the United States. It was never clear whether the international effort in Afghanistan was a NATO mission or a US mission, or if there was there a difference between the two approaches.

The deployment in Afghanistan marked NATO's first operation outside of Europe or North America. Approximately 90 per cent of its troops originally came from NATO member states. Initially, the force's authority was limited to Kabul, but in October 2003, UNSCR 1510 extended its mandate to the rest of the country. It was not until July 2006 that America's Operation Enduring Freedom forces were subsumed into the ISAF command and ISAF began work in the most unstable parts of the country, notably Afghanistan's southern provinces. With President Obama's troop surge in 2009, the US military accounted for nearly 70per cent of the total number of soldiers in ISAF. Part of the decision in June 2011 to reduce the size of the US presence was designed to press the allies and partners to do more. As the table below shows, initial readiness quickly cooled into caution.

Date of Entry of ISAF Members

2003 Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech

Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary,
Date of Entry of ISAF Members (cont.)

2003 Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Macedonia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States

2004 Austria, Georgia

2006 Australia

2007 Jordan

2008 Singapore, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates

2009 Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina

2010 Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Montenegro, Tonga

Switzerland was a member of ISAF for four years before pressure at home led it to withdraw in April 2008.

ISAF expanded in four stages, each of which gave incrementally more responsibility to NATO leadership. In 2003, the first of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), Kunduz in the north, was placed under ISAF command. The other Northern Teams remained under Operation Enduring Freedom, until the end of 2004 when they, too, transitioned to ISAF control. Stage two of the expansion was to the west in early 2005, consolidating nine PRTs. That gave ISAF jurisdiction over roughly 50per cent of Afghanistan.

The first major addition of troops to ISAF after the 2003 expansion of authority was also in 2005. Two thousands ISAF troops were deployed to support the national elections in September. This proved to be ISAF's second major troop expansion since 2003. The largest increase in forces came in the third stage in the summer of 2006. ISAF's troop strength was doubled as it moved into Afghanistan's most unstable parts, such as Helmand and Kandahar provinces in the south.

The final transfer of power was completed on 5 October 2006, when ISAF was given responsibility for the security of the entire country. This paved the way for a new operational strategy.

Participation in ISAF never aroused the intense controversy associated with the coalition that in the Iraq war in 2003. Indeed, the bulk of ISAF members signed up in that year precisely because Afghanistan appeared to be a "good war," or certainly a better one than the Bush administration's clumsy efforts at dethroning of Saddam Hussein and remodelling the Middle East.

In contrast to Iraq, the Taliban appeared to have been beaten; engagement in Afghanistan looked a far safer option at the

time. It seems curious in retrospect, but many saw Afghanistan as a war of necessity, not as a war of choice such as the one being waged in Iraq. For example, in 2004, Spanish public opinion forced a withdrawal from the coalition in Iraq, but not from Afghanistan.

However, there was never very real enthusiasm for the Afghan mission. Its past history the "graveyard of empires" tended to make people cautious. The US heavy reliance on air strikes for the attacks on Afghanistan immediately following 9/11 was itself a method of avoiding physical engagement. Proponents of airpower promised decisive victory. And in many ways, at least briefly, this approach appeared to have worked: the Taliban were gone, al-Qaeda was in hiding, and the United Front (Northern Alliance) suggesting a semblance of national unity. Kipling's bleak advice to soldiers fighting in Afghanistan, might have begun to lose its relevance.

Sadly, and with a similar reluctance shown by the Soviet leadership in contemplating its intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, there seemed little option but to engage in a conventional campaign characterized a dozen years later by boots on the ground.

ISAF participants showed degrees of reluctance from the start and throughout their involvement. The most obvious evidence of the limits of willingness to get fully involved was the pervasive refusal to respond adequately to promptings – in successive NATO Summits – to increase combat troop levels within ISAF. National or alliance military requests and guidance were routinely overridden by national political veto. The longer the mission lasted, the more success became elusive and the less likely front-line force enlargement was going to be.

Another expression of hesitation was for nations, such as the Netherlands or Canada, to announce their own time-selected end-date – not least due to their own perception that as medium powers doing serious front-line business they had carried too heavy a burden on behalf of a reluctant alliance. The Dutch lost 25 soldiers and sustained 140 casualties over a four-year period as part of their ISAF service. When they tried to extend their involvement, it led directly to the fall of the Dutch government. The Dutch government announced its withdrawal to be effective by mid-2011, much to the chagrin of its senior military leadership, who were dismayed at being unable to complete what they thought of as a significant accomplishment. In the end, the Dutch

switched their role in ISAF to police training. The Canadian loss rate was more than 150 dead and some 600 wounded in action over a decade of fighting. Canada, though remarkably tolerant of casualties and proud of its service personnel in the largely unfamiliar role as active warriors, unilaterally announced the transitioning from combat missions to military and police training role in 2011. *(Editor's Note: By late 2012, there were indications that Canada might still persevere with a small but continuing combat role).*

The qualified nature of the commitment to ISAF is also underscored by the debate surrounding caveats -- the geographic or operational limits placed on the scope of what participating troops are allowed to do on the battlefield and the constraints on the authority that commanders have to carry out operations. More than half of the 48 troop-contributing nations are believed to have imposed caveats on their forces assigned to ISAF. The reason that the number is not certain is that caveats can either be written and part of the official record, or they can just as easily be unofficial and undisclosed to the multilateral organization relying on these forces. The effect on coordination and effectiveness of operating this way are obvious. The caveats may either set limits for the specific rules of engagement such as, "Do not operate in a specific locale. Do not fire unless fired upon. Do not engage in particular types of operations. Do not hold prisoners longer than X hours."

"At other times, a contingent's participation may be at the discretion of the country's senior officer on the ground. And quite frequently, the officer might have to call home for permission, which can take time and create controversy both in the theatre and at home." Germany, Spain, and Italy all prohibit their troops from operating in the most dangerous southern provinces, concentrating their forces and reconstruction efforts in the more peaceful northwest of the country.

Germany, a major target of many critics, has become known as "The Poster Child of Caveats" because of the stringent limitations on its operations. For example, German troops cannot leave their bases at night, cannot transport Afghans in their helicopters, and can only respond to situations involving other ISAF forces outside of their immediate area in an emergency. Inevitably, the criticism can go too far. That Germany has allowed soldiers to serve in Afghanistan – ISAF's third largest contributor – was itself evidence of remarkable commitment and alliance

solidarity, against considerable political disquiet at home.
(Editor's Note: As a result of Green Party pressure at home, the Bundeswehr has also distinguished itself as being the only Western force to fly its sewage and household rubbish back to Europe. In the same vein, it has brought in all its own food, kitchen personnel and other support, resulting in Afghan anger at German soldiers for not contributing to the local economy.)

When domestic legal issues are involved, the situation becomes even more complex. In September 2009, a German colonel requested a US air strike on two escaping, Taliban-hijacked oil tankers stuck in mud within the German PRT at Kunduz. Two 500lb bombs, delivered on target by the US air force, killed 125 people, including many non-combatants. German forces are only allowed abroad on peacekeeping missions. Ordering the air strike violated that overriding requirement. Under German law, to which service personnel are subject in the German PRT, was the Colonel guilty of homicide? A tactical operation that succeeded from a military perspective, but nevertheless lacked a permissive domestic legal setting.

The issue of caveats exemplifies the fact that the United States and some ISAF members see themselves as fighting a war, while their ISAF colleagues do not. (Editor's Note: One Afghan quip making the rounds maintains that ISAF means: I See Americans Fighting – but no one else). Those who do not want to be seen as fighting a war hedge their operational conditions with constraints designed to ensure that 'war' conditions do not occur in their area of responsibility.

The conundrum of caveats is ultimately a balancing act between striving for effective command and operations while trying to maintain some degree of political legitimacy. The debate hinges on the argument that these restrictions are unfair, placing a larger share of the burden and risk on certain countries that are forced to carry out the most dangerous operations and operate in the most violent areas. Recently, pressure from within the coalition has been effective at reducing the caveats from some nations, such as France, but caveats are a major point of contention and may be contributing to the unilateral decisions by some countries for an early exit. The public in troop contributing nations obviously does not want to see caveats loosened and the level of risk increased, but leaders must walk a fine line in this area of civil-military relations to avoid undermining the command of forces and operational flexibility. No-one wants to be responsible for

failures on the ground; military caveats help ensure that political failures are minimised. The problem for ISAF is that caveats beg the question of whether it is worth having a force participate if it is so riddled with restrictions, that it is rendered ineffectual and merely symbolic.

Despite their private impatience with their allies, the Americans sought to resolve this by applying a US troop 'surge' to the Afghanistan setting, hoping to match General David Petraeus's earlier success with the same strategy as a field commander in Iraq. In short, the United States opted to up the ante for a temporarily more active period in order to achieve permanent effect. Promoted as commander of the US Central Command for 2008-2010, with responsibilities for both Iraq and Afghanistan, Petraeus supported requests from the field for significant increases in US troop levels. President Obama, mid-way through his first term, agreed; so did Secretary Robert Gates, continuing his distinguished tenure at the Department of Defense. Additional marines and soldiers arrived in Afghanistan during January 2009, to supplement the nearly 100,000 US troops already serving in the country. Their task was to be ready for the expected spring offensive by Taliban militants and to ensure the best conditions for the presidential election due that year.

But there was more to it than that. As Gates pointed out, the ISAF structure of restricting commands to a province-based structure limited effectiveness across the regions. As a partial consequence of the surge, US commanders took over lead responsibility in Helmand (from the British, who remained in a combat role) and in neighbouring Kandahar (from the Canadians, who did not). Needless to say, some US military leaders asked for the surge levels to be maintained – less a surge than an old-fashioned increase. Petraeus added to his reputation by being far more ready to acknowledge the need to accept responsibility for collateral damage – that deadly euphemism – of the kind that occurred in the Kunduz oil truck bombing.

Petraeus saw ISAF's counterinsurgency operations as a part of the wider effort embracing good governance, and he was happier than most generals with the idea that 'victory' was an unhelpful concept in modern warfare. For a while, "money is ammunition" became his catchphrase. The task was above all else to protect the people, enabling them to live productive lives in peace and security while the insurgents were isolated and defeated.

Such a counterinsurgency needed to be taught and harmo-

nized across ISAF's constantly rotating national units. Most ISAF countries have no history of counterinsurgency or embrace traditions that are different from others. All new deployments attend a week of briefings and exercises in Kabul at the Academy devoted to counterinsurgency training. The aim is to ensure that all ISAF components understand the central message, plan and operate accordingly. The reality is that each PRT is different, requiring local approaches, and the insurgents themselves are highly adaptive, better organized, intelligent and brave, changing their approaches as circumstances dictate. Harmonising a unified and agreed doctrine always risked being out of date the moment it was promulgated and rigidified into a formal, course structure, repeated many times during the year. The doctrine changed much in military analysis. The jury is still out as to whether it will facilitate real change for Afghanistan, particularly after 2014.

NATO's Lisbon Summit of 20 November 2010 reaffirmed statements made at the Bucharest and Strasbourg/Kehl Summits, stating that Afghanistan is the top priority for NATO, praising the "important progress that has been made." Despite the coalition's 48 armies and strength of 131,000 troops, and as in previous statements, the Declaration called for further contributions and yet new partners. However, the importance of the Lisbon Declaration stems from the switch away from previous updates to the open acknowledgement that the mission is entering a new, transitional and final phase.

Timetables, albeit vague, were suggested for the withdrawal of foreign forces and the transfer of full control into Afghan hands. The Declaration proposed early 2011 for the beginning of Afghan security leadership in some provinces and the end of 2014 for the completion of this process, with full responsibility for the whole country at the same time. The Declaration stressed, though, that the transition will be "conditions-based, not calendar driven, and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF-troops." Hope and ambiguity masked the impatience.

The final test for ISAF might be whether it will be able to engineer a withdrawal with the relative success that marked the end of the Soviet Union's decade of occupation. If Afghanistan again fails to make the most of the opportunities, and descends post-ISAF into chaos, it is most unlikely that anything like ISAF will be recreated. Attention will have moved elsewhere.

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Essential reading

- *Afghanistan Index.* Brookings Institute, Washington, DC. http://www.brookings.edu/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index.aspx
- Congressional Research Service (USA). http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40682.pdf

Essential data

- Number of Coalition Troops Deployed in Afghanistan (January, 2013):
- Number of US/Coalition Support Troops Deployed in the Region: 100,000 plus.
- Coalition Casualties: (2001 to January 15, 2013): 3,255

(These figures do not include private military contractors or mercenaries, whose casualties are estimated at one third of Coalition forces. Nor do these figures include Coalition casualties who have died "out of theatre.")

Coalition Soldiers Killed in Action according to country of origin

- 2001: 12 (US 12)
- 2002: 70 (US 4;: FRG 10; UK 3; CDN 4; DK 4; AUS 1)
- 2003: 58 (US 48; FRG 6; CDN 2, ROM 2)
- 2004: 60 (US 52; FRA 3; UK 1; Nor 1; ITA 1; DK 1; CDN 1)
- 2005: 131 (US 99: SP 18; FRG 4; ITAL 3; FRA 2; SWE 2; UK 1; ROM 1; PORT 1; CDN 1)
- 2006: 191 (US 98: UK 39; CDN 36; ITA 6; FRA 6; NL 4; SP 1; ROM 1)
- 2007: 232 (US 117: UK 42; CDN 30; NL 8; FRG 7; DK 6; AUS 3; SP 4; FRA 3; NOR 2; EST 2; ITA 2; KOR 1; ROM 1; PORT 1; POL 1; FIN 1; CZ 1)
- 2008: 295 (US 155: UK 51; CDN 32; DK 13; FRA 11; NL 8; POL 7; AUS 3; FRG 3; ROM 3; SPA 2; HUN 2; ITA 2; EST 2; CZ 2; LAT 1; LIT 1;)
- 2009: 521 (US 317; UK 108; CDN 32; FRA 11; ITA 9; POL 8; DK 7; FRG 7; AUS 4; EST 4; NL 3; ROM 3; LAT 2; TUR 2; BEL 1; JOR 1; NOR 1; SP 1)
- 2010: 711 (US 499; UK 103; CDN 16; FRA 16; ITA 12; AUS 10; DK 9; FRG 9; POL 6; ROM 6; GEORGIA 5; NOR 5; NL 4; SPA 4; SWE 3; HUN 2; EST 1; NZ 1)

- 2011: 542 (US 402; UK 42; FRA 24; AUS 11; NATO 10; ITA 8; POL 8; FRG 7; GEORGIA 5; CDN 4; SP 4; DK 3; HUN 3; NZ 3; CZ 2; ROM 2; EST 1; FIN 1; JOR 1; NOR 1)
- 2012: 402 (US 310; 44 UK; FRA 8; AUS 7; GEORGIA 7; NZ 6; ITA 5; NATO 2; ALB 1;)

US military wounded since 2001: 17,674 (As of January, 2013) Reporting on Afghan casualties did not begin until 2007. Overall, including both security forces and civilians, between 25,000 and 30,000 Afghans are believed to have died.

Estimated Afghan Security (army and police) fatalities since 2001: 8,756 as of June, 2011.

Estimated Afghan civilian fatalities since 2001: 11,700 - 13,900 since June, 2011.(Please note that all casualties are estimates.. Last updated: January, 2013. Sources: www.I-casualties.org; www.costofwar.org; www.civiliansinconflict.org)

Foreign Troop Levels in Afghanistan

The United States is the largest contributing nation to the international Coalition forces deployed in Afghanistan. By the end of 2011, their numbers totalled over 140,000. This number is expected to diminish as troops are withdrawn over the next two years. The end of 2014 is considered to be the deadline for the bulk of these withdrawals. To date, the US has roughly 90,000 troops deployed with the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. An additional 10,000 are deployed as part of the US Operation Enduring Freedom, mainly in the East regional command.

IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) have become the assymetric weapon of choice for Afghan insurgents. Photo ISAF

Learning to live with IEDs
By Tim Weaver

*The Improvised Explosive Device, better known as the IED, became the insurgents' weapon of choice after the 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan. Contributing editor and journalist **Tim Weaver** looks at how this highly devastating weapon has been deployed with horrendous effect*

The decade of Soviet occupation that began in 1979 introduced Afghanistan to the blight of landmines. Their use as a means of depopulating large areas of rural Afghanistan and disrupting supply routes (in an attempt to deny the mujahideen local support in their fight against the Soviets and the regime in Kabul they supported) was so damaging that the country moved from being a net exporter to net importer of food. In 1998 the Taliban banned the use of landmines, condemning them as un-Islamic and anti-human. In September 2002 Afghanistan acceded to the Ottawa Treaty (commonly known as the Mine Ban Treaty) prohibiting the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines.

Unfortunately for Afghanistan, it shares a notoriously porous and unpoliced border with Pakistan, one of three countries (India and Burma being the others) still believed to be producing landmines as recently as 2008 (source: International Campaign to Ban Landmines). And Pakistan is certainly producing large amounts of calcium ammonium nitrate fertilizer, the ingredient of choice for those making home-made IEDs. According to the Pentagon's Joint IED Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) in August 2011, calcium ammonium is flowing across the border in "unending supply."

According to Coalition military, the use of fertilizer-based IEDs is common in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Implementation in a country as fractured as Afghanistan is another matter, involving as it does bringing together in common cause independent-minded individuals. However, it is likely that some of the remaining landmines have been recycled by anti-government elements and used in constructing IEDS with which to target directly Coalition forces.

But landmines are no longer the major threat in Afghanistan, either to civilians or the military. That dubious honour is now bestowed on the IED with the first major incidents occurring in

2002, such as the explosion of a bicycle bomb in central Kabul and believed to have been the responsibility of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's people. By 2011, they were proving to be the biggest killer of soldiers and civilians. From slow beginnings – by the end of 2005 there had only been two British military deaths as a result of combat - the insurgency began to grow such that by 2006 fire-fights were common.

Anti-government elements (AGEs) learned to their cost that taking on the well-trained, heavily-armed soldiers of the West head on was not a sustainable tactic. They knew that as Coalition force numbers increased (an Iraq-style surge was implemented in 2009 with 17,000 US troops arriving in February that year), they would lose any resulting fire-fight. By 2008, the number of fire-fights had fallen dramatically, while the use of IEDs had rocketed.

There are well over 100 different types of IEDs familiar to experts, and most of them have an acronym. Remote-controlled (RCIED), low metal content (LMCIED), vehicle-borne (VBIED), vehicle-born suicide (VBSIED) and no metal content (NMCIED) are just a few. The latter might reasonably be expected to be of the most concern to ISAF, but ironically while they make standard metal-detecting equipment redundant, the chemicals they use are so volatile that it makes them very difficult to lay. Indeed, more people are believed to have been killed laying them than have been killed by them. Even when placed successfully, the difficulty in doing so results in more "ground sign" – evidence of disturbed ground - and this makes them susceptible to discovery by that old military standby bit of kit, the Mark 1 Eyeball.

Despite their improvised nature, there is a very real "arms race" as the bomb-makers constantly change their methods of manufacturing, preparing, placing and triggering their explosive devices. This extends to tactics as well. "They (anti-government elements) are clever at working out how they can get us," said one former officer with experience of the situation in Helmand. "They quickly adapt to what we do." They lay ambushes and IEDS to target the movement of army patrols. Based on the tactics that patrols use when coming under fire, or evacuating casualties, they also lay secondary IEDs in areas they know will be used as cover or as helicopter landing sites.

For their part, ISAF forces now have counter-IED skills that are amongst the best in the world. Some 50per cent of IEDs are discovered before they detonate. These skills are being passed

to the Afghan National Army. Once the ISAF troop withdrawal takes place (currently 2014 is the year when most combat troops will be pulled), it is clear that the Afghan security forces will not be able to match the skills or afford the equipment that has made the ATOs (Ammunition Technical Officer) or bomb-disposal men amongst the most feted of soldiers.

The IEDs they must contend with in Afghanistan are for the most part unsophisticated, in contrast to those found in Iraq. In the latter country, levels of technological advancement were high. There is also more money available to reward the skilled bomb-maker coupled with large urban areas offering better and more targets.

In Afghanistan, sophistication isn't a requirement, but effectiveness is. And IEDs have been very effective: there is no need to resort to anything more costly or where greater expertise is needed. Perhaps most important is the effect of IEDs on morale.

Plastic palm oil containers are the current carrier of choice. Ammonium nitrate and substitutes are used for the explosive (particularly in the east of the country), and unexploded ordnance (UXO or ERW, explosive remnants of war) is also recycled. (People with first-hand experience of the situation say that children are paid for delivering landmines to commanders, which are then reworked into IEDs). All sorts of stuff is used for shrapnel. The bombs are dug into roads, disguised as road markers and hidden in the carcasses of dead animals. On several occasions, they have even been strapped onto livestock which have then been driven on to Coalition checkpoints.

IED use has become more targeted, in part due to increasing public disaffection with the insurgents who were seemingly happy to accept high levels of "collateral damage" in their fight. Local people have not proven so sanguine. Criticism of the Taliban and other insurgents is growing for their indiscriminate use of IEDs, which are killing and wounding innocent men, women and children. Toward the end of 2011, Talib spokesmen were pointedly distancing themselves from any responsibility of IED attacks inflicting civilian casualties.

Now, having local friends is as good a means as any of protecting oneself from being caught in an IED incident. However, some experts believe that NGOs and non-military institutions may become more frequent targets (witness the attack on the British Council in Kabul in August 2011). For the time being, the areas

where most NGOs operate – the town and city centres – are relatively safe from the threat of buried IEDs. The Jalalabad highway on the outskirts of Kabul, however, where numerous ISAF troops operate, is a favorite target. So is the Kabul to Kandahar road. The failure, too, of the Americans not to involve local populations (despite ample advice to do so) in the re-furbishing of this important road for sake of expediency and speed is one reason why nearby villagers are so unreliable. Vehicle-borne IEDs and suicide-bombers are of greater concern. As one old Afghan hand put it, they would rather not be anywhere near any Americans when they go out driving in pairs of smart identical Blazer vehicles, with lots of antennae poking out everywhere. Foreign aid workers and journalists also make the point of heading in the opposite direction of they see a military convoy approaching.

There has also been a move away from pressure initiated devices (landmines in all but name) to initiated devices (the timing of the detonation is controlled by an operator, whether remotely or, in the case of suicide bombers, including children or mentally-handicapped individuals whose families are paid compensation by the insurgents, by those transporting the device). It is also harder to place IEDs when there are more troops on the ground and in areas under Coalition control.

As a result, IEDs are not always used indiscriminately (in marked contrast to landmines). The AGEs will only lay them if they know they are likely to hit a target. IEDs may be placed but will not have switches attached until it a possible target is confirmed. Apart from the odd one or two placed by forgetful commanders, experts consider that IEDs will not be left in place after the conflict ends, and thus there will not be an IED legacy to deal with in the same way that the country is still trying to deal with the landmines sown during the Soviet occupation and its aftermath.

The effectiveness of IEDs is all too apparent. Even if the IEDs are caught before they detonate, they still severely damage the coalition military effort. The supply pipeline for British forces in Afghanistan is a year long, with IEDs making a significant contribution to the delay. First it has to get to Pakistan. Then there are long delays getting it through Pakistan and across the border. (From November, 2011 to this time of writing, the Peshawar route was closed to NATO because the US military refused to apologise for the killing of Pakistani soldiers by a predator drone. NATO is now forced to go through the Central Asian republics.) Once into Afghanistan, convoys have to travel very slowly to avoid IEDs. The convoy trucks are big enough to take a hit, but when they do, it still delays the convoy.

Landmines

By Tim Weaver

While the increase in IED activity has seen a corresponding rise in the number of civilian casualties, the consequences have generally been less severe than those of the indiscriminately sown landmines of previous decades. Indeed while the fighting against AGEs has intensified, the process of landmine clearing has continued (in some areas with varying degrees of urgency), although there have been a number of incidents in which teams have been attacked and deminers killed or kidnapped.

According to the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), 40 deminers have been killed since April 2010 (CHECK), while on average 50 people have been dying from landmine explosions per months. For civilians, the risks posed by landmines in urban and agricultural areas still remain: there are still small piles of stones dotting the landscape providing ad hoc warnings of mined ground. Whether there will be a long-term threat from IEDs in the same vein as landmines is questionable. However, it seems likely that IEDs – particularly vehicle-borne and suicide – will continue to provide Afghanistan's hapless people with a reminder of the ill-fortune to be at the crossing-point of so many lands.

Essential reading

- *AFGHANISTAN Improvised Explosive Devices (IED),* Sept 2010, Nato civil military fusion centre
- *Landmine Monitor Report 2011*, Afghanistan, Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor
- *IED Metrics for Afghanistan January 2004-May 2010*, Centre for Stratefic and International Studies

ISAF Commander General Joseph Dunford Jr. meets with Fazla Hadi Muslimyar, speaker of the Upper House of Afghanistan's Parliament. Deja vu all over again? photo ISAF

Afghanistan: A replay of Vietnam?

By William Dowell

Many facets of the international experience in Afghanistan recall similar errors that led to the failure of US efforts in Vietnam. Self-delusions about "progress," creating a viable government and expectations that an international (i.e. US-trained) indigenous army and police force will be able to accomplish a military objective that well-trained professional armies cannot, top the list. The harsh truth is that wars are 'pass-fail', 'winner-take-all' situations, in which nuances and incremental advances are quickly swept away. Any war involves gambling on a future that is inherently unpredictable. In war that unpredictability is accentuated by the fact that the enemy is using all of his intelligence and resources to make certain that you fail. This holds true for development and aid organizations as well as for military forces. In Afghanistan as in Vietnam, humanitarian NGOs as well as international development organizations may wonder why they become targets, but the fact is that insurgents see them as equally dangerous opponents in the battle to win loyalty from local politicians. From the insurgent's point of view, it pays to have an all black or white, pass fail situation, in which there are no halfway compromises. Aid workers make good targets precisely because they are well intentioned and vulnerable.

In this situation, it is crucial to be clear-headed and realistic. The failure to do just that in Vietnam eventually cost the US nearly 60,000 soldiers killed in action, and it cost the Vietnamese several million dead. The collateral damage to the US economy and the distraction from essential social issues as well as the corrosion of civil values at home were even more striking.

It is true that the US investment in Vietnam was far greater than in Afghanistan. In Vietnam, the US committed more than half a million troops, substantial naval forces and round the clock strikes by B-52 strategic bombers. The war also provided an opportunity for the Pentagon to introduce a wide-range of sophisticated weaponry.

What went wrong? The journalist and military historian, Thomas Ricks, attributes the US Army's approach during the Vietnam War to a military mindset that had been forged in the battles of World War II. US commanders saw their primary objective as destroying, or at least neutralizing the enemy. In Vietnam this was translated into "search and destroy" operations. In the process, the notion of protecting the population—a prime requirement of a successful counter-insurgency—took

a back seat. As casualties increased, self-protection began to take on a higher priority than defending a local population that might be harboring the attackers. Although US commanders sensed that they needed a counter-insurgency strategy, they never quite got around to giving one a full priority or for that matter really understanding what counter-insurgency meant.

The irony is that to understand insurgency, the US Army had only to look at its own history. One of the first great insurgencies was the American War for Independence, in which a rag-tag band of colonial militias, under the command of George Washington, eventually defeated the well-trained, red-coat Hessian troops of Britain's King George III.

One of the clearest expressions of the basic formula for modern insurgency is captured in an essay by Mao Zedong, written in the late 1930s, on resisting the Imperial Japanese Army 's efforts to establish a foothold on the Chinese mainland. Imperialism, Mao argued, is usually driven by the promise of eventually making a profit. The insurgent's military objective, therefore, is to demonstrate that the cost of occupation is greater than any potential gain. In conventional wars, you defeat the enemy. In insurgencies, you exhaust your opposition to the point where he no longer thinks that the fight is worth it. The difference in these two points of view is important, because it shifts the military objective from occupying and holding territory to one of simply exhausting the opponent by dragging him into situations which are ultimately patently absurd, and at best useless.

In this respect, Afghanistan is very much like Vietnam. Both countries have terrain that is difficult enough to rule out a definitive military victory. In Vietnam, despite its massive military commitment, it still could not control infiltration or supply movements through the jungles along Vietnam's extensive border. In Afghanistan, the mountains of the Hindu Kush provide a refuge that is often as effective as the jungles of Vietnam.

Ruling out a definitive military victory, the only option is a political solution. But here again, the US has repeated many of the mistakes that led to failure in Vietnam. The US dabbled in local politics in Vietnam in an indecisive and inconclusive manner, much as it has in Afghanistan. The declared intention was to offer an incubator that would lead to a functional indigenous government with democratic values, not unlike those in the US and Europe. It didn't work.

During the Vietnam War there was a great deal of talk about a moderate "Third Force," eventually establishing itself. The problem is that political moderates, who respect humanitarian values, do not last long

in the highly polarized conditions that exist in wartime. Third Force candidates existed in Vietnam, but they had a hard time getting anyone to listen to them.

That left the option of working with a local leader who was clearly not a moderate and clearly not democratic. The main question then was what would serve as the glue to hold the regime together? In Vietnam, it turned out to be corruption, fueled by funds flowing in from the US. The result was a drain on the US economy that proved to be unsustainable over the long haul. The insurgents only had to wait for exhaustion

to take over. Certainly, a few honest politicians surfaced while this was taking place, but it was relatively easy to either intimidate or assassinate them. The US tried to invest in development, but this was also relatively easy for the insurgency to sabotage. To speed up the process in Vietnam, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces did their best to draw US forces into pointless battles, or into situations in which civilian casualties would result. The ultimate expression of this was when a US Army major noted after B52 bombers flattened Ben Tre, a Vietnamese urban center in the Mekong Delta, “We had to destroy the city in order to save it.”

The communist strategy of creating situations expressly intended to lead to collateral damage did not by itself win the civilian population over to the insurgents’ side, at least not emotionally, but it did manage to demonstrate the inability of the US to provide effective protection. And

it added a new factor to the mix--the notion that Americans might end up killing everyone by accident. In that context, the insurgency became the lesser evil, especially since it eventually became obvious to everyone involved that the US would eventually have to leave, and at that point there would be no protection for anyone. The bottom line in Vietnam was that Mao's strategy for insurgents resisting a foreign power in an asymmetric war was followed almost to the letter. The amazing fact was that even years after their defeat, many Americans still did not realize what had happened to them, or why they had been doomed to failure from the start.

If it is at all possible, the history of the US presence in Afghanistan has been even more confused than Vietnam. In the 1980s, the Russians were convinced, and not without reason, that the US was feeding a limited

amount of aid to the Afghan resistance in order to keep the Soviet occupation of the country at a low boil, The tactic aimed at weakening Russia economically and militarily. Essentially, as the Russians saw it, the US, mainly through the CIA, was attempting to expose Russia to the same kind of disaster that had affected the US in Vietnam. Once the Russians pulled out of Afghanistan, the US more or less confirmed that analysis by simply losing interest.in what happened to Afghans.

The motives for the current US involvement are even more suspect. On the surface, a retaliation against Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan after the attack against the World Trade Center on

September 11, 2001, may have seemed appropriate at first, but the administration of George W Bush quickly diverted its attention to Saddam Hussein and a war in Iraq, despite the fact that neither Saddam or Iraq had anything to do with either the attack against the World Trade Center or al Qaeda. A cynic might have suspected that having been caught completely unprepared by the attack on the World Trade Center, the administration was trying to salvage its credibility by starting a war that would let it sidestep criticism as unpatriotic. Whatever the rational, the fate of ordinary Afghans was clearly secondary to what looked very much like a sudden thirst by Americans for revenge. While Afghans could understand the emotions, there was very little in it that had much to do with their concerns.

In Afghanistan, as it had earlier in Vietnam, the US claimed to be promoting democratic values and a rule of law, but in the rush for vengeance in the wake of 9/11, these concerns quickly fell by the wayside. In what came to be known as the Global War Against Terror, or GWOT, Washington showed a readiness not only to disregard the Geneva convention, but also to violate or at least stretch the definitions of US federal law, not to mention the US Constitution. As the US vice-president Dick Cheney put it, the time had come to "explore the dark side." Whether this was the right strategy or not, US actions ranging from using tortures first developed under the Spanish Inquisition (waterboarding, sleep deprivation and prolonged exposure to physical stress positions) to secret detention at extralegal prisons undermined any US protestation that it was promoting democracy, justice or a rule of law. The perverse sexual sadism perpetrated at prisons under US supervision, notably at Abu Ghraib, just outside Baghdad, confirmed the claims by Islamic extremists that Western society was fundamentally sick. Washington could easily dismiss these acts as deviant behavior by a few low level soldiers, but soldiers do what officers tell them to do, and in any case, it is the officers in command who bear responsibility for the actions of their units. In Afghanistan, as in Iraq, it was hard to see how any officers or key officials had paid much of a price for the rampant misbehavior. It is probably in this respect that the American involvement in Afghanistan differs from the US involvement in Vietnam. In Vietnam, there was at least a pretense of striving for the moral high ground, despite egregious exceptions such as the massacre at My Lai, the Phoenix assassination program, and the widespread use of the cancer-inducing defoliant, Agent Orange. In Afghanistan, there was little pretense at searching for a high ground of any kind.

In all fairness, the Afghans, who have endured tribal conflicts for centuries and have a harsh sense of justice themselves, may not have had unrealistic expectations that Americans would act any differently from

the other invaders who have sought to occupy their territory. But what the largely amoral policies of the Bush administration did do was to raise the question of what the US was doing in the country in the first place. What did Americans really want?

At least initially, there seemed to be two incentives. As with the Vietnam War, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, revived defense spending, and effectively absorbed what idealists had hoped might turn out to be a "peace dividend" after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The Carlyle Fund, founded by a former US Defense Secretary, Frank Carlucci, gathered a number of Washington insiders as investors and became heavily involved in the formerly sagging, but now revived defense industry. Carlyle paid George W. Bush's father $100,000 to give a speech. War, in short, not only funneled money into Afghanistan and Iraq, it also made fortunes in Washington. Instead of colonizing Afghanistan and Iraq, the administration was essentially colonizing the American taxpayer. In this, the situation in Afghanistan was simply a speeded up version of what had taken place decades earlier in Vietnam.

It explained why everyone seemed willing to continue in a situation in which eventual defeat seemed all but inevitable. The trick was to get in, make some money, get your career ticket punched if you were in the military and then get out before the whole thing collapsed.

While this might have made sense to the individuals seeking jobs in Afghanistan, or assigned there in the military, it was not necessarily an attractive proposition to the Afghans who would have to deal with the aftermath once the whole thing collapsed. Unless, that is, they could make a massive amount of money and exit along with the departing international community.

Did anyone really not know what to expect? Hadn't they heard and read about what happened in Vietnam? Countless American officials assigned to Kabul grumbled about Afghan corruption, while not bothering to question their own qualifications or the hefty salaries that they were earning thanks to the conflict. The war, in short, had become a diabolical money machine for everyone involved, except that is for the poor grunts deposited in an alien countryside and ordered to play what amounted to Russian roulette with improvised explosive devices concealed along side of the road.

In a sense this was a replay of Vietnam, but with the stakes raised considerably and with considerably less manpower to hold the fort. The difference was that the Bush administration decided to do it on the cheap, by contracting much of the war to private security firms on a mercenary basis. Salaries might be a bit higher than for regular soldiers, but medical, insurance and retirement costs were likely to be less, and more important the US public really wouldn't care if these men lived

or died. More than that, the comportment of these mercenaries would not fall under the restrictions or public supervision required by the US Army. Again, this was not all that different from the comportment of the various warlords who had been functioning in Afghanistan since the Soviet retreat. In case, anyone thought that there might be a difference, Washington dispelled the illusion by hiring the warlords in the Northern Alliance as surrogates in their supposed efforts to track down Osama bin Laden. Not surprisingly, bin Laden easily slipped across the border into Pakistan. The question in the minds of many Afghans was whether the US had seriously looked for find bin Laden in the first place, or whether they simply needed to appear to be looking for him in order to justify a war in which a great many people made a great deal of money.

As in Vietnam, US commanders in Afghanistan were convinced with a little bit more force they would eventually be able to find the last member of al Qaeda and kill him. When it became obvious that the insurgency had more to do with the Taliban than al Qaeda, the emphasis shifted to eliminating the Taliban, even though no one could say for certain who the Taliban were.

In fact, both al Qaeda and the Taliban appeared to be more a state of mind than a structured, physical organization. Alliances and affiliation could shift from one moment to the next. As it became increasingly clear that ISAF and the US were chasing what amounted to a shape-shifting ghost, non-US members of the international coalition began discretely slipping away from the party, and the US, itself, began seriously redefining its mission, albeit with a sense of guilt about having created a mess and not being able to solve it. US President Barack Obama had initially agreed to give the Pentagon the troop "surge" it had been asking for, and this had managed to impose a relative calm in certain provinces.

The objective had now become to stop the momentum of the Taliban, so that reconstruction efforts and an attempt to create a viable government in Kabul would have a chance to take hold. The problem was that fighting the Taliban was like fighting cancer. Afghanistan might go into remission briefly, but as long as some of the Taliban were still ready to fight, the problem would return once the US had gone. The US had faced the same problem in Vietnam, when the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had simply slipped across the border into Cambodia or Laos when the going got tough, and then come back as soon as the US pulled out.

Having proved that the troop surge might temporarily control the problem, but would not definitively solve it, President Obama now found himself faced with the hard fact that US involvement in Afghanistan might cost the same amount over the next decade that providing health care to Americans would cost the US government over the same period.

The realization led to the formation of a commission in Washington described as the "good enough" committee. Its mission was to determine how much the US would need to withdraw quietly from the country without losing face. Taking a cue from George W. Bush, President Obama announced that the original mission in Afghanistan had been to neutralize al Qaeda, and that that mission had, in fact, been accomplished. It was time to go home. "At least we won't be taking off from an embassy roof in a helicopter," noted one somewhat jaded observer.

A replay of Vietnam? The answer, surprisingly enough, is still not clear. In short, the situation is not beyond hope. What is clear is that the strategy of searching for peace by trying to kill the people you may end up having to negotiate with may not be the way to go. So-called "collateral damage," especially, has turned out to be far more damaging to any future mediation than the Pentagon has been prepared to admit. The fact that should have been obvious from the start is that the Pentagon is fundamentally unsuited both in its psychology and its training to create a true counter-insurgency strategy.

One of the few counter-insurgency campaigns to actually succeed was the British suppression of the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s. Over roughly a decade, some 40,000 British troops and police were eventually able to control an estimated 7,500 mostly Chinese communist insurgents.

The British eventually reached the conclusion that the military is a blunt weapon, and that it made sense to bring in civilian police officers to handle security at the district level. The goal was to separate the guerillas from the population, and this was done in part by moving much of the population into well-lit and heavily fortified villages. In contrast to the Strategic Hamlet program that the US tried to institute in Vietnam, the British made certain that the houses they were moving villagers into were of much better quality and economically upmarket compared to the shanty towns that the villagers had previously been living in.

Despite having defeated the insurgents, the British still felt obliged to respect the ethnic differences in the country by making Singapore a separate state that was largely Chinese, while the rest of Malaysia was predominantly Malay. Of course, the British had a long history of involvement in Malaysia and a deep understanding of the culture.

When the US went into Vietnam, it had very little understanding of the country's complex culture. Initial guidance was han-

dled by the European desk at the US State Department because Vietnam had been a French colony. The US initially tried to work through the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was a Catholic and a northerner while South Vietnam was culturally distinct from the North, and was largely Buddhist. The difference not only separated Diem's government from the public he was supposed to represent, but it also led to the formation of cliques throughout the administration which preferred giving the best jobs to northerners, and fundamentally did not trust the southerners.

Similar ethnic differences make it difficult to establish a credible government in Kabul. The US quickly allied itself with Afghan northerners, who are often Tajiks and Uzbeks, while Hamid Karzai and the government that he created are Pushtuns. They might as well be in separate countries.

Facing a kind of ethnic schizophrenia and a tradition that is heavily based on jealousy-prone alliances between clans, there was very little that Karzai could do to form a united front. Not surprisingly, Karzai was soon dismissed by power-hungry opponents as little more than the "Mayor of Kabul." Since Karzai is constitutionally bound to step down at the end of his current term, the future is even less certain.

From Karzai's point of view, there may be strong incentives for not being in office once the US pulls out the majority of its forces in 2014. The Afghan Army is probably deeply penetrated by Karzai's opposition as are the Afghan police, and Kabul is likely to be an unhealthy place once there is no longer an international force to provide protection.

Even if Karzai had wanted to stay, he would have had to deal with a serious problem in the rapport of forces between Afghanistan and the US. Having invested heavily in Afghanistan, Washington, while publicly promoting democratic reforms and the free choice of Afghans, would nevertheless like to have a say in who gets to run the government. In other words, the Afghans are free to choose whomever they want, as long as the choice coincides with Washington's choice. Any parent who had tried to give reasonable guidance to a teenager knows that this is fine in theory, but it does not work in real life. Karzai may actually agree with Washington's analysis, but with the US responsible for assassination by remotely-controlled drone aircraft and a host of other unacceptable actions, even giving the impression that one is caving into Washington's demands amounts to political suicide.

In Vietnam, the US, acting through the CIA, finally overthrew

the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, largely on the advice of its ambassador in Saigon at the time, Henry Cabot Lodge. The result was a struggle for power among Vietnamese generals who had even less credibility than Diem. No one will need a coup to rid Afghanistan of Karzai because that deed has been handled effectively by the rules set out in Afghanistan's constitution. The aftermath of Karzai's departure, however, is likely to be just as chaotic. It is fair enough to ask who is going to want the job once the Americans are gone.

What should be clear however is that only a government that shows that it can operate independently of Washington's dictates has a chance of winning Afghan loyalty. The best thing that the US and for that matter the international community can do is to be a patient friend. Foreigners, in short, can advise, but they can't command. Of course, standing back means that everything is likely to collapse and a brutal struggle for power may ensue, but whatever government emerges from that chaos will have one advantage over the current attempts to set up a regime. It will be Afghan. Instead of taking other people's advice on how to form a government, the Afghans will do it themselves. They may make terrible mistakes, but they will learn how to handle themselves in the process.

Here again, it is interesting to look at what happened in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was based on a false premise, the belief that if Vietnam collapsed, it would fall under the control of Communist China, and other Asian nations would fall one after another according to what was then known as the "Domino Theory." After Saigon fell, South Vietnam did experience an extended period of chaos and disorder. The 1980s were particularly difficult economically. The irony, though, is that Vietnam, having finally won its war for independence, achieved an invaluable sense of self-confidence because it was acting on its own. Today, it is concerned with encroachment from China in the disputed South China Sea, and rather than considering the US to be a threat, it considers the US Navy to be a potentially valuable ally in underwriting its independence. None of this would have been likely to happen if the US had actually won the war and continued to meddle in Vietnamese affairs. The bottom line is that in losing the Vietnam War, the US was able, over the long haul, to effectively win it – not by force of arms, but by setting an example and producing things that the Vietnamese actually wanted to have.

If one conclusion can be drawn from the last decade in Afghanistan it is the realization that if the Afghans truly want something they will fight for it. The best policy may be one that Abraham Lincoln advocated. "If you want to convince someone," Lincoln advised, "first convince them that you are their friend."

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Detail of Lady Elizabeth Butler's famous depiction of Dr. William Brydon's arrival at Jalalabad after the 1842 retreat from Kabul. Brydon was one of only a handful of survivals. His horse died after reaching the fort. Another survivor of the 90-mile trek from Kabul also managed to reach Jalalabad, but died the next day.

On the Trail of Britain's Greatest Afghan Disaster

By William Darymple

*Surrounded, and with no hope of relief, 16,000 British soldiers and camp followers fled Kabul in 1842. Despite promises of safe passage, the vast majority were killed or sold into slavery. The catastrophe forced Britain to rethink its approach to colonialism over the next century. British author **William Dalrymple** describes what the region looks like today:*

The route of Britain's 1842 retreat follows the base of the mountain range that leads to Tora Bora and the Pakistan border, the Ghilzai heartlands that have always been the Taliban's main recruiting ground. I had been advised not to attempt to visit the area without local protection, so set off in the company of a regional tribal leader who was also a minister in Karzai's government. This was a mountain of a man named Anwar Khan Jigdallick, a former village wrestling champion, and later captain of the Afghan Olympic wrestling team, who had made his name as a Jami'at-Islami Mujehedin commander in the Jihad against the Soviets in the 1980's.

It was Jigdallick's Ghilzai ancestors who inflicted some of the worst casualties on the British army of 1842, something he proudly repeated several times as we drove through the same passes: "They forced us to pick up guns to defend our honour," he said. "So we killed every last one of those bastards." None of this, incidentally, has stopped Jigdallick from sending his family away from Kabul to the greater safety of Northolt in North London.

On the day we were to drive to Gandamak, I had been told to report at Jigdallick's Ministry in the heart of the administrative district, Wazir Akbar Khan—named after the resistance leader of 1842-- at seven in the morning. Threading my way through a slalom of checkpoints and razor wire surrounding the ministry, I arrived to find Jigdallick being hustled into a convoy of heavily armoured SUVs by his ever-present phalanx of body guards, walkie-talkies crackling, and assault rifles primed.

Jigdallick drove himself, while pick-ups full of heavily-armed Afghan bodyguards followed behind. As we drove through the capital, evidence of the failure of the current occupation lay all around us. Kabul remains one of the poorest and scrappiest capital cities in the world. Despite the US pouring in around $80 billion into Afghanistan, almost all that has disap-

peared into defence and security and the roads of Kabul were still more rutted than those in the most neglected provincial towns of Pakistan. There was no street lighting and apparently, no rubbish collection. According to Jigdallick, that was only the tip of the iceberg. Despite all the efforts of a dozen countries and a thousand agencies over a decade since 2001, the country is still a mess: a quarter of all teachers in Afghanistan are illiterate. In many areas, governance is almost non-existent: half the governors do not have an office, less have electricity. Civil servants lack the most basic education and skills.

We bumped through the potholed roads of Kabul—within sight of the blast walls of the US Embassy and the NATO barracks that has been built on the very site of the British cantonment of 170 years ago, past Bud Khakh, then headed down the zigzag road into the line of bleak mountain passes that link Kabul with the Khyber Pass.

It is a suitably dramatic and violent landscape: fault lines of crushed and tortured strata groaned and twisted in the gunpowder-coloured rock walls rising on either side of us. Above, the jagged mountain tops were veiled in an ominous cloud of mist. As we drove, Jigdallick complained bitterly of the Western treatment of his government: "In the 1980's when we were killing Russians for them, the Americans called us Freedom Fighters," he muttered as we descended the first Pass. "Now they just dismiss us as warlords."

At Sarobi, where the mountains debouche into a high altitude ochre desert dotted with encampments of nomads, we left the main road, and headed into Taliban territory; a further five pick-up trucks full of Jigdallick's old mujahideen, holy warriors as the anti-Soviet guerrilla fighters were then known, all brandishing rocket propelled grenades and with faces wrapped in keffiyehs, appeared from a side road to escort us.

At Jigdallick (or Jagdalak as some refer to the village), on the 12th of January 1842, two hundred frostbitten British soldiers found themselves surrounded by several thousand Ghilzai tribesmen; only a handful made it beyond the holly hedge. Our own welcome was, thankfully, somewhat warmer. It was my hosts's first visit to his home since he became a minister, and the proud villagers took their old commander on a nostalgia trip through hills smelling of wild thyme and rosemary, and up through mountainsides carpeted with hollyhocks and mulberries and shaded by white poplars. Here, at the top of the surrounding peaks, near the watch tower where the naked and freezing sepoys had attempted to find shelter, lay the remains of Jigdallick's old mujahed bunkers and entrenchments from which he had defied the Soviet army. Once the tour was completed, the villagers feasted us, Mughal style, in an apricot orchard at the bottom of the valley: we sat on carpets under a trellis of vine and pomegran-

ate blossom, as course after course of kebabs and mulberry pullao were laid in front of us.

During lunch, as my hosts casually pointed out the site of the holly barrier and other places in the village where the British had been massacred in 1842, we compared our respective family memories of that war. I talked about my great great uncle, Colin Mackenzie, who had been taken hostage nearby, and I asked if they saw any parallels with the current situation: "It is exactly the same," said Jigdallick. "Both times the foreigners have come for their own interests, not for ours. They say, 'we are your friends, we want to help.' But they are lying."

"Whoever comes to Afghanistan, even now, they will face the fate of Burnes, MacNaghten, and Dr Brydon, " agreed Mohammad Khan, our host in the village and the owner of the orchard where we were sitting. Everyone nodded sagely into their rice: the names of the fallen of 1842, long forgotten in their home country, were clearly still common currency here.

"Since the British went we've had the Russians," said one old man to my right. "We saw them off too, but not before they bombed many of the houses in the village." He pointed at a ridge full of ruined mudbrick houses on the hills behind us.

"We are the roof of the world," said Khan. "From here you can control and watch everywhere."

"Afghanistan is like the crossroads for every nation that comes to power," agreed Jigdallick. "But we do not have the

The last stand of the survivors of Her Majesty's 44th Foot at Gandamak, painted by William Barnes Wollen in 1898

strength to control our own destiny. Our fate is determined by our neighbours."

It was nearly five o'clock before the final flaps of naan bread were cleared away, by which time it became clear that it was now too late to head on to Gandamak. Instead we went that evening by the main highway direct to the relative safety of Jalalabad, where we discovered we'd had a narrow escape. It turned out that there had been a small battle at Gandamak that very morning between government forces and a group of villagers supported by the Taliban. The sheer size and length of the feast and our own gluttony had saved us from walking straight into an ambush. The battle had taken place on exactly the site of the British last stand of 1842.

The following morning in Jalalabad we went to a jirga, or assembly, of Ghilzai tribal elders, to which the grey beards of Gandamak had come, under a flag of truce, to discuss what had happened the day before. The story was typical of many I heard about Karzai's government, and revealed how a mixture of corruption, incompetence and insensitivity had helped give an opening for the return of the once-hated Taliban.

As Predator Drones took off and landed incessantly at the nearby airfield, the Ghilzai elders related how the previous year, government troops had turned up to destroy the opium harvest. The troops promised the villagers full compensation, and were allowed to burn the crops; but the money never turned up. Before the planting season, the Gandamak villagers again went to Jalalabad and asked the government if they could be provided with assistance to grow other crops. Promises were made; again nothing was delivered. They planted poppy, informing the local authorities that if they again tried to burn the crop, the village would have no option but to resist. When the troops turned up, about the same time as we were arriving at nearby Jigdallick, the villagers were waiting for them, and had called in the local Taliban to assist. In the fighting that followed, nine policemen were killed, six vehicles were destroyed and ten police hostages taken.

After the jirga was over, two of the tribal elders of Gandamak came over and we chatted for a while over a pot of green tea.

"Last month," said one, "some American officers called us to a hotel in Jalalabad for a meeting. One of them asked me, 'Why do you hate us?' I replied, 'because you blow down our doors, enter our houses, pull our women by the hair and kick our children. We cannot accept this. We will fight back, and we will break your teeth, and when your teeth are broken you will leave, just as the British left before you. It is just a matter of time.' "

"What did he say to that?"

"He turned to his friend and said, 'If the old men are like this, what will the younger ones be like?' In truth, all the Americans here know their game is over. It is just their politicians who deny this."

"These are the last days of the Americans" said the other elder. "Next it will be China."

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Refugees face a brutal winter. Photo UN

The Refugees

By Peter Marsden

Over the past three decades, Afghanistan has produced one of the largest refugee movements since the end of World War II, sending over six million refugees to the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran as well as to Europe, North America and India.

The first Afghans began fleeing communist repression within weeks of the 1978 coup d'etat by the Khalq ('Masses') faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the overwhelming majority heading for Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. By the time of the December 1979 Soviet invasion, some 400,000 had crossed the border into Pakistan and another 200,000 into Iran. The exodus quickly became a flood; an estimated 1.9 million had fled by the end of the first year of the occupation, constituting the largest single group of refugees in the world.

By the early 1980s, Soviet counter-insurgency methods were leaving people with no choice but to abandon their land and migrate. From 1985 to 1990, according to estimates of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a staggering 6.2 million Afghans children born in exile were living in Pakistan and Iran alone: just under half the world's refugee population.

When the pro-communist regime of President Najibullah fell in 1992, millions of refugees flooded back, believing that the jihad was finally over. But the flood soon slowed to a trickle during the mid-1990s, as civil war tore Afghanistan apart once more. By the end of 1997, 2.7 million refugees remained in Pakistan, Iran and other regional countries. This number crept up in response to ongoing drought and conflict to the point where, by the beginning of 2001, both Pakistan and Iran were claiming to have two million refugees each still the single largest refugee caseload in the world.

In the year following the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, between 1.5-1.8 million Afghan refugees returned home mainly from Pakistan, whose police forces began harassing and evicting refugees from border camps. Refugees were also spurred on to return by media reports that the international community was bringing peace and a massive reconstruction programme. Despite the evidence that this mass return was a consequence of media-induced optimism and police harassment in both Pakistan and

Iran, the international community has consistently presented the return as a vote of confidence in the new Afghan government and as a key indicator to present the US-led military intervention and the Bonn Agreement as a success. The reality, however, is that many returned to find their homes destroyed, their property ownership in dispute and no means of earning a living off the land, after losing vital agricultural skills during decades in exile. An independent report on Afghan repatriation in 2002 concluded: "many returnees found themselves in a worse position after their return than before."

The rate of return since 2002 has been very much less. This is in spite of increasing pressure by the governments of Pakistan and Iran. Further, large numbers of Afghans again sought refuge in Pakistan after 2002 so that, by 2005, the number of Afghans living in Pakistan was the same, at three million, as it had been in 2002. Pakistan, with the assistance of UNHCR, therefore sought to regulate the Afghan presence through a census conducted in February and March 2005. Those who were registered were given documentation which, although it accorded no right to remain for a specific period, enabled the police to stop and search Afghans and deport those who did not possess this documentation. Those who did register have come under further pressure to repatriate through a programme of successive closures of refugee camps.. Pakistan has thus followed the lead taken by Iran in becoming increasingly draconian in its treatment of Afghans within its borders. UNHCR surveys indicate that many refugees fear they will not find housing or jobs, while the adverse security environment is seen as another key deterrent.

The origins of the refugee situation in Afghanistan can be traced as far back as the early part of the 20th Century when King Amanullah, who ruled from 1919-1929, attempted to introduce a process of reform aimed at improving the position of women and girls. He failed, however, to consult with and involve the traditional tribal and religious leadership of the country. He also failed to ensure the necessary military support to secure a degree of compliance. His reforms were barely introduced before he met with armed opposition and had to abdicate. Amanullah's successors immediately cancelled his reforms and adopted a more conservative approach, taking their lead from the religious establishment of ulama and mullahs.

It was not until the 1950s that the reform movement resurrected itself under Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud. Backed by

the Soviets, Daoud strengthened his government's armed forces, while at the same time he engaged in debate with the religious leaders. As a result, he was able to secure certain concessions through a combination of force and persuasion before falling from office in 1963. Nevertheless, his efforts culminated in the 1964 Constitution which was agreed by a large assembly, representing all parts of Afghanistan and, among other provisions, accorded legal equality to both women and men.

The reform process proceeded steadily during the 1960s and 1970s within a climate of growing political ferment and radicalism, inspired by student movements elsewhere in the world. Two particular movements emerged: one, socialist, looked to Moscow for guidance; the other, radical Islamist, drew on the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Islamic thinkers from the Indian subcontinent.

When Daoud ousted King Zahir Shah in 1973, and proclaimed himself President, he initially sought the backing of the socialist movement, which had formed the PDPA. He also leaned heavily on Moscow and encouraged an accelerated process of Soviet political, economic and military engagement in Afghanistan. Tensions, however, soon arose between Daoud and the PDPA over the pace of reform and his attempts to suppress the movement finally resulted in the April 1978 Saur Revolution.

The communist PDPA was quick to impose land reforms and to introduce a female literacy programme but used excessive force in the process. They demonstrated an arrogant and gross insensitivity to societal religious and cultural norms. There was an immediate backlash from all sections of rural society, with very clear echoes of the response to Amanullah's reforms.

But this time, the level of armed conflict was considerably more acute. The communists brutally put down the wave of armed insurrections which manifested themselves throughout the country, provoking a call for holy war or jihad. The existence of the jihad justified not only the taking up of arms against the PDPA but also a process of migration, on the religious grounds that the believers had been wronged. This followed the example of a migration which Mohammed and his followers had undertaken.
The military actions of the PDPA provoked an early exodus of refugees in 1978 and 1979 to the neighbouring Islamic countries of Pakistan and Iran, which regarded it as their Islamic duty to provide hospitality to those seeking exile. They also provided active support to the jihad by supplying arms to men of fighting age and

by facilitating their regular transit across borders to engage in attacks on communist forces. The radical Islamist parties, which had emerged in Kabul in the 1960s, were quick to capitalize on the Islamic dimension to the conflict and assumed an increasingly leading role from bases in Pakistan and Iran.

This situation fed into the paranoia of the Soviet Union over the possibility of encirclement along its southern borders. The Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1978 had deprived the United States of a strategically important base in the region. Moscow may have speculated that the armed uprising could be exploited by the US to establish a military presence in Afghanistan. This and other factors led to a chain of events which culminated in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Both the invasion and the repression inflicted by the Red Army and Afghan government forces provoked the population further, resulting in a rapid intensification of the conflict. Growing numbers sought exile in Pakistan and Iran, to the point where by the mid- 1980s, Pakistan accommodated 3.3 million refugees and Iran 2.9 million.

Some Afghans attempted to remain in their villages but found it increasingly difficult to withstand the bombardment and armed entry into their homes by Soviet forces. It was common for families to flee to the mountains, where they would reduce their food intake to the absolute minimum in order to survive, while the men returned to fight as mujahideen and to keep the land under cultivation as best they could. Some villages fared worse than others. Within the same district, certain areas of strategic importance would be reduced to rubble while others were barely touched and life could continue with a degree of normality.

Only a small handful of primarily French and British humanitarian organizations provided a trickle of clandestine crossborder assistance during the early 1980s to civilians seeking to survive inside Afghanistan. The overwhelming majority of aid organizations and donors preferred to offer so-called 'official' assistance to refugees only, mainly in Pakistan. United Nations agencies, for example, refused to become involved in any form of crossborder relief. According to some observers, this lack of international assistance to help civilians withstand the impact of war inside Afghanistan actually contributed to the refugee exodus as many people had little option but to leave.

When the Soviet Union announced its decision to withdraw its forces by February 1989, much of the international community expected the Soviet-backed regime of President Najibullah to fall

almost immediately. They also anticipated, not unreasonably, that this would result in the immediate return of the six million refugees in Pakistan and Iran, with the ending of the jihad. The UN geared itself up for a massive relief operation in support of the returnees.

However, the government did not fall until three years later, when the Soviet Union itself collapsed and the flow of arms and other resources supplied by Moscow came to an end. In the meantime, the UN, working closely with NGOs, sought to prepare the ground for the eventual return of refugees through programmes aimed to rehabilitate the agricultural base of Afghanistan. This resulted in a trickle of refugees, mostly men, returning to their villages from Pakistan for the summer to rebuild their homes and get the land working again before wintering in the refugee camps. Meanwhile, the families who had spent the war in the mountains of Afghanistan returned home as soon as the Soviet troops left. They started the process of reconstruction long before the aid agencies arrived to offer assistance. At this stage, however, there was no return from Iran.

When the Soviet-backed government was replaced by the mujahed-led Islamic State of Afghanistan in April 1992, the jihad was finally over. The summer of 1992 saw a return of refugees from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan on a massive scale, tempered only by the gradual realization that disunity within the mujahideen was going to result in further conflict.

The ending of the jihad was a trigger for Iranian authorities to put pressure on refugees to go home, particularly those who had fled from the villages of Farah province to the desert camps on the other side of the frontier. In summer 1992, Iran began bulldozing these camps and by December the government had agreed a repatriation programme with UNHCR aimed at returning all its 2.9 million refugees by the end of 1995. The stability created in Herat by the rule of the mujahed leader Ismail Khan encouraged people to return. By the end of 1993, much of Herat's exiled population had come home. Those who remained in the desert camps had little choice but to return when their temporary homes were destroyed.

Continuing conflict, however, inhibited further return from Iran in 1994 and 1995. The capture by the Taliban of the whole of western Afghanistan in September 1995 brought the return process to a halt. Efforts by UNHCR to assist refugees from northern Afghanistan to return via Turkmenistan met with a total lack of

interest. Refugees from the north indicated that the chronic level of insecurity across the northern and central provinces represented a major deterrent to their return. Instead, people started to go back to Iran in their thousands to escape the restrictions imposed by the Taliban and the deteriorating economic situation following the takeover.

There was also a substantial flow of migrant workers from 1993 onwards, as younger members of returnee families left Afghanistan to look for work in Iran, while their elders continued the long process of reconstruction. A significant population growth among Afghans brought on by improved healthcare in Iran made it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency in spite of substantial progress in restoring the agricultural base in western Afghanistan, as in many other parts of the country.

The advent of the Taliban in 1994 had a positive effect, however, on the return of refugees to Kandahar and the Pushtun belt of southern Afghanistan. Prior to the capture of Kandahar in October 1994, the city and surrounding region had been subject to chronic instability. The Taliban brought absolute security to a wide area. People started returning in large numbers to revitalise the urban economy and work on the land. However, the initial failure of the Taliban to take Kabul in 1995-1996 led to fears that the Islamic movement might not be able to maintain their hold. As a result, the return process became more cautious.

Meanwhile, in September 1995, aid agency rations and free services for the refugees living in Pakistani camps were finally curtailed. When the refugees had first arrived towards the end of the 1970s, they had been accommodated in camps along the length of the border and provided with tents, various food items, kerosene and kitchen equipment. They had quickly built their own mud homes and compounds, with or without assistance, and had gradually found work to supplement their rations. Schools, clinics and water supply systems were established in the camps. Over time, the rations were reduced to the point where only wheat and kerosene were provided. The ending of free rations in 1995 coincided with a decision to require refugees to contribute towards the costs of water, education and health services. The decision to wind down and then end the rations and free services was based on the premise that the refugees were in a position to be self-sufficient, at least at the level of the poorest among the population of Pakistan.

The UN sought to minimize hardship for disadvantaged groups by providing an allocation of cooking oil for women attending clinics and children attending school. But a December 1996 study of refugee camps near Peshawar indicated that a significant proportion of the population were living at a very marginal level. Many had to look for work on a daily basis and some would go for long periods without finding work. The allocation of free cooking oil did not appear to prevent large numbers of refugees from being dependent on the charity of their neighbours. In spite of the difficulties that refugees in Pakistan faced in their daily efforts to survive, the pace of return remained very low over the following years (around 100,000 per year until 1999). It was not until the Taliban capture of Taloqan, in September 2000, that there was a significant change in the underlying patterns.

This new Taliban conquest provoked large-scale displacement from the province of Takhar. Around 170,000 people fled into Pakistan, while many more remained displaced within north-eastern Afghanistan. The Pakistan government housed the initial outflow in existing refugee camps but took a harder line with non-Pushtun refugees (Pushtuns formed the majority of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan). These were housed in a makeshift camp on the edge of the major refugee settlement of Jalozai near Peshawar.

International journalists visited in droves to witness the full horror of people living under plastic bin liners. Neither the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) nor UNHCR were able to provide aid for this group in the face of Pakistan's refusal to permit registration. Finally the government agreed to register the refugees if they were relocated to new camps in the tribal territories, away from urban centres where they could secure employment.

From early 2001 onwards, Pakistan's previous hospitality towards Afghan refugees began to ebb away, reflecting growing public opposition to the Afghan presence and changes in key personnel within the Pakistan government. Pakistan's response to the Jalozai influx in late 2000 was an early manifestation of a clear change of policy, both to encourage refugees to return and to discourage any further arrivals of Afghans into Pakistan. Afghan refugees were increasingly harrassed by the Pakistan police and some young Afghan men were arbitrarily picked up by the Pakistan authorities and deported to Afghanistan. The closure of a major camp at Nasir Bagh, near Peshawar, sent an important signal that now was the time to think of returning.

In the wake of the 11 September attacks, UNHCR persuaded Pakistan to accept Afghan refugees fleeing any US-led military action against the Taliban. However, UNHCR found the new camps designated by the authorities to be problematic because of security and other concerns. So when the US-led invasion started on 7 October 2001, UNHCR was unprepared. Fortunately, the scale of the outflow was very much less than had been planned for, in part because of pressure on Pakistan from the US government to police the border and prevent the Taliban and other radical elements from fleeing.

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...as political pawns

By Peter Marsden

Nearly six million Afghans fled the fighting of the 1980s and 1990s and sought sanctuary in Iran, Pakistan and further afield. But since the US bombed the Taliban out of power in late 2001, Afghan refugees have come under increasing pressure from the countries hosting them to return home. Since 2002-03, Afghans applying for refugee status in Western countries have been routinely refused asylum. And refugees in Pakistan's camps have been threatened with eviction and camp closure to force them back over the border.

Media publicity about the reconstruction of Afghanistan encouraged many refugees to return home. President Bush spoke of a 'Marshall plan' to rebuild the country, and donors queued up to pledge US$ 4.5 billion in aid. During 2002, around 1.8 million refugees returned, way in excess of estimates. When asked why, one returnee in the Shomali Plain replied simply: "the whole world told us they were rebuilding Afghanistan".

Yet for most who have returned, the process of securing income-earning opportunities has been difficult in the extreme. The agricultural economy has not been able to provide for the increased population. This, in combination with the fact that a high proportion of those who have returned were born in exile or were too young to develop agricultural

skills when they left, has contributed to a very significant urbanization process. Kabul has increased from less than one million to over four million and major expansion has also been evident in the other cities as well as in the many smaller towns and district centres.

Because of the precarious nature of both the rural and urban economies, it is the norm for families to diversify their income sources, with some members working on the land while others head for urban centres or seek labour migration opportunities in Pakistan and Iran. Labour migration to the neighbouring countries has provided an important safety valve in the Afghan economy since before the Soviet military intervention. However, there are indications that Afghans have recently begun to look less to Pakistan and Iran as possible income sources, arising in large part from the treatment that they receive at the hands of the authorities but also due to a relative improvement in the Afghan economy.

The Afghan economy has also depended very heavily on the opium trade, which has seen record production levels in recent years and now represents around one third of GDP, if the black economy is included.

The absence of an effective rule of law, with the Karzai Government very dependent, for its power base, on those who wield power through the gun has added to the insecurity generated by the ongoing insurgency and counter-insurgency operations.

Although the international community has provided assistance to help rebuild the infrastructure of roads, electricity, telecommunications, education and health care, this has been a complex process and the positive results have been countered by many serious shortcomings. Further, there has been a pronounced pattern of tying aid to military objectives. Further, the active involvement of the international military in hearts and minds projects has identified humanitarian aid workers with the international military presence and placed them at risk. Large numbers have been killed or abducted as a result.

According to a report commissioned by the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, the mass repatriation was driven by political pressures. While the US and its allies – including the new Afghan government – were keen to show the benefits of their campaign to oust the Taliban, the Pakistan and Iranian authorities seized the chance to offload two decades worth of refugees. But this was in the interests neither of those returning nor of Afghanistan's long-term recovery. "Many returnees found themselves in a worse position after their return than before", says the report, while "the scale and speed of the return helped to divert yet more of the limited funds available for reconstruction into

emergency assistance."

UNHCR coped by establishing temporary 'holding' camps just inside the Pakistan border at Chaman. However, Pakistan then called a halt to any further influx, following agreement with the Afghan government and UNHCR to embark on a repatriation programme with effect from 1 March 2002. The 40,000 people left in the holding camp then became a potentially permanent population, along with a similar number camped in Spin Boldak just across the border inside Afghanistan. These two populations comprised mainly kuchi nomads, affected by the drought, and Pushtuns fleeing persecution for being ethnically associated with the Taliban. In August 2002, UNHCR established new camps for these unfortunate people in the desert to the west of Kandahar. But relocation proved very unpopular because of the area's barrenness and lack of job opportunities.

Further police harassment put considerable pressure on Afghans living in Pakistan's urban areas to take advantage of the repatriation programme initiated in March 2002. This programme provided returnees with wheat, cash, household utensils and, for some, building materials. By the end of September 2002, around 1.5 million refugees had returned partly because of the repatriation programme and partly because the media coverage of January 2002's donor conference in Tokyo created high expectations of international investment and well-paid jobs. A high proportion of returnees settled in Nangarhar province, which had recovered reasonably well from the drought of 1999-2001. An estimated 400,000 returnees travelled to Kabul where, UNHCR reported, they had no choice but to live in destitute conditions in ruined houses because rents had soared with the arrival of international organizations. There were indications that many of those who had returned to claim the assistance package might have slipped back into Pakistan to continue their lives there, in spite of difficulties with the Pakistan authorities.

Far fewer refugees returned from Iran during 2002. A repatriation agreement drawn up between Iran, Afghanistan and UNHCR in April 2002 had, by the end of September 2002, resulted in the return of 270,000 refugees. Although the Iranian authorities employed a sustained media campaign to put considerable pressure on Afghan refugees to return, police action has been primarily targeted at those without documentation, although many of those summarily deported have been registered with the Iranian authorities. The low rate of return from Iran relative to Pakistan reflects two factors. For those refugees planning on returning to farm, agricultural conditions in eastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan, were

far better than in Afghan provinces bordering Iran. Secondly, the porous border with Pakistan enabled refugees to return home but keep their options open to re-enter Pakistan illegally in search of work. Those leaving Iran faced far greater difficulty in seeking to re-enter Iran illegally.

Once the repatriation programme started in 1992, the Iranian government began to place restrictions on the Afghan population, particularly in relation to their right to operate businesses, albeit through Iranian intermediaries, and to work in certain occupations. A worsening economic situation forced Iran to reduce subsidies and to demand contributions from the refugees towards the costs of education and health services. The economically marginal position of many Afghans led to acute suffering. Those who fled in the mid-1990s in response to the Taliban occupation, flooding in central and south-western Afghanistan and the fighting in Kabul, had to survive without access to subsidies or services and without the limited protection which refugee documentation accords. A study undertaken in July 1996 of refugees in Mashad and Tehran revealed a highly marginal level of existence, much as in Pakistan, in which intermittent daily labouring was the principle source of income.

The experience of exile has markedly changed attitudes within the population. Women have been compelled by circumstances to take on an economic role, even though this may not have been part of their lives prior to exile. In the cities of Iran, women have often had to fend for themselves without family support in a difficult and sometimes hostile urban environment, making them more assertive and independent. Many of them have had to engage in tailoring, embroidery and other forms of piecework at a fraction of the very low rates of pay which men receive. In the refugee camps of Pakistan, women have found themselves subject to greater restrictions on their mobility than had been the norm in their villages but some have nonetheless undertaken some work.

The presence of aid agencies among Afghan refugee populations in Pakistan, in combination with a greater level of access to education and health care in Iran than has been possible in Afghanistan, has led to female education and preventive health care becoming more highly valued. One consequence of this has been that refugee children are now more likely to survive infancy further increasing the population in exile. The value placed by returning refugees on healthcare and education may lead them to expect more in the way of public services once back in their home communities.

In addition to the millions of refugees who have fled across international borders, conflict and drought during the 1980s displaced over one

million Afghans within their own country. As the conflict shifted from a rural-based jihad against the Soviets to the more urban-based civil war of the 1990s, so huge numbers of city-dwellers were forced to flee. Some were allowed across international borders as refugees, but hundreds of thousands ended up as "internally-displaced persons" (IDPs). Since they do not qualify as refugees, many have had to fend for themselves while some have become the responsibility of the ICRC, UNHCR and other aid agencies.

The first major movement of IDPs was to Mazar-e-Sharif, following the rocketing of Kabul in August 1992. The rockets which rained on the capital in January 1994 drove many more Kabulis from their homes. When Pakistan closed its borders, they had to be accommodated in two enormous IDP camps near Jalalabad. From January 1997 onwards, the Taliban capture and scorching of the Shomali plains north of Kabul forced whole villages to flee. Some fled to the Panjshir Valley while around 200,000 sought refuge in the slums of Kabul itself. Over the 1999-2001 period, one of the worst droughts in living memory forced hundreds of thousands of Afghans in northern provinces to flee their land and seek refuge in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif or in IDP camps outside the cities.

The US's military action against Afghanistan in late 2001 made access to drought-affected areas almost impossible for humanitarian agencies. As a result, even more Afghans desperate for food and water flooded into IDP camps in Herat and Mazar. FThe collapse of Taliban power in the north led to reprisals against Pushtuns and forced many to flee, even though their descendants had lived in the region for over a century.

As access for humanitarian agencies to drought-affected areas eased after December 2001, migration slowed down and the summer of 2002 saw people returning to their villages in large numbers. Those who left Kandahar and Jalalabad have also largely returned, as have those stranded on islands on the Tajik border. However, the Pushtun settlers who fled from the north have found that not only is Pakistan unwilling to receive them, but fellow Pushtuns in the south of Afghanistan are also unwilling to offer hospitality. Throughout 2003, Pushtuns were continuing to arrive in southern Afghanistan to escape harassment and insecurity in the north swelling the IDP population of the south to 350,000. The IDP population has, however, increased dramatically as a direct consequence of insurgency and counter-insurgency operations, with people displaced in their hundreds of thousands. Population displacement has been particularly intense in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. Because of the high level of insecurity, it has not been possible for the Afghan

Government or the UN to provide more than minimal assistance to those thus displaced. Many have been compelled to take sanctuary with relatives in the city of Kandahar.
Pakistan's progressive closure of refugee camps has created an additional displaced population as returness find themselves unable to establish themselves in their villages of origin and rest as a floating population. Some are in temporary settlements scattered across southern Afghanistan. Others have headed for the cities.

Droughts in 2008 and 2011 led to further displacement, with the level of displacement in 2011 particularly significant. However, such displacement can be reversed in years of good harvest even if some families, or members of families, opt to look to the non-agricultural sector rather than return to their land.

The planned drawdown in the international military presence risks creating new conflict and, thereby, new causes of displacement. It is therefore important that the Afghan Government, with the support of the international community, develops the necessary capacity and flexibility to respond to these effectively.

A refugee chronology

1978: First refugees begin fleeing from midsummer onwards as fighting erupts in the wake of the Saur (April) Revolution.

1979: 600,000 refugees by the end of the year, fleeing to Pakistan (400,000) and Iran (200,000).

1980-83: Refugee exodus increases dramatically to 3.9 million as Soviet-Afghan military strikes against the resistance, including deliberate attacks on the civilian population in what some observers describe as "migratory genocide."

1987: Refugee populations in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere reach 5.9 million.

1989: Red Army troops withdraw in February. Fighting in Afghanistan reverts to that of a civil war as mujahideen continue their battle against the communist PDPA Kabul regime. Refugee numbers continue to rise to 6.1 million despite some refugee returns.

1990: The Afghan exile population reaches a record 6.2 million, nearly half the world's total refugee population. An estimated 350,000 have returned to Afghanistan since 1988.

1992: Najibullah's communist government falls to the mujahideen in April. An estimated 1.6 million refugees return home. Fighting in Kabul displaces 1 million Afghans.

1993-94: Factional fighting devastates much of Kabul with fighters often

showing complete disregard for civilians. Up to 1 million 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs) believed to have fled to other parts of the country. Another 1.3 million refugees return to peaceful areas. 3.4 million refugees still outside the country at the end of the year.
1994: Taliban forces capture Kandahar. Refugee numbers continue to fall
slowly with returns.
1995: Taliban capture Herat in September. Repatriation of refugees from
Iran comes to a halt. The Taliban reach the outskirts of Kabul. Refugee numbers stabilize at 2.7 million.
1996: Taliban capture Kabul in September. Fighting continues in north-ern
and central Afghanistan.
1997: Refugee population in exile stands at 2.6 million.
1998: Two huge earthquakes leave thousands homeless in N Afghani-stan.
1999: Taliban scorched earth policy in Shomali plain and Parwan dis-places
up to 100,000 Afghans. Concerns over forced repatriations of Afghans from
Iran.
2000: Drought displaces at least 500,000 during 2000-01. Pakistan re-fuses
aid for 'environmental refugees'. Thousands flee to Iran. An estimated 1 million Afghans remain internally displaced. Taliban conquer Takhar in
September forcing 170,000 to flee to Pakistan.
2001: US bombing campaign from October-December UN agencies evacuated
to Pakistan. 300,000 flee US bombing around Kandahar. Approx. 1.2 million internally displaced. All neighbouring countries close borders to refugees.
Afghan refugees total 3.4 million in Pakistan and 2.3 million in Iran.
2002: Nearly 1.8 million refugees return to Afghanistan, mainly from Pa-
kistan the world's largest repatriation for 30 years. Around 400,000 IDPs
return home while 800,000 more remain displaced. Over 50per cent of refugees
return to Kabul and Jalalabad. Around 100,000 Pushtuns flee persecu-tion

in north and west.
2003: Pakistan and Iran home to an estimated 4 million refugees even though nearly 2 million had returned by July 2003. Some returnees also heading back to Pakistan or Iran where conditions are less difficult. Britain begins forcible repatriation of refugees. Over 400,000 people remain displaced within Afghanistan, including persecuted Pushtuns from northern regions, where intermittent conflict continues, and kuchis, whose nomadic life has been shattered by drought and landmines.
2004: Further repatriation to Afghanistan, plus return migrations to Pakistan.
2005: Start of a nation-wide census of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.
2012: New pressure by the Pakistanis and Iranians for refugees to return.
2013: More than 5.7 million refugees voluntarily repatriated.

Sources: **AFP, BAAG, UNHCR**

Essential Contacts

BAAG, ICRC, IOM, MSF, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP

Essential reading

- *Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*--David Turton and Peter Marsden, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (Kabul, December 2002)
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- *Living in Exile: Report on a study of economic coping strategies among Afghan refugees in Pakistan,* British Agencies Afghanistan Group (London, December 1996)
- *Exile and Return: Report on a study on coping strategies among Afghan refugees in Iran and returnees to Afghanistan,* British Agencies Afghanistan Group (London, June 1996)
- *Tradition and Dynamism Among Afghan Refugees,* ILO (Geneva)
- *Left out in the Cold: The Perilous Homecoming of Afghan Refugees,* Hiram A Ruiz, US Committee for Refugees

Lack of Justice: A driver of instability

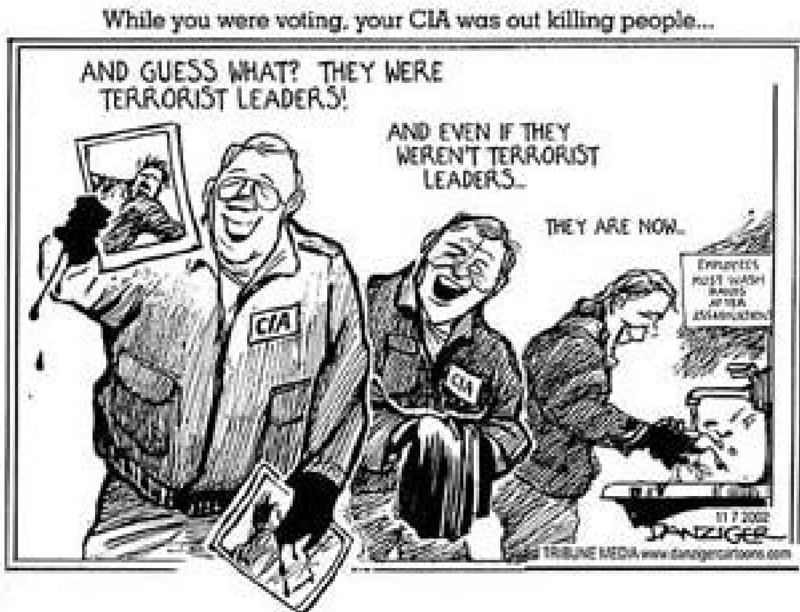
By Norah Niland

A pervasive sense of injustice at the hands of Afghan power brokers and warlords, is a major obstacle to the credibility of the government in Kabul. ***Norah Niland*** *provides the following analysis:*

Opinions on Afghanistan's future run the gamut from 'cautious optimism' to catastrophic doomsday scenarios. Much of the analysis is based on the alleged successes or failures of post-Bonn peace consolidation, democratization, and nation-building strategies. A major preoccupation is the impact of reduced US and allied engagement as Afghans face up to another round of presidential elections against a background of intensified conflict and faltering peace initiatives. There is also concern that the billions of dollars spent on Afghanistan have done more to aid and abet corruption than secure a foothold for responsible governance, the rule of law, or even a modicum of justice. Widespread impunity

has eroded confidence in the Bonn process and undermined the role of human rights in building a foundation for a just and peaceful future for Afghans.

Human rights activists are fully aware of the extent to which the post-Bonn process has empowered abusive authorities nowithstanding the rhetorical concern of major pro-government



players. They know that the absence of justice is a key driver of instability and deprivation. At the same time, the justice deficit has worked to the advantage of the armed opposition. The Taliban and others opposed to the Karzai administration have been able to exploit widespread disillusionment as hopes of peace and improved livelihood opportunities have faded. Immediate post-Bonn aspirations have given way to fears of increased violence, lawlessness, and abuse at the hands of government authorities and insurgent groups.

A long list of human rights violations such as ingrained discrimination and limited or erratic access to food and health care, lack of due process and freedom of expression, torture and unlawful detention, are routine and systematic. Abuses that are an affront to human dignity are also part of a system of governance whereby

authorities, in and outside the official state apparatus, use their power to advance agendas that are harmful to the wellbeing and safety of Afghan citizens. Many of the country's systemic human rights problems can be traced to the Bonn Agreement and the processes generated for its implementation. The ability of Afghans to confront and remedy their country's poor human rights record has also been undermined by the failed strategies and double standards of the US-led intervention that, nowadays, is widely resented.

From the onset of the US B-52 campaign in October 2001, just a few weeks after Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks in America, Afghans from different walks of life expressed the need for a break with the policies of the past that had led to the destruction of their country and the death, displacement and deprivation of millions. The majority of Afghans wanted a new political culture based on the rule of law. They wanted an inclusive, stable and democratic state that would promote and uphold respect for the human rights of all.

But in the weeks leading up to the Bonn Conference that adopted the roadmap for Afghanistan's post Taliban-regime transition, the very people who had created the chaos that was largely responsible for bringing the Taliban to power were helped to regain power. These included many notorious and well-known warlords. Some of them were responsible for acts that could be classified as war crimes.

With a few isolated exceptions, Afghans who were at the receiving end of discrimination and abuse were excluded from Bonn. A survey conducted between 2002 and 2004 found that 90per cent of Afghans do not want warlords to hold public office; 76per cent want them tried as war criminals. However, US priorities, policies, perspectives, and personalities were the chief drivers of Afghanistan's transition programme. US concerns and the perverse logic of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) took precedence over the safety and wellbeing of Afghans.

The Bonn state-building process effectively denied the political space that was needed to strengthen respect for core human rights and democratic values. The Bonn juggernaut – a series of events and processes that served primarily to strengthen the stranglehold of those with a long record of abusing power and the rights of their compatriots – sustained a narrative that democracy was taking hold. It was also used to justify the presence of foreign troops.

The Bonn process failed to provide a framework for a durable peace. It was an arrangement that excluded a significant number of Afghans including those in the Pushtun belt. It was not designed to roll back the injustices that had crippled Afghanistan. It ignored the need for accountability for war crimes. It returned to power many individuals who had earned the enmity of Afghans and was oblivious to atrocities and patterns of abuse that were deadly as well as inimical to a democratic and just society. The Bonn project that was rolled out under the auspices of the United Nations glorified a jihadist culture that was antagonistic to Afghans opposed to warlordism, unaccountable governance, and predatory power structures.

These failures that have undermined support and respect for human rights include a political system that rewards abusive power-holders whether in or outside government. The parliament is dominated by warlords thanks to an electoral system that has worked to the advantage of those with cash, influence and an ability to intimidate opponents. Private security companies that mushroomed to maintain a supply line for NATO and other troops have shown little interest in operating within the limits of the law and are rarely held to account. Funded by US and other taxpayers, they are known to have bought-off insurgents to secure free passage, and they have profited greatly from a $2 billion industry. They have thrived on lawlessness and insecurity and they have been a significant factor in the disorder that puts the lives of others in danger.

Systemic failures can also be traced to the way in which the US and its allies have disregarded international law while simultaneously claiming to support the improved rule of law. The blatant disregard by the government's backers for due process, particularly in relation to rendition (the apprehension and extra-judicial transfer of individuals from one state to another) torture and unlawful detention in Guantánamo, Bagram and other facilities throughout Afghanistan, have immediate and long term ramifications. The lack of rigorous accountability for events that have contributed to the staggering human cost of the war, particularly in terms of civilian casualties and night-raids, feed perceptions that human rights standards are a tool to advance the interests of powerful states. Such perceptions have undermined the credibility of civil society and other actors engaged in initiatives to counter impunity and egregious human rights violations.

Afghans from all walks of life can point to double-speak that underscores a major gap between rhetoric and reality concerning justice and human rights. A botched nighttime raid in Gardez in southeast Afghanistan in early 2010, for example, resulted in the death of three women, two of them pregnant, as well as two government officials, a police officer and a prosecutor. Initially the dead were described as insurgents, but after protests a US military investigation concurred that the dead were civilians. They apologized for the raid that was conducted on the basis of erroneous information. Such apologies are rare. The lack of impartiality, public scrutiny and accountability for similar incidents are widely seen as contempt for the rule of law and for the lives of Afghans.

Notions that a dysfunctional electoral system, largely crafted by

outsiders, and a pattern of flawed elections are acceptable or 'good enough for Afghans' create deep resentments. Such notions are also harmful to the efforts of those Afghans who have worked for a democratic state dedicated to safeguarding the human rights of all its citizens. Afghans, other than those who benefit from the mayhem and inequities that are integral to the post-Bonn state system, remain concerned that the US persists in its support for powerful individuals with long records of human rights violations. An example is Asadullah Khalid, a longtime US ally and close

friend of the President, Mr. Karzai. Khalid, a former governor of Ghazni and Kandahar provinces, was cited by Human Rights Watch for numerous alleged human rights violations and for using his influence to assist Karzai in the flawed 2009 presidential elections. He was nevertheless made chief of the National Directorate of Security, the country's spy agency, in September 2012, over the objections of human rights activists. President Obama visited Khalid in Washington at the end of 2012 when the Afghan spy chief entered the US for medical treatment subsequent to a suicide attack in Kabul that left him seriously injured.

Abusive power systems that profited from US political and financial largesse are only one of the problems Afghans will inherit as 'Afghanization', the current phase of the post-Bonn transition, unfolds. The country's judicial system is corrupt, weak and compromised as is policing and the management of prisons.

The weak capacity of such institutions is a major problem in a country where injustice is rampant and shapes the perspective of Afghans at the receiving end of *zalem* or cruel behaviour. Deeply entrenched prejudices and discrimination against females are compounded when victims seek help from the police and the courts; frequently, women are further victimized and held responsible for so-called 'honour' crimes and 'running away from home'. Land seizures, unlawful evictions, arbitrary detention, and selective poppy eradication are not unusual. Political marginalization and manipulation of tribal differences contributes to instability

and the dynamics of armed conflict. Presidential pardons have been dispensed for convicted rapists and drug traffickers.

Injustices are closely linked to powerlessness and poverty that undermine the ability of many Afghans to carve out a dignified life. There have been some improvements in the health and nutritional status of Afghans in recent years but the country remains at the bottom of the league in Asia for under-five mortality rates. Data on women shows that Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Approximately one third of Afghans are malnourished. Some nine million people, more than a third of the population, struggle to survive below the poverty line. In other words, they are largely unable to meet their basic minimum needs, an issue that should be a human rights as well as a political priority. Analysis of vulnerability in Afghanistan shows that it has a strong gender dimension linked to discrimination that relegates females to an inferior status in society and in the home.

High levels of vulnerability and marginalization also mean that a huge proportion of Afghans have limited resilience to shocks whether these are associated with the shrinking economy, armed conflict, extreme weather events and disasters linked to floods, drought, or earthquakes. The longevity of multiple strands of crisis in Afghanistan has seen the humanitarian situation deteriorate and the number of displaced increase in recent times. This, in turn, means that more lives are on the line and mortality rates are will increase if concerted measures are not taken to address the underlying structural problem of exclusion, discrimination, corruption, poor governance, and armed violence.

The long years of war and political turmoil in Afghanistan have added to the complexity of the problems confronting Afghans. However, it is of great significance that Afghans have an innate sense of justice and a strong sense of dignity and self-worth. When this is coupled with a rising tide of young people who aspire to a peaceful future and are assertive in challenging the harmful policies of the past, there are grounds for optimism. Afghanistan's human rights defenders led the challenge in 2010 to a blanket amnesty law that effectively green-lighted impunity. Numerous civil society actors throughout the country are engaged in an uphill but impressive campaign to roll back deeply engrained discrimination that marginalizes women, girls and minority groups.

The majority of Afghans want a just peace and means of rec-

onciliation that reflects what this implies, namely a process that is geared to ending armed violence, structural inequalities and the abuse of power. Building a state system that is inclusive and fair is critical to healing the wounds of a brutalized and fractured society. Building a political framework that is conducive to securing respect for human rights requires an acknowledgement that the absence of justice is a strategic issue and it must not be sidelined by the short-term expedient goals that have undermined the post-Bonn transition process. Initiatives to bring about positive transformative change in Afghanistan will have greater possibility of success than before when a culture of impunity lacks the support of powerful external and internal actors. Afghanistan is facing troubled and uncertain times but meaningful support for the human rights aspirations of Afghans will greatly facilitate a transformation that is in the best interests of the Afghan people.

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Women and the barriers of tradition

By Christina Lamb

For many women, particularly educated ones living in Kabul, life is far better today than it was under the Taliban. In urban areas, women can go to university, hold jobs in government ministries, set up businesses, and travel on their own. Only one in four women in Kabul wears a full chador when going to the bazaar or heading to work. Yet in many rural areas, the regime may have changed but the mentality remains the same. Women are increasingly abused and threatened. Even in some government ministries, conservative officials can turn out to be more Talib than the Taliban. British journalist and author ***Christian Lamb*** *looks to see how women are faring in Afghanistan today.*

On a grey March afternoon in Herat in 2008, I had the privilege of meeting an extraordinary woman called Maria Bashir, Afghanistan's first female prosecutor. It came as no surprise when, in 2011, she was presented an International Women of Courage award by Hillary Clinton. Her house had been bombed, she had to travel everywhere with a posse of armed bodyguards and her three children were being home-schooled as it was too risky for them to go out. The day I visited her of-

fice she had just received a letter warning; "Suicide bombers have come to Herat and you are the target." When I asked who would want to kill her, she reeled off a list. "They might be insurgents, or people who we've prosecuted — killers, thieves, kidnappers…. If a man beats his wife and she has a hospital report, I will sentence that man to jail. People don't like that."

Just down the road from her office in summer 2011 an angry mob surrounded a car containing two teenagers from different ethnic backgrounds who fell in love while working in an ice-cream factory. The crowd was incensed because the couple had dared travel together and was demanding they be stoned to death. Rescued by police they were sent to jail and the girl's own father called on the government to kill them.

What is going on in Afghanistan? One of the reasons given for removing the Taliban in 2001 was their repression of women. Not only did Mullah Omar and his regime ban women from working and girls from going to school, but they outlawed wearing lipstick, white shoes and shoes that click. They even renamed parks that had feminine names. After the Taliban were ousted, President George W Bush triumphantly declared in his 2002 State of the Union address: "The mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes… Today women are free."

The country's new Constitution guaranteed equal rights for women and reserved them 25per cent of the seats in Parliament meaning Afghanistan has more women in Parliament than America (17per cent). By 2011, 2.4 million Afghan girls were enrolled in school compared to a few thousand in 2001. On paper it looks good. And the fact that Maria Bashir had become Herat's chief prosecutor might have seemed a vindication of women's rights were it not that she was living in fear of her life.

Not long before I met Bashir, Kandahar's top policewoman, Malalai Kakar, was gunned down with her son. One of the country's best-known actresses fled to Canada after her husband was shot dead, and a female-rights activist was murdered in broad daylight outside her house. A jam maker had to flee her village after coming second in a televised competition for entrepreneurs even though she had appeared in full chador and sunglasses. Zakia Zaki, a mother of six who featured in the last edition of this guide as the head of Afghanistan's first private radio station, was assassinated in 2007, shot seven times in the head and chest as she slept with her 20 month old son.

So much for all the stories of women being able to throw off

their burqas, the blue shuttlecock robes that became synonymous with Talib oppression. After the initial optimism in the first few post-Taliban years, ten years on it was clear that the situation for most women had deteriorated. A half a million of those girls enrolled in school don't attend regularly. Many of the new girls' schools had been burnt down and there were cases of acid thrown in the faces of girls and teachers going to school or their food poisoned. In mid-2012, there were growing incidences of school girls being deliberately poisoned forcing the closure of their establishments.

The problem for Afghanistan's women is not just Taliban attacks. Though Afghanistan has seen major improvements in its health system, it remains the most dangerous place on earth to have a baby. Human rights groups estimate that at least 60 percent of marriages are forced marriages, the brides often as young as nine or ten, sometimes handed over by their own families to resolve feuds. Half of the women in prison are actually victims of domestic abuse who have tried to run away.

Some become so desperate that they set themselves on fire. Herat Central Hospital has a special burns unit where heavily bandaged women tell awful stories. Others flee to shelters. Like many of Afghanistan's problems this is partly a failure of leadership. Women may be present in parliament but they have little influence – those who speak out such as Malalai Joya end up suspended or in hiding. The government appointed only one woman — minister of women's affairs. President Hamid Karzai's own wife, Zeenat, an obstetrician, not only stopped working once her husband became president, but never appears in public.

"The problem is we have good written laws for women, but they are not implemented," said Maria Bashir.

The Afghan Constitution may guarantee equality but there is little political or judicial will to enforce laws that protect women's rights. The situation is not helped by the fact that the writ of government does not extend far in many of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and is exacerbated by corruption. In practice the status of Afghan women remains much lower than men and they are still generally regarded as the property of their husbands and fathers. Even middle class female entrepreneurs have to ask permission of their menfolk to receive bank loans. The conservative nature of society makes it risky for a woman to go to court independently and taking a problem outside the home continues to be seen as shameful.

Yet it hasn't always been this way. Herat's greatest cultural renaissance was in the fifteenth century and brought about by a queen - Gowhar Shad. The wife of Tamerlane's son Shah Rukh whose empire stretched from Turkey to China, she used her power to seek out the best architects to carry out grand projects and brought to court talented painters, calligraphers, philosophers and poets. Among those she sponsored was Abdul Rahman Jami, perhaps the greatest ever Persian poet, and Bihzad, her court artist, who is widely regarded as the master of Persian miniatures. After her husband died, Queen Gowhar continued ruling until she was murdered at the age of 80. For years afterwards she was seen as a symbol for women who would pay pilgrimage to her tomb.

Some of Afghanistan's male rulers did try to improve the lot of women. Abdur Rahman, who ruled from 1880-1901, may have been known as the Iron Amir but he did ban child marriage, forced marriages and exorbitant bride prices, and gave women the right to seek divorce in cases of cruelty. Perhaps influenced by his liberal wife Bobo Jan, the first Afghan queen to appear in public unveiled and wearing European dress, he also restored the rights of widows to inherit, and prohibited the custom forcing widows to remarry their husband's brothers. His grandson King Amanullah, who ruled from 1919-29, was so impressed by an eight-month tour of the capitals of Europe that he became determined to modernise Afghanistan. He regarded emancipation of women as an important part of this and scrapped the veil for women, dramatically removing that of his queen in public. "Tribal custom must not impose itself on the free will of the individual," he said. However this played into the hands of his conservative opponents who denounced him as un-Islamic and dishonouring the Afghan nation, and provoked widespread revolts in the countryside. Amanullah ended up fleeing in his Rolls Royce, discovering it was hardly the best vehicle for mud roads when it got stuck in the snow.

The next advances occurred in the 1950s and 1960s under King Zahir Shah, who attempted to reintroduce restrictions on child marriage and raised the legal age of marriage consummation from 9 to 15. His Prime Minister, Daoud Khan implemented a series of reforms enabling women to join the work force and enter politics. From 1959 women were allowed to enrol in Kabul University and take jobs in companies and factories as well as become air stewardesses on the national airline and announcers

on Afghan radio. In 1964 they were given the right to vote.

The Soviet invasion in 1979 also led to new opportunities for women. I have a photograph of a group of female students from Kabul University clad in tight jeans, tight T-shirts, and lipstick like students the world over, and another of women training as soldiers. They are from 1989 but it's hard to believe now. Once again such efforts were cast as anti-Muslim and helped fuel fundamentalism in Afghanistan. Though the Taliban is most associated with repressing women, it was before them, when the mujahed government took over in 1992, that women found themselves confined to the homes.

Throughout Afghanistan's history women's rights seem to take one step forward, two steps back. The issue has often played a key role in toppling regimes. There is a vast difference between rural and urban Afghanistan and it may be that the reforms were over-ambitious and imposed by a small elite out of touch with Afghanistan's highly conservative rural society. Most of these reforms have never been backed by efforts to make them take hold in society such as combating illiteracy. "Rather than focusing on educating women on their rights, it's the mentality of men they need to change," one woman told me.

After the Taliban fled Herat, in November 2001, I met a group of courageous women writers whom I dubbed the Sewing Circles. To be able to continue writing, which was banned by the Taliban they had met under the guise of sewing classes, the only activity women were still allowed to do. Once a week they would arrive at a door marked Golden Needle Sewing School in their burqas, bearing bags full of materials, scissors and thread. Underneath would be notebooks of writing. Inside, a brave literature professor from Herat University would take out his bust of Pushkin and begin discussions of writers such as Virginia Woolf, Dostoyevsky and James Joyce. I was astonished at their courage – these women had risked their lives to be able to write. Had they been caught they would have been imprisoned and possibly even hanged. Many ran secret classes for girls. One, Leila Razeqi, told me how she had stayed up till the early hours doing calculus to stop her brain from atrophying. They were excited about the end of the Taliban and the opportunities ahead. They spoke vividly of how much they hated the burqa.

Six years later, in 2007, I went back to find out what had happened to them. The first surprise was they were all still wearing burqas. "The regime has changed but mentality hasn't," said

Leila. One of the six founding members Homeira Naderi, had got married and moved to Iran. But most shocking was that two of the six were dead.

Maria Tanha had died after a car accident that by all accounts should not have been life-threatening. But she was unmarried, and with a man, and her family so ashamed that they refused to take her to hospital. Saddest of all was the story of Nadia Anjuman, the young poetess of the group. She had enjoyed critical success with a collection of her poetry Dark Flower. But her husband was so incensed that she wrote about women's rights and gave public readings that he beat her to death. She was just 25. Her brother took me to the graveyard on the stony hillside overlooking Herat where every Friday local people gather for picnics. Several women passed by and silently genuflected at her grave. "What happened to Nadia should make the world bow its head in shame," said her friend Leila. "Your prime ministers and presidents promised freedom to us Afghan women. That someone like Nadia is under the soil and her husband walks free should make you ask what is really going on here."

Christina Lamb, *until recently Washington correspondent for the Sunday Times, is now based in London with Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of her beat. She has reported widely from the region and is author of a number of books. Waiting for Allah: Pakistan's struggle for democracy (1992), The Africa house: the true story of an English gentleman and his African dream (1999), The sewing circles of Herat: my Afghan years (2002), House of stone: the true story of a family divided in war-torn Zimbabwe (2006) and Small Wars Permitting: Dispatches from Foreign Lands (2008).*

INSPIRE:
Afghanistan's Hannah Montana

(*INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)*

Her name means Good News, she is one of Afghanistan's best known pop singers, and has performed for the Obamas at the

White House. But Afghan singer Mozdah Jamalzadah is best known for her weekly TV show challenging taboo subjects like divorce, domestic violence and forced marriages. Described byTIME magazine as "part Oprah, part Hannah Montana." The Mozhdah Show airs twice a week, and combines music and discussion with a studio audience. It might look fluffy with 26-year-old Mozdah holding court from a pink and yellow sofa, but her real mission is to improve the lot of women and children. "Today, we will be talking about problems in the family," is her trademark opening line before bringing in psychology professors, marriage experts and actors to role-play scenarios such as a family going through a divorce.

Born in Kabul, Mozhdah was only five when her family fled to Canada. She insists she never wanted to be a singer but thought music the best way to spread her message. Her hit single "Afghan Girl" was recorded in Canada and spread throughout the Afghan diaspora. It was voted best song of the year in Afghanistan in 2010. She describes it as a song for the men of Afghanistan. "It is about all the great female heroes in Afghan history, and I try to remind men that women too can be powerful." When a new TV station in Kabul contacted her about hosting a music show she jumped at the chance both to go back to her home country and inspire Afghan women. She took a box set of Oprah episodes as a model.

"What we try to do is we try to mildly bring the issues up and mix it up with a song," she says. Though she is mobbed by autograph hunters, not everyone is a fan. Her Facebook page and YouTube videos are frequently posted with threats. "Someone should put a bullet through her head and stop her from doing this" read one, "she's a disgrace to our nation." Mozhdah says that some in the Afghan government are annoyed by her subject matter and tight fitting clothing. They once stopped one of her shows from airing after she appeared without a headscarf. But Mozhdah will not be intimidated.

Afghan Culture: Then and now

By Whitney Azoy

Afghan culture is noteworthy for both its diversity and traditionalism. The combination has fascinated anthropologists for the last two centuries. Positioned at an ancient crossroads of Eurasia, Afghanistan has witnessed countless migratory, military, religious, commercial, artistic and intellectual movements. It is here that the gigantic Himalayan range finally dwindles to permit passage between Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. Even today the only "all-weather" road crossing the Hindu Kush at 3,400 meters, is blocked by snow several days each winter. (SEE CULTURE INFOBRIEF)

Four thousand years ago the great Aryan migrations from north of the Caspian Sea towards the Indus Valley relied on Afghanistan for their passage to the south. Wave after wave of migrant-warriors have done the same ever since, lured by warm climate and rich soil. The Moghuls, succeeded in using Afghanistan as a stepping stone to the wealth of India. Others never made it that far: the Hazaras of central Afghanistan and the more recently arrived Uzbeks, Turkomans, and Kyrgyz settled in Afghanistan permanently. The failed Soviet occupation of 1979-1989 can be counted in the litany of Central Asian invasions.

From south to north, the movement has tended to consist of ideas rather than people. Buddhism reached China by way of Afghanistan's passes through the Hindu Kush. Bamiyan, in the center of the country at 2,800 meters, is the best known Buddhist site, but it is only one of thousands of Buddhist archeological sites along this route. Far from a transient passage, Buddhism thrived on the ground for the better part of a millennium.

Northern Afghanistan was known in ancient times as "Bactria" or "Ariana." It straddled the best route between the Mediterranean and the Far East. Contrary to popular claims, Alexander of Macedon's passing had little impact on Afghanistan's ethnic composition, but its cultural impact is still present. The fusion of Greek and Buddhist cultures – a 4th century BCE alliance of civilizations – can be seen today in Gandharan sculptures. Fifteen hundred years later, Marco Polo traveled stage by stage along an already well organized east-west chain of trading communities.

It was in Afghanistan that the two main communication routes of ancient Asia – north/south and east/west – crossed and established a pattern for ethnic diversity that persists (despite official Afghan denials) to this day. With variety came sophistication. Cities like Balkh and Herat hosted libraries and universities. Marketplaces, some of them held for

centuries on the same weekday, offered products from Rome, central India, and perhaps even Japan. Afghanistan during the premodern world, was in every sense "connected."

Cultural traditionalism

Given Afghanistan's history of ideas and diversity, it is natural to ask how the country arrived at the strict and often closed-minded traditionalism of today. How did a crossroads, once on the cutting edge of cosmopolitan exchange, turn into a land of quaint dress, antique dwellings, crumbling monuments, and next to no government?

In short, when did Afghanistan cease to grow? The answer is that two catastrophes struck Afghanistan in the 13th century CE. First, Genghis Khan swept across the land leaving destruction in his wake. Mongol hordes destroyed much of the north – including Balkh, formerly "The Mother of Cities" – beyond repair. (The destruction is still apparent in the vast, leveled, and utterly vacant interior of old Balkh.)

The old trading networks struggled to recover, only to find that the old Silk Road that linked trade from the east to the west was fast becoming economically irrelevant. From the mid-1400s, improvements in navigation, notably the increasingly wide-spread use of the compass, which enabled ships to sail beyond the sight of land, made traveling by sea both cheaper and safer than the overland routes. Landlocked Afghanistan was left high, dry, and beyond the reach of global development. The dynamic cross-roads became a static dead-end: its importance reduced, its contacts greatly curtailed, and its leaders increasingly xenophobic. (In the years following the outbreak of fighting against the communist regime in the summer of 1978 and the Soviet invasion of December, 1979, many of these old routes regained importance as guerrilla, refugee and nomad trails leading from Afghanistan into neighbouring Pakistan). Abdur Rahman, the "Iron Amir" who consolidated central government power (1880-1901), forbade railways and other instruments of modernity. Later would-be reformers battled custom to little avail, losing their thrones and sometimes their lives. Result: Outside the downtown areas of a few cities, the culture of 21st century Afghanistan remains frozen in the traditions of the past.

Cultural values

While each significant ethnic group has its own language and home territory, all share the same values which, at their core, relate to the notion of individual and family honor. For men, the prime component is physical bravery; for women, chastity (which reflects on male relatives). These are the bedrocks of personal reputation in a society where reputation, rather than money or official status, is a person's greatest resource. Other values related to honor and reputation include hospitality, seniority, and Islamic piety (or at least its appearance). The "code" of Pushtunwali, so often celebrated as the centrepiece of Pushtun behaviour, is essentially an intensified statement of these values. With the maintenance of reputation so critical in daily affairs, Afghans can be quick to take offense…but also guarded and patient in concocting the appropriate response. The male personality ideal is expressed by the word sangueen: "heavy," controlled in word and gesture, unflustered by tribulation, dignified in the sense of gravitas.

Cultural structures

The most basic principle structure in organizing Afghan society is the residential extended family. In rural areas three or more generations still live "from one pot (az yak deg)." Like all peoples everywhere, the roles and activities of family members depend largely on age: Kids do kids' things; adults live adult lives. And yet young children make real contributions to the household economy. Little girls take care of even younger siblings; 11-year-old

boys frequently pasture their family livestock – analogous to a "stock portfolio" – all day long. At the other end of life, seniors are still considered repositories of wisdom merely on account of years lived within a culture that, until recently, seemed almost changeless.

While women are respected within the domestic sphere, Afghanistan is very much a man's world. The descent system, a basic feature of individual identity, is patrilineal. Residence is patrilocal: The new couple typically goes to live within the groom's father's household. That household is patriarchal: "ruled" by the senior male. And, consistent with Muslim doctrine, males may have as many as four wives at a time. (Fewer actual do nowadays because of the cost – economic and, some admit, emotional.) In this regard, the Talib restrictions on women are exaggerations based less on Islam than on existing custom. Before the Taliban most Afghan women wore the burqa (a Pashto word, previously known in Kabul by the Persian term chadry) outside their homes; the Taliban simply made the garment mandatory.

Political culture

While debate rages in the West regarding the optimum size of government, Afghanistan offers a useful reference point: Traditionally Afghans have had weak government and, recently, next-to-no government at all.

In the absence of functional nation-wide political institutions, issues of legitimate authority – who has the right to make decisions? – are forever up for grabs. Power resides not in impersonal structures but in ambitious individuals with public reputations ("names") for controlling events, for getting things done. Enormous effort goes into the maintenance and enhancements of such reputations, and virtually all males – at whatever level – participate in what amounts to a zero-sum game: The greater one person's reputation, the less is left for others.

Hence the contentiousness of day-to-day life and the hesitation of Afghans to cooperate beyond the extended family. Hence the insistence on maintenance of personal "honor." With individual reputations constantly in flux – their "names" rising and falling – every public act is scrutinized for its political implications. Put differently, in public life there's no such thing as an apolitical act. All expatriate public behavior, no matter how innocently meant, is understood politically.

Cultural change

Starting with the first Marxist coup of April 1978, the pace of Afghan cultural change has increased exponentially. Ham-handed efforts at leftist reform led to radical Islamist reaction. Women have never been more free than under the Marxists – and never less so, a mere decade later, than under the Taliban. As this article is written in 2011, the future of Afghan gender relations is very uncertain indeed.

There is nothing uncertain, however, about the new communications revolution. Telephoning beyond Kabul was problematic enough in the pre-conflict 1970s. For the next two decades there was little phone service at all. Then from 9/11 well into 2003 the satellite phone was king. Today there are 13 million cell phones in a population of 26 million. While Afghanistan remains a "radio culture," television is now available in distant provinces. One fondly remembered Kunduz tea house used to sit its clients, four or five at a time, facing each other on broad, carpeted benches called takhts. Men from different villages chatted for hours about local matters (crops, weather, gossip), their talk animated by proverbs and snatches of classical Persian poetry. Now the same establishment features individual chairs ranged in rows and facing a satellite TV. Customers return home with images of Baywatch or Bollywood rather than the folk stories of Mullah Nasruddin.

No doubt Afghanistan has benefitted, however unevenly, from post-Taliban modernity. Electricity, now 24/7 in Kabul, has come to more rural areas than ever. Urban students flock to courses on IT, English, and business administration. In Afghanistan's newly free press, almost anything goes. The government claims that 75per cent of the populace has access to basic health care.

There are downsides. Cities stagger under the load of ever more arrivals. Elders growl about a perceived weakening of family structure. Society suffers from a pandemic of massive corruption, fueled by "reconstruction" money from the international community, and narcotics money generated to satisfy international demand. Louis Dupree, the irrepressible and irreplaceable pioneer of Afghan cultural studies, wrote half a century ago how corruption had always been a fact of Afghan life "within the limits of cultural deviance." Since 9/11 those limits have been grossly transgressed, some fear beyond any hope of reversal.

So Afghan culture today abounds in contradictions. Former

notions of loyalty exist side-by-side with blatant side-switching opportunism. Differences in ethic lifestyles dwindle, but ethnic identities become more divisive. Islam remains the sole religious ideology, but its power seems to be growing in parts of the South while Kabul and much of the North display traces of secularism. On the roads immediately outside the capital city – roads now far less secure than when I arrived forty years ago – camels and Hummers share the same newly paved surface…and dodge the same newly gaping potholes. The Afghan age of innocence, if indeed there ever was one, is gone for good.

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The celebrated Babur Gardens, restored by the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN) in a successful campaign to restore Afghanistan's threatened cultural landmarks. Photo AKDN

INSPIRE: Babur Gardens--A case study where culture makes a difference

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

Afghanistan's needs are so immediate and overpowering that it might be tempting to rank cultural issues relatively low on the list of national development priorities. The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is proof, however, that cultural regeneration not only improves the quality of life, but can also play a critical role in any national development strategy. Cultural awareness and pride are essential

components of the Afghan spirit, particularly among young people, who are repelled by political infighting, greed and war. Afghan youth seek a clearer notion of their own identity. They require a more coherent understanding of their past and what their nation represents. Recognizing this, other aid groups have now begun to incorporate culture into their initiatives.

In 2002, AKDN began to rehabilitate the Bagh-e-Babur (Babur's Gardens), an early 16th century terraced domain that includes the tomb of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Moghal Empire. AKDN's restoration, which has been underway for six years, began with the reconstruction of large sections of the 1.5 kilometre long Pakhsa (baked mud) perimeter walls. This phase of the reconstruction culminated with the rehabilitation of the Queen's Palace, a late 19th century structure built by Amir Abdurrahman Khan. In the process, rehabilitation teams excavated and reconstructed the historic water channels and tanks, which provided irrigation for the garden until the early 20th century. They also restored Babur's tomb along with the 17th century Shahjahan Mosque, which now conform to their original designs. At the foot of the garden near the Kabul River, a reconstructed caravanserai, similar to those found in Baku and elsewhere in Central Asia, now provides space for a visitor's centre, shops and offices.

Wherever possible the garden's rich horticulture, including fruit trees and plants, which were described in meticulous detail by Babur himself in the Baburnama (Babur's memoirs), has been restored. A crucial part of the rehabilitation work involved improving access, drainage and flood protection facilities for the 10,000 inhabitants of the surrounding residential area. Rare bird and other wildlife have now begun to return.

Since early 2008, Babur's Gardens have been maintained and operated by an independent trust, which managed to become self-sustaining in 2010, enabling hundreds of thousands of visitors to use the site for cultural and recreational purposes each year.

In a similar project, Jolyon Leslie, a South African architect and one of the country's most experienced cultural experts, has been working on the renovation of the war-damaged quarters of the Old City of Kabul, once a crossroads of civilizations. An elaborate blend of Indian, Persian and Central Asian influences is noticeable, not only in the Old City's unique architecture, but also in its arts and crafts. War shattered much

of the Old City's craft industry, leaving most of its inhabitants impoverished.

The AKDN has sought to conserve key historic buildings, including houses, mosques, shrines and public facilities, and the transformation since the programme's launch has been stunning. Upgrading works have dramatically improved living conditions for some 35,000 Old City residents. Socio-economic training for hundreds of households in the neighbourhoods of Asheqan wa Arefan, Chindawol and Kuche Kharabat have fostered newly found skills in tailoring, embroidery, and weaving. The recent reclamation of Baghe Qazi (Judge's Garden), a 3.5-hectare public garden, located in the heart of the Old City, will also enable local residents to benefit from using the green space for recreational and sporting activities.

The Turquoise Foundation, which started its Old City rehabilitation work in 2006, has also contributed to the restoration. Like the AKDN, the Turquoise Foundation has rebuilt homes, improved basic infrastructure and preserved historic buildings. It has also focused on rebuilding the country's neglected craftwork by establishing the Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture, which offers schools in woodworking, calligraphy & painting, ceramics and jewellery & gem-cutting. It has also opened a school in Murad Khane, the artistic quarter of Kabul's Old City. It ahs helped sell nearly one million US dollars worth of traditional Afghan arts and crafts both at home and abroad.

Although the work so far has been impressive, more remains to be accomplished. Many other historic buildings in the capital and in other Afghan cities have been neglected for too long and are now in danger of collapsing. Some of these buildings have also suffered from deliberate destruction by ruthless real estate entrepreneurs and corrupt government officials. Some buildings are knocked down overnight in a bid to avoid protection orders, which, in any case, are frequently not enforced if the police have been paid off.

In 2009 the AKDN completed the restoration of the imposing 19th-century brick mausoleum of Timur Shah in central Kabul. Responsible for consolidating the political gains made by his father Ahmad Shah Durrani, considered by many as the founder of the modern state of Afghanistan, Timur Shah was responsible for transferring the seat of the power from Kandahar to Kabul. The remaining open space surrounding the mausoleum has been

reclaimed to serve as a public garden in a densely crowded part of the city.

Renovation in other cities

But Kabul is not the only place where urgently needed renovation is being carried out. In the ancient western Afghan city of Herat, well known for its historic architecture, the AKDN has worked at upgrading and documenting surviving historic quarters and monuments of the Old City. This includes the restoration of the Ikhtyaruddin Citadel and the Char Suq cistern. It has undertaken additional rehabilitation work in the Timurid era shrine complex built for Abdullah Ansari in Gazurgah, northeast of the city.

The restoration of urban monuments, houses and public spaces, as well as related cultural programmes, have been important sources of training for craftsmen, creating employment and facilitating economic regeneration. But perhaps most importantly, the work undertaken by AKDN, Turquoise Foundation and other organizations is also creating a sense of normality and hope in a country deeply affected not only by decades of conflict, but also religious and ethnic division. Albeit costly, the investment in cultural heritage needs to become of part basic development if Afghanistan is ever to emerge from its current quagmire.

Ethnic and tribal groups

By Ali Wardak

Afghanistan is a mosaic of different ethnic and tribal groups, most of whom have lived together for centuries. These include Pushtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baluch, Brahui, Nuristani, Pashai, Pamiri, Kirghiz, Qizilbash, Mongols (also referred to as Moghuls), Arabs, Gujars, Kohistanis, Bayats, Wakhis and Jats. In addition, a large population of nomads and small numbers of Hindus and Sikhs also live in Afghanistan. These ethno-linguistic groups are referred to as qawm (tribe, people), wolas (tribe, people) or taifa (ethno-linguistic group, tribe).

Group members are identified by their distinct languages or accents, ethnic origins, and sometimes by their specific cultural and religious practices and physical features. Some groups form the majority in specific regions, for example, the Pushtuns to the south and east, the Tajiks and Uzbeks to the north and the Hazaras in central Afghanistan.

Linguistic, cultural and geographical characteristics all play an important role in forming the ethnic/tribal identities of Afghan people. However, the opportunities offered by trade, employment, universities and government or military service have pulled generations of Afghans from different ethnic/tribal backgrounds into urban areas to live and work side by side. Inter-marriages and shared religious and social activities have further resulted in a multi-ethnic fusion and strengthened the multi-cultural Afghan identity at the expense of ethnic/tribal affiliations, at least in urban centres.

Many people from different ethnic backgrounds see themselves first as Afghans and only second as, for example, Pushtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras or Uzbeks.

In Kabul, Herat and other urban centres, where intermarriages among members of different ethic/tribal groups are common, tribal identities have been absorbed by new 'metropolitan' identities such as Kabuli and Herati. As there has never been a systematic and complete census in Afghanistan, little reliable data exist regarding the total population and its various ethno-linguistic groups. This is one reason why the subject has become highly controversial and politicized in recent years in particular among the various Afghan factional groups and warlords who

At home on the farm. Afghanistan's ethnic and tribal groups are highly diverse, but all feel a national identity that makes them fundamentally Afghan.
Photo©Edward Girardet

have exploited ethnicity and religion for their own political and economic gains.

After over three decades of war, the Bonn Agreement of December 2001 authorised the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to conduct the first systematic national census in time for the national elections in 2004. However, as the post-Taliban administrations have been dominated by rival warlords, the UN authorities along with many Afghans fear that the census may be influenced by those with guns, money and political power as happened during the 2001 emergency Loya Jirga.

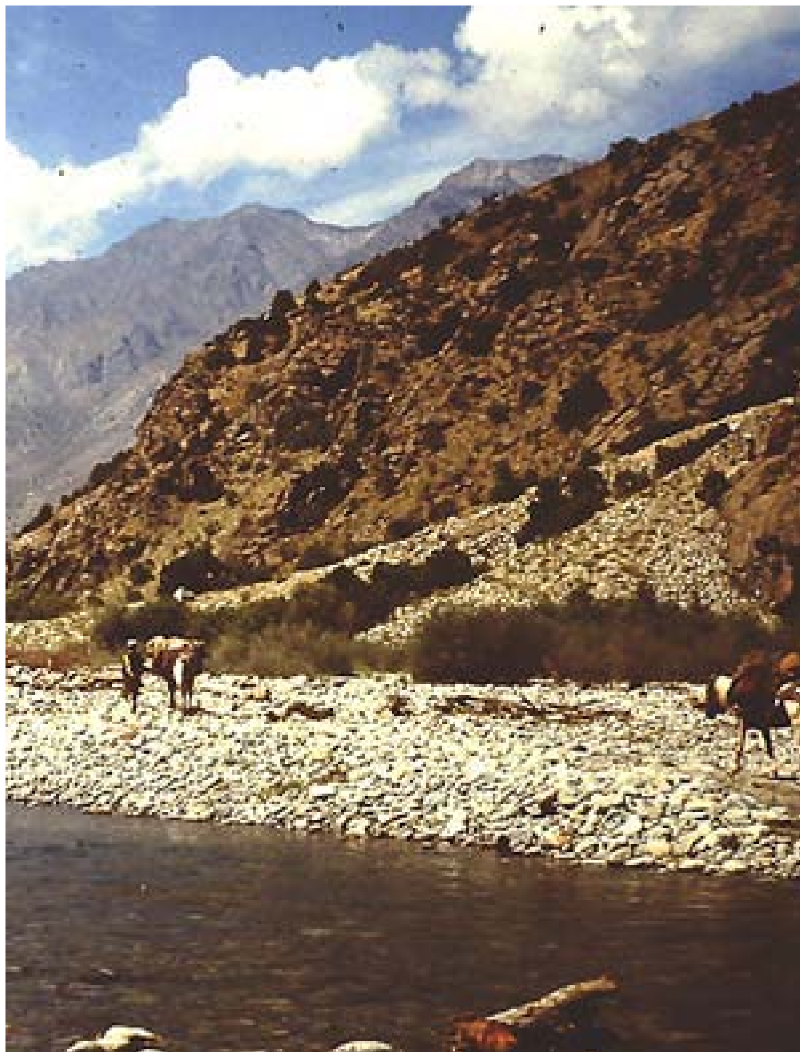
As a result of these concerns a preliminary 'pre-census household listing' is planned, to count every household and collect basic information about the number of residents and their age and gender. The issues of ethnic/tribal affiliation plus more detailed data on occupation, household income and education will be left to a more complete census to be conducted in the future. The collection and compilation of this data is likely to take a few years.

To understand Afghanistan's ethno-linguistic make-up, it is crucial to look at the geographic distribution of its various tribal groups. While the map below indicates the locations of these groups, it does not reveal the more complex picture of inter-tribal mixing and coexistence in many urban centres.

The description which follows is organized according to the relative size of each ethnic/tribal group, starting with Pushtuns, the largest such group in Afghanistan. Pushtun The majority of Afghan Pushtuns have traditionally lived in the south and east of Afghanistan. Large communities of Pushtuns have also settled in the north and west of the country, and several hundred thousand live a fully nomadic life. However, after the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001, Pushtuns particularly in the north became the victims of targeted violence, murder, extortion and looting at the hands of warlords associated with the the former Northern Alliance (now split into the National Coalition of Afghanistan and the National Front of Afghanistan). This forced tens of thousands of Pushtuns to flee to the south in search of safety often ending up in rudimentary camps for displaced people. Although most of these displaced people have returned to their homes, some continue to be in potentially dangerous disputes with the warlords who grabbed their agricultural/pastoral lands.

Pushtuns

Tribal Pushtuns constitute the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Estimates from the 1960s and 1970s (when the total Afghan population was around 13-14 million) suggested that settled Pushtuns constituted roughly half of the country's population. According to a 1981 projection by the former- USSR's Academy of Sciences, based on the Afghan government's incomplete 1979 census, Pushtuns formed 55 percent of Afghanistan's settled as op-



posed to nomadic population. Working on these figures, American anthropologist Louis Dupree estimated the Pushtun population at 6.5 million in 1980, while British writer Anthony Hyman put the figure at seven million two years later. However figures from the 1990s vary more widely. According to T. Eighmy's 1990 report on the subject, Pushtuns form just 38 percent of the Afghan population, whereas the CIA World Factbook of 2013 put this figure at 42per cent. The Wak Foundation put the total number of settled Pushtuns in Afghanistan at 63 percent in 1998. In the same year, the experienced German Afghanologist, B. Glatzner, concluded: "Pushtuns are estimated to account for between 40 percent and 60 percent of Afghan nationals."

Around 15 million Pushtuns live across the border in Pakistan, mainly in the North West Frontier Province. Also known as 'Pathans', they were artificially cut off from their Afghan cousins by the 'Durand Line', drawn up by the British in 1893 to mark the Afghan border but never recognized by successive Afghan governments.

Afghanistan's Pushtuns are generally divided into Durrani

and Ghilzai branches, with further sub-branches whose names are often suffixed with zai or khil. Pushtuns are mostly Sunni Muslims and speak Pashto one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. However, significant numbers of Dari-speaking Push-

tuns live in Kabul, Herat, Kunduz, Parwan and other provinces. The overwhelming majority of settled Pushtuns are farmers. And it is mainly the farm, the orchard, the water-spring and canal, the water-mill, animal husbandry and the manufacturing of basic agricultural tools around which the Pushtun economy and society are organized.

At the heart of this social organization is the Pushtun kalay, or village. The average kalay is a small socio-economic unit that normally consists of several extended families which are directly related to a common ancestor. The average size of a kalay ranges from about 50 to 200 individuals who normally attend the same village mosque. It is usually a self-sufficient socio-economic unit within which people are not only related to one another through blood ties, but also through established reciprocal relationships. They share agricultural tools, goods, gifts, favours and services.

The norms of reciprocity are governed at a local level by trabgani the code of behaviour within which members of each kalay cooperate and compete with one another. Trabgani is a source of both cohesion and division among kin in different circumstances, but should not be interpreted as mere 'rivalry'.

On a more general level, reciprocity in the Pushtun kalay and individual behaviour in society are governed by the centuries-old Pushtun code of behaviour, Pushtunwali. One pair of experienced Western Afghanologists describe it in this way: "In addition to the basic requirements of Islam, Pushtuns observe the code of Pushtunwali. It is simple but demanding. Group survival is its primary imperative. It demands vengeance against injury or insult to one's kin, chivalry and hospitality toward the helpless and unarmed strangers, bravery in battle, and openness and integrity in individual behaviour.

Much honour is given to Pushtuns who can successfully arbitrate the feuds that are endemic among them. Fines and blood money are devices frequently used to limit violence among rival families.

Pushtunwali is a code that limits anarchy among a fractious but vital people. It has influenced other groups within the country who must deal with similar environmental and social realities" (Newell and Newell, 1981).

Whether *Pushtunwali* has influenced other Afghan ethnolinguistic groups or not, many of its demands such as hospitality, bravery and individual integrity are central elements of the national culture, shared by most Afghans whatever their ethnic

background. Such values constitute the basis of the moral order and of informal social control in Afghan villages and tribes, which have historically resisted the penetration of successive governmental mechanisms of formal social control.

Pushtuns have contributed significantly to Afghan culture and society. They have historically resisted the attempts of foreign military powers to subjugate them. For about two centuries, from Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1747 to President Daoud who was overthrown by a Marxist military coup in 1978, Pushtuns ruled Afghanistan as Amirs and Kings.

Alongside other Afghan tribes, many Pushtuns fought successfully against Soviet forces in the 1980s. According to some observers, however, clan loyalties prevented resistance fighters from adopting more effective regional tactics against the Soviets, with some Pushtun groups preferring to operate in a more localized (and limited) manner.

Nevertheless, leading Pushtun commanders such as Abdul Haq of the Hezb-e-Islami's Younis Khalis faction managed to overcome such parochialism by organizing highly mobile guerrilla groups operating inside Kabul itself as well as throughout the eastern region. Other key Pushtun personalities, past and present, include: Mirwais Hotak, Ahmad Shah Durrani, Nazo Ana, Malalai, Sayed Jamal ad Din Afghani, Mahmud Tarzi, Mohammad Zahir Shah, Najibullah Ahmadzai, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid, Hamid Karzai and Mohammad Hanif Atmar.

Tajiks

Afghan Tajiks are predominantly settled in the north and northeast of Af- ghanistan. Estimates from the 1970s reflected in the work of Dupree and Hyman suggested that the total number of Tajiks in Afghanistan was around 3.5 million (approximately 25 percent of the population in the 1970s). The Soviet Academy of Sciences' 1981 projection put the figure at 19 percent. More recently, Tajiks have been reported as forming anything from 12 percent (Wak Foundation, 1998) to 25 percent (Eighmy 1990) and 27 percent (CIA World Factbook 2013) of the Afghan population. It is important to mention that the estimated 600,000 Persian-speaking inhabitants (Farsiwan) of the western city of Herat and its surrounding areas are often incorrectly referred to as Tajiks.

A much larger number of Tajiks (around six million) live in

neighbouring Tajikistan. Afghan Tajiks are predominantly Sunni Muslims and speak Dari (Afghan Persian) one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. Working mainly as farmers in fertile mountainous valleys and foothills, the social organization of the Tajik economy and society resembles that of the settled Pushtuns of Afghanistan: the largely kinship (or valley)based Tajik *deh* (village), the basic unit of collective action, is socially organized around the agricultural farm, vineyard, orchard, water-mill, canal/spring, and the processing of agricultural products.

Within the *deh,* Tajik villagers are not only tied to one other through kinship and/or area-based relationships, but also through the institutionalized reciprocity which their agricultural economy requires. They exchange favours, services, gifts, agricultural products and tools, which create strong mutual obligations among donors and recipients.

The rules of reciprocity are spelled out by *abdurzadagi,* the established code of behaviour which guides members of the village-based kin-group on whom to cooperate with, whom to compete with, whom to marry, and in short how to live as an individual in the community. The moral and social values associated with *abdurzadagi* often coexist in a symbiotic relationship with religious values expressed in the village mosque, itself an important part of the moral and social order of the deh. Tajik inhabitants of valleys and villages often trace their roots to one or more common ancestor(s). However, unlike the Pushtuns, they tend to refer to themselves by their regional name (e.g. Panjshiri, Ghorbandi, etc.) rather than an ancestral name. Social boundaries are not very rigidly drawn; whoever lives in the region may assume its regional identity. Some scholars categorize this form of social formation as ‘peasantized’ rather than ‘tribalized’. Despite the fact that Tajiks are mainly farmers, many migrated to and settled in urban areas during the 1950s-70s, particularly in Kabul. They benefited from modern educational and technical facilities and achieved very high standards of educational and professional qualification.

Many educated Tajiks occupied high-ranking positions in government and played a very important role in running the bureaucratic machinery of successive Afghan administrations. As one writer put it: “Because they [Afghan Tajiks] make up the bulk of the educated elite and possess considerable wealth in Kabul and Herat, they have significant political influence. Their influence lies predominantly in the government ministries, public services,

and trade bodies" (Javad,1992). The development of modern Afghanistan's economic, cultural and educational institutions prior to the Soviet invasion owed much to the dedication of many talented Tajiks, and their contribution to Afghan culture and society has been tremendous. Moreover, Tajiks contributed very significantly to the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviet invading forces. Some of Afghanistan's best-known and most effective guerrilla commanders, such as Ahmed Shah Massoud, were Tajik. Other key past and present Tajik personalities include: Mawlana Jalal ad Din Mohammad Balkhi, Rabi'a Balkhi, Habibullah Kalakani (known as Bacha-e-Saqao), Burhannudin Rabbani, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, Atta Mohammad Noor, and Amrullah Saleh.

Hazaras

Hazaras live predominantly in the central mountainous region of Afghanistan known as Hazarajat, and a significant part of the population also live in Kabul, Parwan, Ghazni, Herat and in some other Afghan provinces. But a large number have settled permanently in the Pakistan city of Quetta.

Estimates of Afghanistan's Hazara population from the early 1980s range from 800,000 (Dupree, 1980) to around 1.5 million (Hyman, 1982). The USSR's Academy of Sciences' 1981 projection calculated that they formed eight percent of the Afghan population, where the CIA World Factbook put the figure at 9 percent . However, Eighmy put this figure at 19 percent in 1990. Hazaras speak Hazaragi, which is a distinct dialect of Dari. As predominantly Shi'a Muslims, they are mostly followers of the Ja'faria ('Twelver') school. They are divided into various sub-tribes and large kinship-based social units and their names are usually prefixed by Dai, in the way that Pushtuns use the suffixes khil and zai.

As predominantly herders and farmers, the social and economic organization of the Hazara *qaria/deh* (village) is similar to that of the Tajik *deh*. It is usually a geographically bounded area that comprises a number of extended families with members of various villages tracing their common ancestral roots to a subtribe or clan.

As among Pushtuns and Tajiks, clan leaders (*maliks, khans* and particularly *sayeds*) exercise a considerable amount of authority in Hazara society. Despite attempts by Hazara warlords to undermine *sayeds* (who are considered to be descendants of

the Prophet and are usually religious scholars), they remain the centre of authority at the local level.

In practice, the *sayed* is a preacher, teacher, spiritual leader and interpreter of religious laws and doctrines. Often based at the *takia khana* (Shi'a mosque), he also plays an important role in the resolution of disputes. However, the social organization of the Hazara economy and society is also closely related to the consolidation of Afghanistan as a centralized state, which led to the forced subjugation of all the state's internal opponents.

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who in 1880 became King of Afghanistan, was obsessed with the centralization of government power in an era of widespread anarchy, when local khans, mirs, pirs and mullahs controlled different parts of the country and continually fought with one another. To achieve this goal, the King used all possible means of repression. These included deportation of his Ghilzai Pushtun rivals to the remote areas of Turkistan (now the northern region of Afghanistan), inciting negative religious sentiments between Sunnis and Shi'as, and the brutal killing of all rivals.

During Abdur Rahman Khan's two decades of tyrannical rule, Hazaras were the most severely affected. The government employed its predominantly Sunni subjects to forcibly repress the Hazaras' resistance to the King's emerging central government. This resulted in large-scale violence against the Hazaras, including looting of houses and the killing of numerous men and women.

Furthermore the Hazaras were discriminated against as Shi'as (often having to perform the most menial jobs) and were largely excluded from the social, cultural and political life of wider Afghan society. This state of affairs gradually became institutionalized, while successive Afghan governments (with the possible exception of Amanullah Khan and Dr Najibullah Ahmadzai) looked on.

They did little or nothing to put an end to the discrimination and exclusion practised against this sizeable minority of Afghans. Such discrimination has led to the gradual emergence of a communal Hazara consciousness of being a distinguishable cultural and religious community, supported by the hard work and social solidarity of its members. Many Hazaras in Kabul and other cities became successful entrepreneurs, businessmen and merchants. They also proved to be effective fighters, both against the communist PDPA regime as well as against the Soviets.

According to outside observers who have travelled with Haz-

Hazara elder at a village meeting. Photo©Edward Girardet

aras, their military and economic performance in recent years has almost certainly allowed them to rise up from their previous position as underdogs to adopt a strong identity of their own.

The Post-Taliban era has provided Afghan Hazaras with expanded political, economic and educational opportunities that they have used effectively. Because of their relatively more liberal attitudes towards gender relationships, many Hazara wom-

en have excelled educationally and professionally. More Hazra women are recruited by the Afghan security forces, and the first female provincial governor and a mayor in Afghan history are Hazara: Habiba Sorabi is governor of Bamyan province and Ozrah Jafari mayor of Daikondi.

These developments have resulted in noticeable improvements in the lives of those Hazaras living in the central mountainous region of Hazarajat, with its harsh weather and terrain. However, they continue to have mixed farming, herding and skilful crafting inwool, fur and wood to survive, self-sufficiently, in extreme climatic conditions.

Since the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001, many Hazaras have returned mainly from Iran to Kabul, Herat and to other parts of Afghanistan. Hazaras presently contribute vigorously to the social, political and economic life of Afghan society. The Hazara Taekwondo athlete -- Rohullah Nikpai – who became Afghanistan's first Olympic medalist in 2008 - is a source of pride for many Afghans. Other key past and present Hazara personalities include: Faiz Mohammad Katib, Sayed Ismail Balkhi, Abdul Karim Khalili, Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, Sima Samar and Ramzan Bashardost (dubbed 'Afghanistan's Gandhi').

Uzbek

Afghanistan's Uzbeks live in the northern plains of the country, separated from Uzbekistan by the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and cut off from much of Afghanistan by the high snow-topped Hindu Kush mountains. Only in the 1960s was this part of Afghanistan linked to the rest of the country through the building of the Salang tunnel. These fertile northern areas, also known as Turkistan, form a naturally-bounded homeland for the Afghan Uzbeks.

Estimates from the early 1980s put the total number of Uzbeks between one million (Dupree, 1980) and 1.3 million (Hyman 1982). The Soviet Academy of Sciences' 1981 projection (and the CIA world Factbook 2013) estimated that Uzbeks formed nine percent of the Afghan population, while in 1990, Eighmy put this figure at 6.3 percent. Far larger numbers of Uzbeks (approximately 23 million) live in neighbouring Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks of Afghanistan are Sunni Muslims and speak Uzbeki. Similar to the Pushtuns, Afghanistan's Uzbeks mix farming with herding. The vast northern plains represent some of the most fertile farming land in the country and, with irrigation from the Amu Darya,

are particularly suitable for growing rice and cotton. Cotton production, processing and trade used to be one of the main sources of national income, and played an important role in the economic development of the northern cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz.

In addition, the Uzbeks produced high quality karakul lamb fleeces and hand-woven rugs. The karakul wool was exported to Europe and soon became another important source of income, despite growing competition from countries such as Namibia. Similarly, the rugs and carpets which were produced mainly by Uzbek (and Turkmen) women found a lucrative outlet in European markets, particularly Germany, Britain and the former USSR. Moreover, the production of gas, oil and fertilizer in northern Afghanistan created hundreds of jobs in the 1960s-70s. The economic resources of the north made its predominantly Uzbek population relatively self-sufficient and attracted labourers, traders and skilled professionals from all over the country. The self-sufficiency of the Uzbeks, alongside the geographical remote- ness from Kabul of their northern region, has traditionally played an important role in their limited interaction with central governments and national institutions.

Although successive governments have been represented in northern provinces by governors, judges, magistrates and the military, the centre of Uzbek authority, economy and social organization has always been the qishlaq or Uzbek village. Similar to the Pushtun kalay and the Tajik and Hazara *deh*, the *qishlaq* is usually situated in a demarcated geographical area that comprises more than one extended family, the members of which have a common ancestor.

The organization of the *qishlaq* is unique and it provides the main context for political and social action. It is the traditional structure of authority and its main figure is the *arbab* (landlord). Social relationships revolve around the ways that peasants in the *qishlaq* relate to the arbab. Members of the Uzbek qishlaq are generally peasants who work on the arbab's land. The former are not only economically dependent on the arbab, but also socially and politically dependent, since the arbab is usually an influential figure, who has links with government institutions. The peasants thus need the arbab's help both in community matters and in dealing with officials. The social organization of the *qishlaq* and the arbab are in turn closely linked to the local mosque an important agency of social control within the village.

The Uzbeks have contributed outstandingly to the Afghan economy, culture and society: their rugs, karakul goods, cotton and other agricultural products constituted the backbone of the economy particularly in the 1960s- 70s.

The majority of ordinary Uzbeks were active in fighting against the invading Soviet forces. They have also produced strong military personalities, including Abdul Rashid Dostum. Uzbek political personalities include Ne'amatullah Shahrani, Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi and Mohammad Yunus Nawandish .

Turkmen and Aimaq

Afghan Turkmen share a close Turkic cultural and linguistic affinity with Afghan Uzbeks. They live in the northern and northwestern provinces of the country which border Turkmenistan. Estimates from the early 1980s put the total number of Afghan Turkmen between 125,000 (Dupree, 1980) to 600,000 (Hyman 1982). The Soviet Academy of Sciences' 1981 projection estimated that Turkmen formed three percent of the Afghan population, while in 1990, Eighmy put this figure at 2.5 percent.

Some 3.5 million Turkmen live in neighbouring Turkmenistan. Afghan Turkmen are Sunni Muslims and speak Turkmeni - a Turkic language, which is closely related to Uzbeki. The Turkmen are a semi-nomadic people who mix herding with farming. The raising of lambs for karakul fleece used to be a major source of income. Karakul pelts and the very fine rugs and gelims, which Turkmen women produced, represented some of the most important Afghan exports to Europe and the USA. Although Turkmen are more geographically mobile than Uzbeks, the social organization of both groups is very similar.

Afghan Aimaq are scattered throughout the northwest and central regions of the country. Aimaq means 'nomad' in Turkic, but the mobility and power of their chiefs was curtailed by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who put them under the control of the Governor of Herat in the 1880s. Their total number was estimated to be around 800,000 in the early 1980s. Traditionally the Aimaq are herders and carpet weavers. Several thousand also live in Iran, where they are referred to as Berberi. Since the Aimaq in Afghanistan live in close proximity with other Afghan groups, notably the Farsiwan of Herat and the Turkmen, Uzbeks and Hazaras, they have generally adopted the culture of the group that is immediately their neighbour. Aimaq are predominantly Sunni Muslims and most speak Dari.

Baluch and Brahui

Divided, like the Kurds, between three countries Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, the Baluch have a tradition of rebellion against central governments and harbour ambitions to create a separate state of Baluchistan. Since the mid-1970s some 2,500 Baluch guerrillas, fighting for autonomy in Pakistan, took refuge in southern Afghanistan. But their struggle for independence has seldom received international support and has faded after political repression by all three countries.

Afghan Baluch and Brahui live predominantly in the south western provinces of Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar. Their total number in Afghanistan was estimated at around 300,000 in the early 1980s. A larger number of Baluch inhabit Baluchistan, a province of Pakistan, and several thousand more live in Seistan province of Iran. Although the majority of Baluch are semi-sedentary, some live as caravaneers and nomads. Their social and economic organization is not significantly different from other Afghan ethnic/tribal groups who survive on small-scale farming and herding. However, since the Baluch live on Afghanistan's porous borders with Pakistan and Iran, and can travel between the three countries without bothering about frontier regulations, some are involved in small-scale crossborder trade.

Although Afghan Baluch speak their native Baluchi tongue, many also know Dari and/or Pashto. They are Sunni Muslims. The Brahui, who live in the south-western region of Afghanistan, resemble the Baluch both culturally and in their general lifestyle. In fact, many Brahui consider themselves a subgroup of the Baluch. Some work as tenant foragers and herders for Pushtun or Baluch landlords. Although Brahui is the native language of this Afghan group, most of its members also speak either Pashto or Baluchi. They are Sunni Muslims.

Nuristani, Pashai, Pamiri and Kirghiz

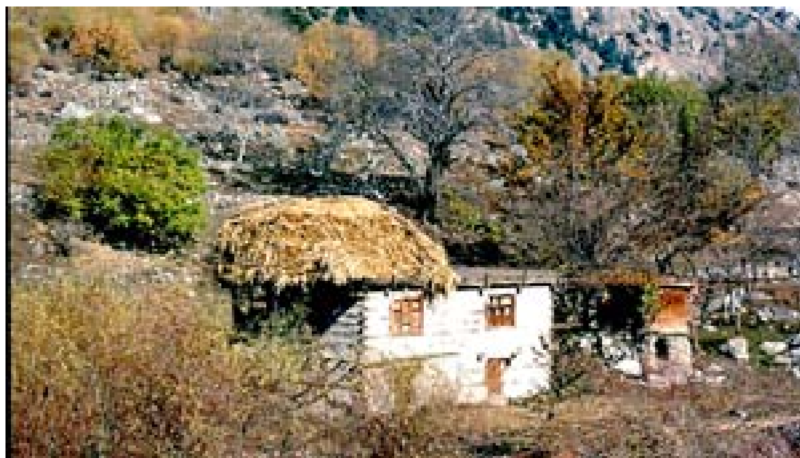
The Nuristani, whose total number was estimated at 100,000 in the early 1980s, live in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan. They maintained their ancient paganism until 1896, when they were forcibly converted by the sword to Islam by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan.

With the change of religion, the name of their traditional homeland (Kafiristan Land of the Infidels or non-believers) was changed to Nuristan (Land of Light, or Islam). It is with this new

cultural identity – Nuristani -- that they now strongly identify, even creating their own government during the Soviet-Afghan war, including a foreign ministry to issue visas to visiting journalists and aid workers, and a finance ministry to tax passing caravans.

On a local level, however, the Nuristani refer to themselves by the name of the valley or area in which they live. Nuristan is located in the middle of the Hindu Kush mountain range, in the provinces of Kunar and Laghman. It occupies four valleys, each with its own distinct dialect Kati, Waigali, Ashkun and Parsun.

Due to the rugged topography of the region (Nuristan contains some of Afghanistan's few remaining forests) it has limited arable land. Terraced farming is mixed with goat-herding and forestry, but the economy is very much one of subsistence. As settled farmers/herders, the social organization of Nuristani society does not appear to be significantly different from most other Afghan eth-



A typical farmhouse in Nuristan. Photo©Edward Girardet

nic/tribal groups, with one notable exception: women are considered of equal importance to men in the daily life and work of the community.

As with other groups, the extended family and clan networks constitute the basis of social order. Despite Islam, Nuristanis retained various elements and institutions from their ancient culture, which make them stand out as an unique Afghan social group. They normally wear their traditional clothes even outside Nuristan and speak a distinct language Nuristani, containing

Tajik fighter from Badakshan surveys high mountain pass. Photo©Edward Girardet

elements of Indian, Greek, and Iranian tongues. However most Nuristanis also speak Pashto, while all are Sunni Muslims. They were the first tribal group to declare rebellion against the communist PDPA government in October 1978. Subsequently the area became an important transit base for mujahideen operations and has remained largely autonomous ever since. There are significant insurgent activities taking place in Nuristan today.

Pashai

Towards the eastern mountains of Nuristan lives another ethnic/tribal group, the Pashai. While their social and economic organization is very similar to that of the Nuristanis, they speak their own language Pashai. Due to their proximity to the Pushtuns in Kunar province, most Pashai also speak Pashto. They are Sunni Muslims.

Pamiri and Kirghiz

Further to the north of Nuristan live two relatively small ethnic/tribal groups the Pamiri and the Kirghiz. While the Pamiri are generally settled farmers and herders in and around Badakhshan province, the Kirghiz are a largely nomadic people who live in huts very close to the Chinese border. The total number of each group is estimated to be several thousand. However, hundreds of Kirghiz families migrated to Turkey after the occupation of the Wakhan Corridor (the 'panhandle' of north-eastern Afghanistan) by the Soviet forces in 1980. While all Kirghiz are Sunni Muslims, some Pamiris are followers of Shi'a (Isma'ili) Islam. The Pamiri speak the Pamiri dialect of Dari, while the Kirghiz speak a kipchak Turkic dialect.

Other ethnic and tribal groups

Several smaller groups further add to the cultural richness of Afghan society, including Qizilbash, Bayat, Mongols/Moghuls, Arabs, Gujars, Kohistanis, Wakhis and Jats. The total number of all these groups in 1980 was less than several thousand, according to Dupree. Although some of them, such as the Jats, have retained their distinct lifestyle and language, the rest have largely adopted the culture of the dominant, neighbouring ethnic group.

However, the urbanite Qizilbash (Shi'a Muslims) have held very important professional and bureaucratic positions in national institutions. Isma'ilis who follow the Aga Khan are another group, living in northern areas (and in Kabul). Afghanistan has also been

home to several thousand Hindus, Sikhs. These groups lived and worked mainly in urban centres such as Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. They greatly contributed to Afghan trade and business, but many left after the Soviet invasion in 1979. Nomads Afghan nomads kuchis are an important feature of Afghan society and culture but do not represent a specific ethnic/tribal group. Instead, it is their unique fully-nomadic lifestyle that separates the kuchis from the rest of Afghanistan's settled populations. Afghan nomads are mainly comprised of Pushtuns (up to 80 percent) along with some Baluch and Kirghiz. Estimates of the numbers of kuchis range from 500,000 to three million. Most kuchis have traditionally been herders and traders, with sheep and camels constituting their main property. Baluch and Pushtun nomads generally spend winter in Pakistan and move to Afghanistan in spring when the weather is warmer. Their tradition of widespread grazing lands has occasionally led to conflicts between nomads and villagers. Some villagers complained that the surrounding grassland was overgrazed and exploited by the nomads, who were seen as aliens.

Some non-Pushtuns also saw the seasonal presence of the predominantly Pushtun nomads as a form of Pushtun expansionism. However, most settled local populations established enduring economic relationships with the nomads. In exchange for locally-produced grain, fruit and vegetables as well as grazing rights the nomads traded tea, sugar, mutton and goat meat, wool and dairy products.

This exchange was particularly extensive between the nomads and the populations of remote and isolated villages, where kuchis were often used as a means of communication and transportation to the outside world.

According to Louis Dupree, writing in 1980, the nomads' huge animal stock also fertilized the deserts and hillsides which would have otherwise remained barren. He argued that, far from being a burden to the land, nomads "...live in a symbiotic, not parasitic, relationship with man and nature in Afghanistan."

Whatever the effect of nomads on the rest of society, the long Afghan war has had serious implications for the nomadic population of Afghanistan. Most kuchis were unable to continue their traditional existence after the Soviet invasion. Many remained as herders or traders, or fought alongside the mujahideen inside Afghanistan in the 1980s.

By 1997, Afghan kuchis were believed to have lost about

35,000 animals to mines, which works out at 25 beasts (worth around US$ 3,000) per household. Furthermore, as a result of five years of almost continuous drought, kuchis have lost even more animals and income. The presence of millions of landmines has severely limited the scope of their traditional migration patterns. Although most kuchis have returned to post-Taliban Afghanistan, their lands have been grabbed and pastoral rights denied by villagers associated with local/regional warlords.

This situation has resulted in potentially dangerous conflicts between kuchis and local villagers in Hazarajat, Maidan-Wardak, Kabul and in parts of Northern Afghanistan. Largely displaced and dispossessed, many Afghan kuchis fight for the restoration of their rights; they seem to prefer to continue their nomadic way of life.

Effects of war

More than three decades of war have devastated both Afghanistan's infrastructure and the social, political and economic organisation of Afghan society. An estimated one and a half million Afghans were killed and six million more fled to other countries. Equally seriously, the conflict deprived a generation of young people from gaining educational qualifications and other useful skills. Instead, fighting for rival warlords provided these young men with a source of income, social status and a way of channelling their energy.

Warlords maintained their own ethnically-based armies that fought against one another. A key factional tactic was to 'divide and rule' by propagating ethnic and religious hatred. Sadly, some Afghan intellectuals by backing the warlords' positions played important role in the process of widening ethnic divisions.

The warlords attempted to turn the Afghan conflict into an ethnic war. Examples of this included: the aerial massacre of Hazaras and looting of their houses in the Karte Seh and Afshar quarters of Kabul by the Tajik-domi- nated Jamiat-e-Islami/Shura-e- Nazar faction in 1993; the massacre of the predominately Pushtun Taliban by Uzbek and Hazara militias in Mazar-e-Sharif and sur- rounding areas in 1997; the massacre of Hazaras in Yakaolang and Hazarajat by Taliban forces in 2000-2001; and the suffocation of hundreds of Taliban prisoners by joint Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara forces in northern Afghanistan in late 2001.

In addition to the six million refugees who fled Afghanistan,

conflict also displaced at least one million Afghans within the country during the 1980s- 83 90s. These internally-displaced persons (IDPs) have been forced to flee from Badghis to Herat, from Shomali to Kabul, from Kabul to the Jalalabad and more recently from northern Afghanistan to Kandahar and surrounding areas.

The IDPs in Herat were predominantly Pushtun and Baluch, whereas those in Jalalabad were largely Tajik or non-Pushtun. Significantly, aid workers and visitors reported that non-Pushtuns in predominantly Pushtun Jalalabad and the Pushtuns and Baluch in predominantly Farsiwan Herat were received as fellow Afghans and enjoyed considerable assistance from the local population.

In some cases, locals in 'host' cities even shared their own homes with displaced Afghans. These observations are very important. They would seem to indicate that despite the apparent division of the country along ethno-linguistic lines, ordinary Afghans still feel that they are bonded to one another in various ways.

Indeed, shared religion, customs and moral values, inter-marriages, economic interdependence, clothing, lifestyle and, more importantly, a shared interest in the establishment of peace and social order are all common grounds that unite ordinary Afghans.

The collapse of the Taliban regime and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority in December 2001 raised hopes among many Afghans that there was an opportunity to end Afghanistan's warlord culture and rebuild the country's social, political and economic institutions. Consequently most Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran returned home. However after their defeat by Taliban, the revival of many warlords as key political and military leaders in the post-Taliban administrations plus the US government's emphasis on the 'war against terrorism' rather than on rebuilding Afghanistan has spread disillusion among many Afghans about the prospects of lasting peace. The US's military, political and financial support for warlords whose ethnicity-based militias have been used as foot soldiers in the 'war against terrorism', continues to be a major source of ethnic tension in the country.

While the continued exploitation of religion and ethnicity as vehicles for reaching positions of power by various factional warlords poses serious threat to Afghan unity, the forces of unity among ordinary Afghans also remain strong. It remains to be seen how this challenging situation evolves after the withdrawal

of international forces from Afghanistan in 2014.

Meanwhile, most Afghans see the long-term prospects of peace and stability in an inclusive political order and in a united but multi-cultural Afghanistan – an Afghanistan where its ethnic and tribal diversity is a source of strength, progress and cultural richness. Only then can Afghanistan counter foreign interferences, rebuild itself, and face the more serious challenges of the 21st Century.

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Government: Assuming responsibility

By Kate Clark

Ever since fighting first broke out in the summer of 1978, Afghanistan has gone through a series of 'official' governments/ regimes, each backed by a variety of outside supporters and each seeking legitimacy. ***Kate Clark*** *explores how the post-2001 internationally-backed administration of President Hamed Karzai is faring – what it has achieved, and what it has not.*

In December 2001, it seemed Hamid Karzai (See Key Players) might just prove to be the magician, the patriot with no blood on his hands, who might heal the hurts of a quarter century of war.

His charm seemed likely to woo the entire world as well as Afghanistan's disparate factions. He was given honorary degrees by foreign universities and an honorary knighthood by the Queen of England. Karzai's was the face of the new Afghanistan; in his iconic karakul hat and striped green Uzbek coat, he was acclaimed, "the most chic man in the world," by Tom Ford of the Gucci fashion house.

Karzai had previously served as a PR rep for one of the mujahed (Afghan resistance during the Soviet war) parties headed by Sibgatullah Mujadeddi (See Key Players) and three months as deputy foreign minister in the mujahed government of the mid-1990s. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, he went to Uruzgan to stir up anti-Taliban rebellion. At his inauguration on 22 December 2001 as interim president, he declared: "If we deliver to the Afghan people what we promised this will be a great day. If we don't deliver, this will go into oblivion."

Karzai has been in office ever since, winning the presidential elections in 2004 and more dubiously in 2009. This in itself is something of a feat; only one other Afghan leader has managed to stay in power for more than five years since 1973 when King Zahir Shah was deposed. There have been both achievements and disasters since 2001, but few can be laid entirely at Karzai's door. He has certainly grown to be the single most powerful man in the country, stamping his mark very firmly on post-Taliban Afghanistan. At the same time, his power everywhere is hedged about,

Afghan president Mohammad Karzai. The main problem has been to find a common element that will allow the establishment of a political powerbase. Until now the major glue holding the administration together has been money. Photo ISAF

blocked and diluted as he deals with the many influential figures within Afghanistan and the fractious "international community," most notably the oftentimes bulldozing US presence.

In December 2001, when still relatively unknown, Karzai was appointed Afghan leader at the Bonn conference. The new political and military landscape of the post-Taliban era had already been created - primarily as a result of US decisions following the 9/11 attacks. President George W Bush wanted a quick defeat of the Taliban and ordered an arming of the factions of the United Front (more commonly known as the Northern Alliance) and other assorted 'anti-Taliban' commanders – regardless, it should be stressed, of their records on war crimes. The Taliban's speedy collapse in the face of the US blitz enabled the United Front commanders to seize districts and whole provinces. One faction in particular benefited from the US strategy. This was Jamiat-e Islami (Islamic Society), a former resistance party whose commanders from the Panjshir Valley and Shomali Plains were led by the man who would become defence minister and later vice president, Qasim Fahim (See Key Players). After much deliberation, Washington gave them the green light to seize Kabul, which happened on 13 November, 2001. The order in the Bonn Agreement, signed three weeks later, for a "withdrawal [of] all military units from Kabul and other urban areas" was subsequently quietly forgotten.

The leader of Jamiat, Burhanuddin Rabbani (who was murdered in September 2011), had remained the internationally-recognized president during Taliban rule. He flew into Kabul almost as soon as the Taliban had fled to take up residence in the presidential palace. In the few weeks before Karzai's inauguration, he spent all of the remaining eight million dollars left by the Taliban in the state treasury, admitting later, without embarrassment, that he had needed to pay off his frontline commanders. Other Jamiat commanders and officials established themselves as the ministers of defence, interior and foreign affairs and as director of the intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security or NDS. They all managed to retain these ministries at the Bonn conference. Although this group's relative power has since diminished, it remains one of the most influential in the country.

Karzai also has had to deal with very powerful foreign 'advisors,' paymasters and military chiefs. Particularly influential in the early years were the first US ambassador, an Afghan-American, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the first United Nations Security

General's Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi. He also had to contend with a plethora of donors and troop contributing countries, such as NATO, ISAF, the United Nations and the various and sometimes bickering 'tribes' of the US establishment – the State Department, Department of Defence and White House.

Despite all this, in the beginning, Karzai had advantages lent to few previous Afghan leaders. He enjoyed widespread popularity and the population was sympathetic, patient and desperate for change. Billions of dollars of foreign aid were available. The Taliban had overwhelmingly accepted the change of government and most went home, expecting to live in peace. For the first few years, foreign forces were popular with Afghans, and a real deterrent to both the Taliban and militia leaders alike.

Karzai's overall policy since 2001 was endorsed - or indeed co-designed - by both the US and UN. It can be described as "big tent" politics, bringing in the likely troublemakers. This meant again ignoring allegations of pre-2001 war crimes. For Brahimi, accountability had to take "second place to peace and stability." Karzai voiced a similar assertion, notably that peace was a necessity but that justice for war crimes a 'luxury' that Afghanistan could not then afford. What this meant was the establishment of impunity. In the long run, it has proved a far more toxic threat to both peace and stability.

Many of the commanders and factional leaders would always have been major political players, but their influence was boosted and legitimized by these early policies. As a group, they have flourished, becoming ministers, governors, senior officers in the police and army, MPs and/or significant businessmen. Most have also become a central part of Karzai's consultation and decision-making structures.

At the same time, initial chances for the creation of a meaningful and representative government were squashed. Most significantly, delegates at the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga who had been chosen by popular ballot and acclamation from across the nation came to Kabul to choose a national leader and cabinet as mandated by the Bonn Agreement. However, they were deliberately sidelined by Karzai, Brahimi, Khalilzad and the various factional leaders, who then haggled behind closed doors over who would get which ministries. The result was another cabinet, which was not only dominated by commanders, but ones who had been legitimized enabling them to become newly assertive. The failure to trust the people's delegates killed off what might have turned

into a more democratic way of choosing leaders in Afghanistan. Since then, every subsequent ballot has been less clean and less fair – although usually pronounced "good enough" by the international powers. For most Afghans, the very word 'democracy' has been tarnished.

The new constitution of 2003, over which Khalizad as the increasingly influential US envoy asserted Washington's own views, is highly centralized with the president holding immense powers. He appoints the provincial governors, district governors, mayors, senior figures in the security forces and - subject to parliamentary approval - cabinet ministers, members of the Supreme Court, the heads of the intelligence agency (the NDS) and the central bank. He also signs off on all appointments of judges, the heads of civil service departments and even sub-departments as well as the members of 'independent' commissions such as those for elections and on human rights. By contrast, other arms of state - the Supreme Court and the elected parliament and provincial councils – were kept deliberately weak.

In his appointments, Karzai keeps the major players happy – so allies and clients of Vice Presidents Marshal Fahim and Abdul Karim Khalili, for example, and of fundamentalist former mujahed leader, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (See Key Players), have done well. New players have also emerged, some of whom are more direct clients of the president, among them Umar Daoudzai and Abdul Karim Khuram, his former and current chiefs of staff, and Farooq Wardak, minister of education and another key advisor, all of whom are seen as having links with the (non-military wing of) Hezb-e Islami, another highly fundamentalist former mujahed party.

Often it seems that the president prizes loyalty above all else. Examples include Shir Muhammad Akhundzada and the late Jan Muhammad (who was killed in July 2011) (See Key Players) the former governors of Helmand and Uruzgan and both close allies. They practiced such egregious abuse of the population, including torture and arbitrary detention and the marginalization of their tribal and factional rivals that many see their rule as kicking off the insurgency in these provinces. Yet they remained governors – in Akhundzada's case, even after nine tonnes of opium were found in his office – until 2006, and were then only removed after pressure from the British and Dutch who were setting up PRTs in Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. Karzai moved Akhundzada to the Senate and appointed both men as minister-level advisors.

Crucially, he left their networks intact. He has continued to argue that removing them was a mistake and it was only after their departure that the insurgency really kicked off.

Afghanistan has achieved much during the Karzai years, although not all of it completely positive. Millions of refugees have returned home and the economy has bounced back after years of war, although the cost of living has soared and a gulf between rich and poor has opened up. The country has enjoyed billions of dollars of aid and although much has been misspent or never left the accounts of expatriate workers or Afghan politicians, there are new roads, schools and clinics. Education and healthcare have both improved markedly. Kabul has been rebuilt. It has risen from the rubble of the Jihadist civil war of the mid-1990s when a third of the city was destroyed to sport new neighbourhoods and multi-storey buildings, but also slums. More recently, there has been a marked increase in the number of paved roads and a much improved electricity supply.

A reasonably non-partisan army has also been formed, although ethnic Tajiks are over-represented. The new national police force, however, is far less clean and (as a 2011 report by the UN and a 2012 report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) have documented) both police and NDS torture detainees. There is now a diverse press, with some independent voices struggling against both power-brokers and the state. The population has access to mobile phones and, for some, satellite television and the internet. Public spaces have been carved out for and by women, including as members of the new parliament. Among the new generation of Afghans can be seen, especially in the big cities, self-confident and politically aware young men and women who have benefitted from better salaries, access to higher education and more links to the wider world.

Yet despite all this, major problems remain. These include corruption, impunity, and of course, the insurgency. All appear intractable. In 2011, Afghanistan was ranked third from bottom (better only than North Korea and Somalia) in Transparency International's survey of perceived public sector corruption. It was an indication of what Afghans have to live with, notably land grabbing, the skimming of contracts and government budgets with resulting shoddy work, the buying of votes in parliament and buying and selling of government posts, judges taking bribes, the use of state forces to arrest the innocent, elections fraudu-

lently fought as well as all the associated problems of an opium economy. In 2011, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Corruption (UNODC), this was equivalent to 15 per cent of GDP. Research published by the UNODC and World Bank in 2006 outlined how state institutions had, by that time, already been co-opted by criminal interests, resulting in a "complex pyramid of protection and patronage, effectively providing state protection to criminal trafficking activities."

The billions of dollars coming into the economy has helped drive corruption, enabling some foreigners and Afghans – whether former commanders, Western-educated technocrats or the relations of government officials – to become fabulously wealthy. Afghans speak of the "9/11 millionaires" – those who have become rich on the back of the intervention.

The presence of foreign forces has also shifted dynamics. Early on, Afghans throughout the country wanted the foreign armies to deploy to their areas. Then they realized the soldiers were not going to defend them against local militias. Instead, the international forces tended to ally themselves with local strongmen – for "force protection," to guard bases or fight the Taliban – and, often, to award these men or their relations security and logistics contracts. This particular aspect of the war economy has created powerful new players, including Abdul Razeq and Matiullah Khan, chiefs of police in Kandahar and Uruzgan respectively (See Key Players) and Azizullah, now head of the Afghanistan Local Police in Paktika. All have been accused of major abuses, including torture and summary execution. Their anti-Taliban credentials have meant they have remained key allies and their close relationship with foreign forces have given them de facto impunity.

Accusations also have focused on how the president's family has been catapulted to the ranks of the super-wealthy since 2001. His younger half-brother, Ahmad Wali (killed in July 2011, See Key Players), who on paper was only the head of the relatively unimportant provincial council, emerged as the pre-eminent power in the south. According to a 2009 study for the British aid agency, DfID, the general perception in Kandahar was that Ahmed Wali, "used [Kandahar] as his personal fiefdom" and that, "he controlled narcotics trafficking and was guilty of major extortion, land grabbing and control of the defunct justice system." The president repeatedly called on those making allegations to bring him evidence of his brother's wrong-doing. Ahmad Wali himself, before his death,

repeatedly denied involvement in the drug trade and (as alleged by the New York Times) that he was on the CIA payroll.

The insurgency has to be seen in this context. It also has to be seen as the major failure of the post-2001 era. Locally, unrest was frequently sparked by the actions of corrupt and abusive government officials and what are seen as unjust actions by the western forces (civilian casualties, night raids, detentions, in the first year or two, torture, and western military alliances with oppressive local strongmen). Moreover, those same Talib commanders who had gone home peacefully in 2001 often found themselves subject to harassment and abuse by those who had seized power locally and by the US Special Forces; many fled to Pakistan and would go on to form the core of the insurgency.

At the same time, violence and intimidation by the Taliban, especially their targeting of non-aligned local leaders – whether tribal elders, Muslim clerics or the educated - has further closed off political space in many rural areas, allowing the Taliban to dominate. Equally important as an external driver of the insurgency has been the role of neighbouring Pakistan. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the insurgency could have thrived without the safe havens and support provided by Islamabad, especially its most powerful intelligence agency, the military Interservices Intelligence (ISI).

Over the last ten years, even as the Karzai state has lost territory to the Taliban and other insurgents, the president has come to have a growing hold over the levers of power in Afghanistan. The key relationship in all this has been between Karzai and Washington, which has been both pay-master and guardian of the post-2001 Afghan state. Few Afghans believe that, without the international troops, the government could withstand the Taliban. Yet the president is frequently critical of America, saying in May 2010 that if the foreign pressure did not cease, he might join the Taliban. And in October 2011, he maintained that if the US ever launched a war on Pakistan, he would side with his brothers on the other side of the Durand Line against America. Many of these comments seem motivated by Karzai's need to appear independent.

In public, the US has tended to be highly diplomatic about Karzai. In private, however, officials can be scathing. Watergate journalist, Bob Woodward, who had access to the most senior sources in Washington, quoted US intelligence reports diagnosing the Afghan president as manic-depressive. Former US general and ambassador, Karl Eikenberry wrote in a leaked diplomatic cable in January 2010, that Karzai was erratic and not an "adequate strategic

partner." He argued that the Afghan president "continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden, whether defence, governance or development."

The relationship between Karzai and Washington has often felt like a dysfunctional marriage in which, despite the many problems and bitter comments, neither side has walked out. The US strategy has continued to have Karzai at its heart. Most recently, this has been to hit the Taliban hard in order to 'degrade' the movement, encourage better 'governance' and build up Afghan security forces, all in the hope that the Afghan state will be able to withstand the insurgents by itself – or with minimal outside involvement. To many this looks as if the best Washington can offer is a continuing low-level civil war. Be that as it may, in 2014, change will come to the US-Afghan relationship. Barring constitutional amendments or declared states of emergency, Karzai must leave the presidential palace following elections and the bulk of the foreign forces will have withdrawn.

What happens next depends on many things: how successful the Afghan army turns out to be, how much money continues to flow from outside and whether Washington keeps some bases and special forces on the ground. Much will hinge on the political succession, whether there is a new leader, and whether he is broadly seen by Afghans as legitimate. Hard-pushed western economies and war weariness among donor countries will constrain action. Pakistan seems highly unlikely to stop support the Taliban, but there is still a small chance of a negotiated political settlement to the insurgency – if all sides took talks seriously.

Numerous Afghans want the international forces to leave – given the widespread unhappiness over civilian casualties and night raids and the very fact of what many see as a foreign occupation. And yet they also fear their departure. They worry about a repeat of events after the Soviet withdrawal, in other words, state collapse and civil war. The bulk of the population also know that, if these worst fears were realized, the new elite would flee the country to spend their millions in Dubai or the west, while they would be left trying to survive a widening conflict.

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Essential reading

- *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Recovery and Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan*. (November, 2011) http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/Programs/FP/afghanistanper cent20index/index.pdf
- *Karzai: The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan*. By Nick A. Mills. (August, 2007) http://www.amazon.com/Karzai-American-Intervention-Struggle-Afghanistan/dp/0470134003
- *Obama's Wars*. By Bob Woodward. (September, 2010) http://www.amazon.com/Obamas-Wars-Bob-Woodward/dp/1439172498
- *Killing the Cranes. A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan*. By Edward Girardet (September, 2011)http://www.chelseagreen.com/bookstore/item/killing_the_cranes
- *Afghanistan Looking Ahead: Challenges for Governance and Community Welfare* (December, 2011). AREU, Kabul.http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?EditionId=567&ContentId=7&ParentId=7

Essential data

- Estimated cost of keeping the Afghan government running post-2014: 7 billion dollars a year. (Source: World Bank).
- Women account for 26per cent of all civil servants in the Afghan government (Source: UNIFEM)
- Implementation of revised constitution: January 4, 2004
- Number of provinces: 34, each divided into separate districts. The number of districts keeps changing but in 2011, there were 364.
- Number of towns and municipalities including Kabul: 153.
- Percentage of the country considered to be insecure: 70per cent or more. (Source: United Nations, Kabul)

Afghan Media: The key to transparency

By Jean MacKenzie

Few areas of development in post-Taliban Afghanistan have boomed like the media. While outspoken but heavily opinionated media first began to emerge during the 1960s and 70s with the advent of political parties - the two communist factions, Parcham (Banner) and Khalq (Masses), were originally ideological magazines - it was only during the Soviet war of the 1980s that independent reporting became evident. One of the most distinctive was the Afghan Information Bulletin, edited by Prof. Sayed Madjruh. Murdered in 1988 by Hezb-e-Islami's Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an Islamic extremist supported by the Americans and Pakistanis, Madjruh had dared publish an investigative report indicating that former Afghan King Zahir Shah enjoyed broad popular support, while many of the corrupt Peshawar resistance leaders, including Gulbuddin, were largely abhorred. Reporting skills were also enhanced by the Afghan Media Center of Boston University in Peshawar, Pakistan, which trained Afghans to film, photograph and otherwise report the Soviet war. While much of the material was rough, these headstrong novice reporters, some of whom were killed doing their job, provided mainstream western media with some of its most effective imagery. While free media inside Afghanistan succumbed to the Taliban, a good 20-odd exile newspapers and magazines (the bulk of them focusing on poetry and culture) were published out of Peshawar until the US-led intervention in October, 2001. Within months, most had transferred to Kabul. But new ones began to assert themselves with western support. American journalist ***Jean MacKenzie*** *explores the state of Afghan media over the past decade.*

As of November, 2012, Afghanistan had over 200 regular print media outlets, 80 television stations, 175 radio stations, and at least eight news agencies. There were about 1.5 million internet users. But numbers do not tell the whole story. For one, these figures do not include the various radio stations and internet news sites operated by the Taliban on Afghan territory or in neighbouring Paksitan. The media has become an important, if far from perfect, guarantor of transparency and ac-

Afghan media are the country's best hope at improving government transparency, a key requirement for eliminating corruption and increasing efficiency. Unfortunately Afghan journalists have become a prime target both insurgents and corrupt officials. Recording the human cost of the war.§ Photo©Edward Girardet

countability, two qualities which the Afghan state badly needs if it is to pull itself out of the well of corruption and incompetence into which it appears to have sunk.

Recent scandals such as fraud in the September, 2010 parliamentary elections; the vast corruption at the Kabul Bank that ultimately resulted in close to $1 billion in losses incurred by friends and relatives of top politicians; civilian casualties inflicted by NATO but never acknowledged; plus abuses by corrupt or power-hungry government officials – all have been covered in depth by the Afghan media. As with most developing countries, however, the picture is far from clear. The complexities are compounded by the over decade-long war with the insurgency, which has split regions and communities, deepened ethnic tensions, and which now threatens to revive warlordism. The fragile licit economy is another factor. Most media outlets exist only through some form of patronage: they may be supported by the international donor community, by businessmen, or by political figures, all of whom may have their own agendas.

Afghanistan's media sector is now entering a critical phase where some outlets are being forced to close their doors for lack of support. *Kabul Weekly*, an Afghan institution that lasted through through several regimes over nearly 20 years, shut down in March, 2011, due to financial pressures that the editor claims were politically engineered. It is becoming more and more difficult for media to exist without strong political and financial backing. Increasingly, media outlets are becoming the purview of special interests, with no hesitation to use their power to further their patrons' political or economic goals. Journalists still lack the training and skills, including business management, they need to survive the dangers that are part of their daily lives. Recent reports by the Committee to Protect Journalists and other media watchdogs underscore the fragility of the Afghan media, as well as the Karzai regime's growing animosity toward the press. Attacks on journalists go uninvestigated, and Afghan reporters regularly receive threats.

The early years

The dramatic growth of the media is, of course, the result of much of the sector starting from absolute zero. Under the Taliban, television was banned completely, and radio carried nothing except the Voice of Sharia, with its Koran readings and religious exhor-

tations. In the first years following the fall of the fundamentalist regime, media was the great hope of both international donors and the Afghan government. In those halcyon days, the expectation was that Afghanistan was just four or five years away from developed democracy.

Following the rapid rout of the Taliban in November, 2001, the state broadcaster, RTA (Radio/Television Afghanistan) lost no time in starting up again, under the dubious tutelage of Hafiz Mansoor. But instead of pushing for greater freedoms, the new RTA chief, a Tajik from the Panjshir, tried to out-Talib the Taliban. One of his first official acts was to ban women's voices from the airwaves, ultimately leading to his dismissal in mid-2002. Even during the height of the Battle for Kabul in the early 1990s, RTA had female TV news anchors.The new state media head Engineer Mohammad Ishaq, was only slightly more progressive.

But in short order big changes were to take place. Various international media NGOs, such as the BBC Trust, Media Action International, Internews and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, sought to coordinate more effective development of Afghan media. This included more targeted training, but also efforts to convince donors, aid agencies and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to support media as crucial to any successful recovery plan. USAID gave large amounts of cash to new media outlets, including Pajhwok Afghan News, the largest independent news agency in Afghanistan, which opened in April, 2004. Tolo TV, one of the first commercial television stations in Afghanistan, also opened its doors in 2004. USAID provided some start-up funds, but most of the investment came from the Mohseini family, Afghan-Australians who came back to begin a media empire. The Asia Foundation, one of the oldest NGOs operating in the region, also supported a good dozen media initiatives, including a Mohseini-run women's magazine.

Radio received a huge push, and independent stations like *Arman* and *Killid* were soon capturing listeners with news, music and entertainment. The radio drama "New Home, New Life," begun in 1994 by the BBC World Training Trust, returned from exile in Pakistan, and once again enjoyed a huge following in its native land. Working closely with the BBC, Media Action International started up Radio Education for Afghan Children (REACH), which primarily sought to educate girls through daily home schooling programmes on the BBC Dari and Pashto services during the Talib period. Ironically, much of its printed support materials

were picked up surreptitiously by pro-Taliban commanders who wanted to ensure that their own children, including girls, also received an education.

The years from 2004 – 2006 were the height of press freedom, with Tolo pioneering satire shows that, for the first time in a very long while, taught Afghans that it was acceptable, maybe even therapeutic, to laugh at their government. Programmes like " Zang e Khatar" ("Alarm Bell") targeted government figures, holding them up to ridicule for corruption or incompetence. One famous clip showed Parliamentarians asleep or playing games on their cell phones during legislative sessions. While the public was gratified and amused, the government was infuriated.

Satellite TV from Europe, India, Turkey and elsewhere also brought both news and entertainment, including highly provocative Indian music channels, to ordinary Afghans. While frowned upon by conservative pro-Talib elements, they developed a faithful following among even the most traditional Pushtuns, who watched avidly over tea in chaikhane ranging from Jalalabad to Kunduz and Herat. Many of these approaches were picked up by Afghan media. (Tolo now runs its own Sat-TV service). Indian soap operas such as "Tolsi" captivated millions, although many complained that Afghan culture was being overshadowed by an alien religion and customs. Foreign serials such as "24" and "Lost" also gained an audience, even though bare arms and midriffs had to be pixellated to avoid offending a still conservative public. Even though EFG reporters have encountered some households watching Koranic reading championships in eastern Afghanistan, most households seemed to prefer anything related to Bollywood.

The honeymoon is over

But in the opinion of many Afghans, things had gone too far, too fast. By 2007, it was time to put on the brakes. Tolo TV was raided by police after the Attorney General, Abdul Jabar Sabet accused the television of misquoting him. The charge was all the more curious since Tolo had broadcast its interview with Sabet live. Nevertheless, as a sign of exceptional media maturity, Tolo did not emotionally lambaste Sabet, but calmly outlined which articles of the Afghan constitution he had violated. Further harassment followed: the news director, Mujahid Kakar, was briefly

detained for filming without permission, and in 2008 the government banned soap operas, one of Tolo's major income earners. The ban did not last long: Tolo defied the government, and in a few months the rest of the stations followed suit. The government ultimately backed down. But as the 2009 presidential election year approached, the interference of political figures in the media became more pronounced. Afghanistan's powerbrokers realised power could be wielded through the media, and they lost no time in acquiring their very own mouthpieces.

Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, one of the leaders of the Hezb-e-Wahdat political faction backed Farda TV; Uzbek strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum used his Aina TV to showcase his own accomplishments. The late Burhanuddin Rabbani, former Afghan president and prominent political figure, as well as the head of the Jamiat-e-Islami political faction, established Noor TV. Second Vice President Karim Khalili put his money into Negah TV.

But this proliferation of politically engaged television stations did little to broaden the range of news available to the public. Instead, the outlets delivered a message, at times heavy-handed, extolling their patrons and denigrating their rivals. At around the same time crackdowns on journalists began in earnest. Sensed by ordinary Afghans as being a curb on their own access to independent radio and television, many began turning to the BBC World Service, Al Jazeera, Voice of America and other outside broadcasters for their news. In times of crisis, Afghans have always relied on such foreign sources for credible, or at least comparative information. Even during the Soviet war, Afghans always listened to an array of news points ranging from the BBC and VOA to Radio Kabul, Radio Tehran and Radio Kabul.

A Dangerous Profession

Journalism has never been easy in Afghanistan – poor basic education, lack of access to information, and growing insecurity hamper the gathering of quality information. Many media outlets lack adequate equipment, and journalists are badly paid.

In addition, journalists have begun to face real repression. The Taliban target specific reporters, particularly in the south. Telephone warnings, soon escalate to threats. As a result, some journalists try to develop relations with all sides, whether the armed opposition, NATO, ISI or the Kabul regime. Nevertheless, some journalists have still needed to be evacuated in the wake of intimidation. In a few cases, journalists have been murdered.

Ajmal Naqshbandi, a fixer, who was kidnapped along with Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo in Helmand in 2007, was beheaded by the Taliban. Sultan Munadi was also killed in 2009; kidnapped along with New York Times reporter Stephen Farrell in Kunduz. He was shot during a NATO rescue operation to free Farrell.

But it is not just the insurgency that threatens journalists. The state maintains a tight grip on the press. Those who step over the line are soon made aware that their livelihood, their freedom, or even their lives could be at stake. Warlords, in or out of formal power, are also a danger. Abdul Samad Rohani, a BBC journalist in Helmand, was killed in 2008. His death was widely attributed to the Taliban, but those close to him, and to the investigation following his murder, say he was working on a story about the drug mafia, and its possible ties to the government, when he was killed.

There are many more examples of state repression of journalists; but even those figures do not convey the entire picture. More and more journalists and media outlets engage in self-censorship, unable or unwilling to stand up to the sometimes intense pressure that the government, the security forces, or various "warlords" can bring to bear. "We see a lot, but cannot always speak," said one journalist from Balkh province, where Governor Atta Mohammad Noor reigns supreme, all but independent of the central government.

The foreign forces can also pose a threat to journalists, as seen by the arrests or detentions of several reporters on the grounds of "collusion with the enemy." US forces may have deliberately bombed the Al Jazeera bureau during the early days of the Coalition intervention just as later happened in Baghdad. This has been denied by the Americans. One Afghan journalist was killed by US military in July, 2011, when they 'mistook' him for being a member of the Taliban. In November, 2011, another Afghan journalist was killed, this time by a roadside bomb placed by insurgents.

Afghan journalists have been detained on several occasions by U.S. forces, mainly on suspicion of overly close ties to the enemy. Arguments that the reporters were only doing their job by talking to the Taliban eventually won out, but the incidents have increased the suspicion with which many Afghans view the foreign forces.

In 2013, the Afghan media present a mixed picture. The inter-

national donors seem intent on putting the remaining money into infrastructure, and USAID is now funding a major expansion of local television. Cash is also flowing into "social media" projects, perhaps spurred by the "Twitter revolutions" in the region. At the same time, mesmerised by the internet revolution, foreign donors are providing insufficient support to youth magazines and other outreach initiatives in rural areas where young people, who have no access to the internet, are desperate for reading materials. There needs to be more imagination for working on a broader media platform or "coffee house" approach, whereby Afghan audiences are informed credibly by a variety of different means, whether print or broadcast, or even information comic books aimed at illiterate audiences (nearly 70per cent of the country).

The question facing 2014 and beyond is whether – and how many – media organizations will prove capable of surviving as funds dry up. Western donors have already begun cutting back. They have also made it clear that media support over the next few years will not even be close to the levels provided during the first decade following the collapse of the Taliban. This will mean a significant drop in critical, public service reporting, which is precisely what the country needs. Even progressive donors, such as the northern Europeans, seem incapable of understanding what quality journalism requires and that the only ones capable of critically monitoring the government and international community are local and foreign journalists working together. As usual, media support is one of the first items of the donor budgets to go.

There are many brave and highly committed Afghan reporters who are trying their best, in the face of enormous difficulties, to get the truth out. But the rosy picture is dimmed by the encroaching problems that are marring all facets of life in Afghanistan. Poverty, illiteracy, corruption, and insecurity are not problems subject to easy resolution. It is to the great credit of Afghan journalists and to international donors that so much has been accomplished. But the road is long, and much remains to be done. Whether the international community will have the long-term vision to grasp the crucial importance of good reporting is another matter.

Jean MacKenzie *is the Senior Correspondent for Global Post News in Afghanistan. She has been living in, and reporting on, the region for seven years.*

Essential reading

- *Committee to Protect Journalists Attacks on Journalists Report, 2013*. http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118550552,descCd-buy.html
- *CPJ's Journalists' Security Guide*. http://www.cpj.org/reports/2012/04/journalist-security-guide.php
- Kabul Government 2006 "guideline" curbing press freedoms. http://cpj.org/2006/06/cpj-urges-karzai-to-renounce-press-guidelines.php
- *US AID 2010 Report on Media in Afghanistan*. http://www.altaiconsulting.com/docs/media/2010/Afghanper cent20Mediaper cent20inper cent202010.pdf
- *US Institute for Peace 2010 Media Assessment*. http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PW68_Afghanistan_Media_Assessment.pdf

Essential data

- Estimated news outlets in Afghanistan: 200 print media, 44 television stations, 141 radio stations and at least eight news agencies. (November, 2011 Reporters sans Frontieres - For a Free, Independent and Democratic Afghanistan.) The October, 2010 USAID report on Afghan Media cited the following number of outlets: 75 terrestrial television channels, 175 FM radio stations and 800 publications.
- Acts of violence against journalists in Afghanistan: Hundreds of cases recorded since 2001. The largest number – 85 – took place in 2009, most of them in the provinces of Kabul, Herat and Helmand. (Source: Reporters sans Frontieres and other organizations).
- Number of journalists (Afghans and foreign) killed since 1992: 24 (Source: Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011)
- Number six on global impunity index: (Journalists killed, wounded or otherwise abused with those responsible getting away with it. (Source: 2011 Impunity Index, Committee to Protect Journalists. http://www.cpj.org/reports/2011/06/2011-impunity-index-getting-away-murder.php
- Pro-Talban media operating both inside and outside Afghanistam:Dozens of websites, clandestine radio stations and transmitters, Twitter feeds, online videos with latest battlefield reports. (Sources: Various)

Afghanistan's History: Foreign invasions and brutal wars

By Chris Bowers

"If you do not wield a sword, what else will you do? You, who have suckled at the breast of an Afghan mother!"

Afghanistan lies at the crossroads of South and Central Asia; its northern plains an extension of the steppes of Turkistan, the Hindu Kush mountains an adjunct to the Himalayas, its southern deserts a prelude to the Persian Gulf. Linguistically, culturally and ethnically Afghanistan's northern Uzbeks, Turkmen and Tajiks look northwards to Central Asia, the centrally-located Hazaras look westwards to Iran, and the southern and eastern Pushtuns and Baluch find more resonance to the south-east in Pakistan. Although distinct from them, each group and region has more in common with its neighbours over the border than with each other.

A few rulers, most notably Abdur Rahman Khan at the cusp of the 19th Century, have managed to bind the Afghans into rule from Kabul, but arguably none left behind a reliable, coherent governing state system. With the mixture of lofty disdain and sharp perception often evident in British Imperial commentary, Sir Henry Rawlinson wrote, "the nation consists of a mere collection of tribes, of unequal power and divergent habits, which are held together more or less closely, according to the personal character of the chief who rules them. The feeling of patriotism, as known in Europe, cannot exist among Afghans, for there is no common country." One might almost add that there has not been much of a state either.

One of the foremost authorities on Afghanistan, the late Louis Dupree, suggests that Palaeolithic Man probably lived in the caves of what is now northern Afghanistan as long as 50,000 years ago. Afghanistan provided the backdrop to the emergence of two of the world's religions. Legend has it that Zoroaster, the founder of the modern Parsee religion, was born in the north of the country. Historians seem surer, however, with the story that Zoroaster (or Zarathustra as he was also called) was killed either in or near Balkh in around 522 BC. Zoroaster is thought to have converted to this religion the parents of Darius the Great, the ruler of the Achaemenid Empire at its height. From the south of Afghanistan, Greek and Indian influences merged to create the rich Gand-

hara Buddhist culture. Surfacing first in the Afghan region, it spread (as Mahayana Buddhism) through much of the Far East.

Scholars have identified 25 ruling dynasties which have swept through Afghanistan. Alexander the Great and his armies passed through on the way to India from Persia. Cyrus the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and Babur all rampaged through Afghanistan on the way to somewhere else. A few patterns emerge. Few, if any, of the invaders stayed for any length of time, nor did they attempt to establish colonies. Less surprisingly, several left behind traces of their passage. Some fair-skinned, blue-eyed Nuristanis claim their features as evidence of descent from Alexander's soldiers. The Mongoloid features of the Hazara people suggest descent from Genghis Khan's soldiers. ('Hazaar' translates as one thousand in Persian: it is widely believed in Afghanistan that Genghis Khan left behind detachments of troops one thousand strong to defend various outposts and that these soldiers were the ancestors of the Hazara people.)

Zoraster's tomb in Balkh

The Uzbeks and Turkmen in the north see their history in terms of a much broader Turkic identity. The ancient khanates of Maimana, Shibarghan and Andkhoi, south of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) were the poorer, smaller relations to the grander Uzbek power centres of Khiva, Bokhara and Samarkand north of the river. Buddhism took root about 1,800 years ago in modern-day Nangarhar, Kabul and Bamiyan provinces. The ancient Buddhist site at Hadda, just outside Jalalabad, is a testament to the indiscriminate nature of the Afghan-Soviet war and the wanton vandalism and looting that sometimes accompanied it followed by further theft under the Taliban and then art traffickers in the post-2001 period. The statues of the Buddha have long since succumbed to the effects of history, treasure hunters or the odd artillery shell. The Bamyan Buddhas were destroyed by the Taliban in the summer of 2001.

One of Bamiyan’s Buddhas before destruction by the Taliban

In the 16th Century three empires emerged, sporadically fighting each other: the Safavids from Iran, who ruled parts of western Afghanistan; the Moghuls from India, who made Kabul their capital; and the Shaibanid Uzbeks, whose kingdom stretched from the plains north of the Hindu Kush far into Transoxiana. In 1747, Nadir Shah of Persia was assassinated and the three empires lapsed into decline. One of Nadir Shah's lieutenants, Ahmed Shah Durrani, seized his chance and became the first ruler whom the Afghans can claim as their own: he controlled or perhaps influenced is a better word territory which loosely corresponds to modern-day Afghanistan. He was able to seize some bounty and used it to enrich and augment the forces at his disposal.

Opportunism, paying off tribesmen and mercenaries with loot, and holding out the prospect of more have pretty much guaranteed success to a whole succession of Afghan warlords over the centuries. Short-term success, that is. Ahmed Shah Durrani was a Pushtun from the Abdali tribal grouping, the bitter rivals of the Ghilzai Pushtuns. For all but a few years, the Durrani provided the rulers of Kabul until 1978, to the exclusion of not only the Ghilzai, but also all other ethnic groups. Some authors date 1747 as the beginning of an Afghan political entity, but it is an argument hard to sustain. Ahmed Shah Durrani, whose base was in Kandahar, was essentially a primus inter pares, who by a combination of charisma and circumstance held swathes of territory under his sway. But in no real sense did he have any governing structures. His personal bodyguards were Turkic-speaking Qizilbash (literally 'redheads') rather than Pushtuns.

After his death, Ahmed Shah's empire disintegrated as warring branches competed for the succession: a swirling and ever-changing confusion of broken and remade alliances set the political scene, and to some extent, still form an important undercurrent to Afghan governance. At the beginning of the 19th Century, Afghanistan had no legal existence and no formal borders. These were finally drawn up in the last decade of the century and were contested throughout the preceding decades, principally in reaction to the advances of foreign powers. As Ludwig Adamec puts it, "Modern Afghanistan was born as a result of foreign occupation." Its terrain and the existence of two imperialistic neighbours defined its borders.

Throughout much of the 19th Century, various dusty, isolated Afghan fortresses Herat, Kandahar or Ghazni were dubbed the "Key to India" by British military strategists. Britain feared that the steady march south-eastwards of the Russian armies through Central Asia was designed not only to subjugate the people there but also to open up invasion

routes towards India. Even resurgent Afghans posed problems to India's defences. Ahmed Shah Durrani, among others, made frequent incursions into the fertile north Indian plains. The British efforts to forestall the Russian advance by intrigue, sorties by intelligence officers, diplomacy, straight bribery and direct military intervention were dubbed the "Great Game" by the British writer Rudyard Kipling, and taken up with almost missionary zeal by some of the most flamboyant adventurers of British and Russian history.

The lack of a state structure or system of formal governance cost Afghanistan dear during this period. Abdur Rahman Khan at the end of 19th Century described Afghanistan as a goat between the two lions of Russia and Britain. But as Lord Lytton, a Viceroy of India, put it, "Afghanistan is a state far too weak and barbarous to remain isolated and wholly uninfluenced, between two great military empires such as England and Russia." Russian soldiers never crossed the Oxus in earnest, but it is not surprising that British military planners should have succumbed to something resembling paranoia. While the borders of British India remained reasonably stable, the Russians moved south capturing Novo Alexandrovsk on the north-eastern shores of the Caspian Sea in 1834, Tashkent in 1865, Samarkand three years later, Krasnavodsk in 1869 and Tekke Turkoman in 1881. By 1885 they had arrived along most of the northern banks of the Oxus River through a combination of conquest and treaty. As the British became increasingly nervous, the two countries almost went to war over the demarcation of a small village of just a few hundred souls called Panjdeh, north of Herat.

In an effort to bring the unruly Afghans under control and to shore up the western approaches to India, British armies twice invaded Kabul within the space of forty years. Both times to no avail: the first ended in spectacular military defeat, the second in fruitless intervention. After capturing Kabul in 1839 and returning the hated Shah Shuja to the throne, the British retreated to Jalalabad in January 1842. (SEE William Darlwymple BOX Following the Retreat) Of more than 16,000 troops and camp followers who left Kabul only one doctor (and, later, some escaped prisoners) made it the one hundred miles back to Jalalabad, after some of the most disastrous leadership ever seen from a British general and constant harrying ambushes through the snowy mountain passes led by Wazir Akbar Khan. (For a colourful, humorous but semi-fictional account of this episode see the Flashman novel by the British writer George MacDonald Fraser).

Another British army invaded later that year and by way of revenge blew up Kabul bazaar. In 1878, the British returned when, as British

author Jan Morris writes, "another presumptuous Amir embarked on a flirtation with the Russians, another British Resident was murdered, another British army was defeated and another punitive force stormed back to Kabul in revenge." By now, the Afghans, although poorly equipped with ancient rifles, had developed a fearsome fighting reputation, a ferocious antipathy to foreigners who tried to rule them and a disdain for any Afghan rulers who came to power on their backs. The Afghans valued their independence above all else. The war and skirmishes against the British and Russians served to knit together the nation. From the aggressor's point of view, the interventions proved less than worthless; in the words of a British report: "as a result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditure of large sums of money, all that has yet been accomplished is the disintegration of the State which it was desired to see strong, friendly and independent."

Whether by design or accident, Afghanistan became a buffer between the Russian and British empires, albeit with Britain guiding its foreign policy. Towards the end of the 19th Century both sides accepted it as such, and saw their interests in it remaining so. Between Abdur Rahman Khan's coming to power in 1880 and his death in 1901, Afghanistan took recognisable shape. Its crucial northern and eastern borders were drawn up and a process of nation-building was started, although in a ruthless fashion. Abdur Rahman Khan established a formative cabinet and developed the framework of a civil administration. He pacified the interior, although how much actual control he exerted is not clear. In an inspired move, he expelled some rival Pushtun tribes en masse to the north of the country. Once there, well away from their centres of power and outnumbered by Uzbeks and Persian-speaking 'Tajiks', they had little option but to serve the interests of Kabul by policing the north.

Abdur Rahman Khan was clearly more ready to depend on his erstwhile, but Pushtun, enemies rather than on Uzbeks and Persian-speakers native to the north who fell more under the aegis of their local khans even though the latter had officially been defeated by Abdur Rahman. (Interestingly, when Afghan Uzbek forces revolted against President Najibullah in 1992, one of the reasons given was resentment that a Pushtun, whose family had been resettled in the north by Abdur Rahman Khan, was in command of the government garrison of Mazar-e-Sharif.) In 1893 the eastern border was clarified between British India and Afghanistan. Known as the Durand Line, after the principal cartographer, it was to become much more controversial than its northern counterpart, drawn up three years later. Suffice to repeat the words of Sir George Macartney, surveying the scene from Kashgar: "So fiercely independent and jealous were the Afghans and so turbulent in their domestic politics, that

their borders," which he describes elsewhere as being so ambiguous and contradictory as to be almost incomprehensible, "offered unlimited scope to intrigue and aggression by a foreign power." The division, particularly of Pushtun tribes and even families in the east, was to prove of great significance for Afghanistan in the 1960s and still has a ripple effect on Afghan-Pakistani relations today. (Much to the annoyance of the Pakistani government, Kabul today continues to refuse to recognize this unilaterally-imposed frontier).

With its borders finally set and a rudimentary governing system in place, Afghanistan joined the community of nations at the turn of the 19th Century very much as an isolated backwater on the world stage. Its collision with the modern world did not go very smoothly. It was one of the few countries in the world, and probably the only in Asia, which during World War II was neither occupied nor belligerent. It was not considered important enough. There was no all-weather road connecting the north with the south, until Nadir Shah built one in the 1930s. There was no University until the 1930s. The first formal school in Kabul was constructed by Habibullah Khan at the beginning of the 20th Century. There was no railway. Until recently, (SEE BOX Chinese Copper Mine), the only railway ever built was a few miles of track near Zahir Shah's palace in Kabul. It was never connected to any other railway.

In his book, *Age of Extremes*, the British historian Eric Hobsbawn wrote that, "the destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late 20th Century." If for one country in the world this was less true then surely it was Afghanistan. History and tradition still ruled the roost. Amanullah Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1919 (Independence from Britain) until 1929, tried to drag the country kicking and screaming into the modern world, only to be ejected from power by a scandalised ulema. Amanullah had travelled to Western capitals where the gulf between an ever-developing Europe and his backward and remote kingdom was brought home to him in the starkest of manners. Afghanistan was virtually untouched by industrial development. Upon his return he incited widespread outrage when he unveiled his wife, Surraiya, in public, after forcing the tribal elders to abandon their shalwar kameez and turbans for morning suits and black ties. Amanullah was influenced by his contempo-

raries Kemal Ataturk of Turkey and Reza Khan of Iran. While all three were trying to bring in broadly similar reforms, the Turkish and Iranian leaders only ventured to do so once they had consolidated the state's (and their personal) power by building up strong armies. Amanullah, a man ahead of his time and naïve in equal measure, did not and was chased from power by a ragtag group of bandits led by Bacha Saqao, a Tajik, after a tribal uprising. Later Afghan rulers, Babrak Karmal and Najibullah in particular, tried to portray themselves as the modernizing but more pragmatic heirs of Amanullah Khan.

Bacha Saqao was the first non-Pushtun to rule Kabul since 1747. He lasted less than one year. In 1933, Zahir Shah inherited the throne after his father, Nadir Shah, was killed in a blood feud. He ruled for 40 years and, after three decades in exile, returned to Afghanistan in 2002. He attained the throne at 18. Power rested with his uncles for 20 years. But, again, Afghanistan was to be buffeted by foreign factors largely beyond its control.

Mohammad Daud Khan
Prime Minister 1953-1963

The British withdrawal from India in 1947 and the consolidation of communism in the Soviet Union changed forever the delicate balance on which Afghanistan's status as a buffer state depended. With the creation of Pakistan, the scales tipped inexorably north. The demarcation of the eastern border back in 1893, resented at the time by a powerless Kabul, now came back to sour relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kabul considered that the demise of British India in effect abrogated the Durand Line. Afghanistan's was the only dissenting voice in the vote which admitted Pakistan to the United Nations.

But what did Afghanistan actually want? Many Pushtuns harked back to the days of Ahmed Shah Durrani when Afghans controlled Peshawar. For them, the border should have been pushed back to include all of the Pushtuns in Pakistan's North

West Frontier Province and entailing the creation of 'Pushtunistan' in fact, little short of the dismemberment of Pakistan. Kabul understood 'Pushtunistan' to mean annexation; others saw it as a new independent country; others still, some sort of autonomy. Daoud Khan, King Zahir's cousin, became Prime Minister in 1953 and took a hardline pro-Pushtunistan stance. Daoud's policy caused untold damage to Afghanistan in the short- and longer-term. In the early 1960s, relations became so bad that the border with Pakistan was closed for a time. The immediate effects of the border closure in 1961 were easy enough to predict: a sharp rise in border tension and a cut in trade. Eastern Afghanistan depended then as it does now on exchange with Pakistan. However, within ten days of the border closing, the Soviet Union offered to buy the harvest that would have gone to Pakistan. Daoud took them up on that.

Zahir Shah, Afghanistan's last king

Since the departure of the British and the end of its empire heyday, the United States had stepped in to try to redress the balance with the Soviet giant to the north. But, from Afghanistan's point of view there was little equality between the two. The closure of the border led to a reduction in American aid to Kabul due to Washington's increasing closeness to Pakistan.

Already America was being outspent in aid terms three-to-one by Moscow. The Soviet Union was also the only customer for one of Afghanistan's few accessible mineral assets: its natural gas fields in the far northwest. (SEE BOX Mineral Resources) Afghanistan totted up a large debt to the Soviet Union which, in turn, was in a position to dictate the price it would pay for the gas coming out of the pipeline that Moscow had paid for and built. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Afghanistan was drawn ever closer economically to the Soviet Union. Politically, there was no great affection for communism in Afghanistan; the 1917 Revolution of the proletariat held no resonance whatsoever for Afghans. A significant number of people in the north had fled there from Soviet

attacks against the Basmachi rebels in the 1920s and were familiar with the ruthlessness of the Red Army. Nevertheless, from the mid-1960s onwards, the Soviet Union tried to draw Afghanistan into its political orbit. It had no real competition.

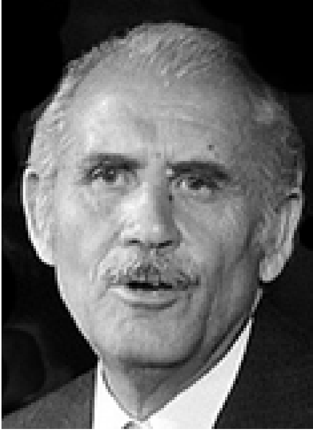
Despite the personal dynamism of Daoud, Afghanistan was as weak a state as can be imagined and ripe for the picking. Zahir Shah was weak and was expected to be weak. The traditional troika of authority in rural Afghanistan the khan, the malik and the mullah only had use or need for a King who would adjudicate when a dispute arose. They did not wish the King to intervene in their business, nor did the King go out of his way to challenge this view. The royal family, meanwhile, kept a stranglehold on positions.

Daud greeting senior Afghan military officers, many of them trained in the former Soviet Union

Those cousins and distant relatives who were not governors would become generals. The Durrani Pushtuns kept things to themselves. Daoud tried to liberate the political class, but his Pushtun chauvinism gave it nowhere to go but north. He created some of the conditions for 'equal opportunities', but failed to create an actual meritocracy. Kabul's attempts to deal with a famine in 1971 in the far west of the country were tragically ineffective. To many Kabuli intellectuals, frustrated by their antiquated regime, it underlined the need for urgent reform and a decisive step forward. A slow-burning fuse was lit in the early 1960s and smouldered beneath the hopelessly outdated royal system of governance. It would lead to some dramatic and ultimately explosions. The pace of change accelerated unrecognisably: in the space of thirty years from 1964, when Zahir Shah brought in some limited democratic reforms (which in effect made him a constitutional monarch), Afghanistan became a Republic (1973), a Democratic Republic (1978), a Soviet client (1979) and an Islamic state (1992).

Yet, despite the speed of change or perhaps because of it the political class was tiny and based almost exclusively in the capital. Kabul was an island politically divorced from the countryside.

At its peak prior to the Soviet invasion and while it was in power, the pro-Moscow People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) is thought to have had fewer than 7,000 members. Kabul University, the country's first, was greatly enlarged in 1964. Most of the key figures of the 1980s and 1990s were former classmates. Moscow sought to build up its influence in Kabul through two main channels: the army and the PDPA.



Nur Mohammad Taraki

Hazifullah Amin

Between 1956 and 1977, up to one third of the entire officer corps of the army was trained and educated in the USSR. Many were recruited into the KGB or the GRU, the military intelligence wing. The Americans tried half-heartedly to keep pace with the growing Soviet influence. Daoud used to joke that he would light his American cigarette with a Russian match, but any idea of a happy balance was an illusion. Washington seemed to acknowledge that Afghanistan had a much closer natural relationship with its northern neighbour.

Unfortunately for the PDPA, the two branches of Soviet espionage seemed to be in competition and had sharply different, even conflicting, approaches. Virtually at its birth, the PDPA split into two factions: the Khalq ('Masses') and the Parcham ('Banner'). The two were at times separate parties rather than factions and, given the chance, persecuted and at times tortured each other mercilessly. American analyst Anthony Arnold argues persuasively in his book Two Party Communism that the Khalqis owed their allegiance to the GRU and the Parchamis to the KGB. The Khalqis, led by Nur Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, concentrated their recruitment

among the armed forces. The Parchamis focused on teachers and social intellectuals. Both saw the need for a dramatic step forward to bring Afghanistan out of a 'museum.' With Soviet help, the Khalqis had already taken part in the palace coup of 1973 in which Daoud overthrew his cousin Zahir Shah and established a Republic. By April 1978, they had the field to themselves.

Although it seems clear that the Soviets had taken part in the planning of the April 1978 coup (also known as the 'Saur Revolution'), its precise timing seems to have taken them by surprise. Moscow felt that Daoud had double-crossed them by ditching members of the PDPA from his inner cabinet. The coup was an accidental and somewhat botched affair. The shooting to death of a prominent Parchami by unknown gunmen led to demonstrations in Kabul orchestrated by the PDPA.

Somewhat alarmed, Daoud arrested Taraki and Amin a few days later. Remarkably, Amin was not kept under close control and was allowed to receive several visitors. To these people, he reportedly issued the pre-arranged instructions to start the coup on the morning of 27 April, 1978. The palace was shelled and confused fighting broke out between various factions and divisions, but by the next morning the Khalqis had won. Daoud and his family were shot to death in the palace, so bringing to an end more than 230 years of almost unbroken Durrani Pushtun rule.

Taraki, a Ghilzai Pushtun, was declared the head of the Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, after several days of internal dispute and wrangling. Places were given to Parchamis but the facade of unity was not to last. Within a few months, the leading Parchamis were sent abroad as ambassadors a communist form of exile. In much the same way as Amanullah had done decades before, the Khalqis attacked the centuries-old traditions of rural Afghanistan head on and with as little sensitivity. One government minister caused outrage by offering public prayers to the souls of Marx and Lenin. With just a few decrees, the new authorities took land away from landowners and redistributed it to peasant farmers, totally disrupting the rural and social relationships that had been unchanged for generations.

The countryside was in uproar. Women were forced to take part in literacy campaigns that consisted of reciting party propaganda slogans. A personality cult was built around Taraki. The first major rebellion occurred in the western city of Herat in the

spring of 1979. Government buildings were attacked and Soviet advisers lynched. The Soviets were unhappy with the way things were being run by their wayward and inexperienced charges in Kabul. Defections from the Afghan army were becoming increasingly frequent. Relations between Amin and Taraki were becoming increasingly strained, as the regime became more and more vicious in the treatment meted out to foes, real or potential. In February 1979, in an incident which has yet to be fully explained, the US Ambassador, Adolph Dubs, was taken hostage in Kabul and then shot dead by Afghan police forces while apparently trying to free him.

The opposition to the Khalqis was uncoordinated and diverse but became increasingly disruptive. The revolt against the Khalqis in the countryside is seen by many as being as much a reaction to an administration in Kabul trying to impose its will in areas where it was not welcome and where it was not usually present, as against a specific ideology in itself. In other words, the rebellion was against governance per se, unwarranted interference as far as many rural Afghans were concerned, as much as it was against communism. Most Afghans in the provinces simply wanted to be left alone. Only in Kabul had the 20th Century had a belated impact. The Taraki-Amin split became worse. The Soviets seemed to have sided more with Taraki and persuaded him to rid himself of Amin. The plan was betrayed to Amin who got his blow in first, and the life of the first Communist leader of Afghanistan was snuffed out ingloriously by a pillow pressed to the face. Amin assumed power and the Soviets found themselves with a serious problem. A few months later, on 27 December 1979, the Soviets invaded, killing Amin in the process and installing Babrak Karmal, leader of the Parcham faction.

Chris Bowers *is a former BBC correspondent in Kabul.*

The Soviet War:
A quagmire that sapped Moscow's strength

The Red Army occupation of Afghanistan lasted nearly a decade. Between 15,000-25,000 Soviets lost their lives by the time the last commanding officer left the country by walking across the Hairaton Bridge over the Oxus River and into the Soviet Union on 14 February, 1989. The Soviets intended to reinforce the PDPA regime in Kabul, but in the end they did much of the fighting themselves. The Soviet war caused the destruction of much of the countryside and forced exodus of over five million refugees. Up to 1.5 million Afghans are believed to have died.

In 1986, the Soviets replaced the PDPA chief, Babrak Karmal with Mohammed Najibullah, former chief of the KHAD secret police. Dr. Najib (as he was known) was relatively popular in Kabul and re-organized the Afghan army into a surprisingly competent fighting force. He also began to develop a National Reconciliation initiative, which began gathering support among disgruntled mujahideen. However, without continued financial backing from Moscow, his peace efforts failed to gather momentum.

Following the Red Army pullout, the PDPA continued fighting for another three years. Ultimately, the lack of funds for political payoffs led to the collapse of the PDPA regime. The mujahideen captured Kabul in April, 1992. Within weeks, all out civil war erupted. Najibullah escaped to the United Nations compound where he hid until the arrival of the Taliban in 1996. Disregarding the UN's supposed immunity, Taliban fighters broke into the compound and captured Najibullah. They tortured and then castrated the fallen dictator, and eventually dragged him through the streets behind a truck until he was dead. His body was strung up to a traffic light and left dangling as a public display.

The Taliban controlled Kabul until the US-led invasion in October, 2001. After driving the Taliban into the surrounding mountains, the Americans and their international allies proceeded to make many of the same mistakes that the Soviets and British had made before them. In 2013, the outgoing American commander in February announced boldly that coalition forces were on the road to winning the war, and then he left. The Taliban remained undefeated.

--EG

Babrak Kamal (top), Mohammad Najibullah (bottom)

Afghan timeline

100,000-2,000 BC: Stone Age
5,000-1,000 BC: Bronze Age trading with Mesopotamia and Indus Valley
1,500 BC: Aryans warriors invade N Afghanistan
500 BC: Persians invade rise of Zoroastrianism
330 BC: Alexander the Great creates Afghan kingdom
250 BC: Buddhist Emperor Ashoka edicts carved in stone
300 BC-50 AD: Bactrian Greeks rule N Afghanistan
50-300: Kushan Empire. Rise of Silk Route
100-700: Flourishing of Buddhism and Gandhara art
650-850: Arabs spread Islam through west and north
1000-1100: Ghazni and Bost flourish under Sultan Mahmud
1150: Ghorid dynasty flourishes under Alauddin. Builds Minaret of Jam
1220: Genghis Khan devastates west and north Afghanistan
1369-1530: Timurid empire, from Tamerlane to Babur, centered at Herat,
1749: Ahmed Shah Durrani, a Pashtun, creates modern Afghanistan
1839-42: British occupy, then forced into disastrous retreat from Kabul
1878: Second British invasion begins the 'Great Game'
1880-1901: Amir Abdur Rahman continues nation building
1893: Durand Line separates Afghanistan from British India
1919: Third Anglo-Afghan war ends, with Afghanistan independence
1919-29: Amanullah Khan becomes king, but progressive reforms backfire
1932: Kabul University established
1933-73: Zahir Shah rules as king. Rise of Soviet influence
1953-63: Mohammed Daoud becomes prime minister. Abolishes purdah
1964: Creation of constitutional monarchy
1973: Daoud overthrows king and establishes Republic
1978: Saur Revolution. Afghan communists assassinate Daoud.
1979-80: Soviets invade and install Babrak Karmal as leader
1980-85: Mujahideen fights Soviets
1985: Mujahideen form alliance against Soviets, based in Peshawar
1980-1989: Six million Afghan refugees flee Soviet attacks on civilians
1986: US supplies Stinger missiles. Najibullah replaces Karmal
1988-89: Peace accord. Soviet troops leave. Mujahideen fight Najibullah
1992: Mujahideen, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, overthrow Najibullah
1993: Najibullah is replaced by Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik
1992-94: Devastating civil war breaks out between mujahideen factions
1994: Rise of Taliban, who take Kandahar and Herat
1996: Taliban capture Kabul, execute Najibullah, exile Rabbani, offer refuge to Osama Bin Laden and impose strict Islam.

Northern Alliance created to fight the Taliban
1997: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE recognize the Taliban
1998: Two major earthquakes kill thousands.
US fires missiles at suspected Bin Laden camps
in retaliation for bombing US embassies in East Africa
1999: Taliban capture Mazr-e-Sharif in fierce fighting
1999-2001: UN imposes sanctions to force Taliban to hand over Bin Laden
2001: Taliban destroy Bamiyan Buddhas. Massoud assassinated.
Taliban ousted by US forces and Northern Alliance.
Bonn Agreement signed
2002: 5,000 foreign peacekeepers arrive in Kabul. Hamid Karzai
elected leader by Loya Jirga. Vice President Hajji Qadir assassinated
2003: Security deteriorates as US forces hunt Taliban/Al Qa'eda
remnants. Third of country off-limits to international aid
workers. New Constitution drafted and debated
2004: Karzai is elected as President in first free nationwide
elections. Insecurity continues in east.
2005: NATO agrees in February to expand ISAF to the whole of
the country by the end of 2006. Parliamentary elections
postponed till end of summer.
2005 (February): Harshest winter in decade kills hundreds of Afghans.
2005 (May): Details emerge of prisoner abuse by US forces.
2005 (September): First parliamentary and provincial elections
in more than thirty years.
2005 (December): New parliament holds inaugural session.
2006 (February): London donor conference pledges more than $10 billion.
2006 (October): NATO responsible for security for whole of Afghanistan.
2007 (March): Pakistan arrests Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, third
most senior member of Taliban leadership council. Operation Achilles,
largest NATO-Afghan offensive to date against Taliban.
2007 (May): Taliban's senior military commander, Mullah Dadullah, killed.
Afghan and Pakistani troops clash over border dispute.
2007 (July): Former king Zahir Shah dies.
2007 (August): UN reports Opium production reaches record high.
2007 (November): Suicide attack on parliament delegation kills forty-one.
2007 (December): Two EU and UN envoys expelled for contacts with Taliban.
2008 (April): NATO leaders in Bucharest say Afghanistan mission top priority.
2008 (June): Taliban engineer massive jailbreak from Kandahar prison,
freeing 350 insurgents. President Karzai warns Afghanistan will send
troops into Pakistan to fight militants if Islamabad fails to take action.
2008 (July): Suicide bomb in Kabul kills more than fifty at Indian embassy.
Afghan government accuses the ISI.

2008 (August): Taliban kills ten French soldiers the in worst NATO loss to date. Karzai accuses US-led coalition of killing 89 civilians in Herat air strike.

2008 (September): President Bush sends extra 4,500 US troops to Afghanistan in "quiet surge."

2008 (October): Germany extends its mission in Afghanistan to 2009 and boosts troop numbers by 1,000 to 4,500.

2008 (November): Talib militants reject President Karzai's offer of peace talks, stressing no negotiations until foreign troops leave.

2008 (December): New Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari agrees to form joint strategy with Karzai to fight militants in border regions.

2009 (January): US defense secretary Robert Gates calls Afghanistan President Barack Obama's "greatest test."

2009 (February): Twenty NATO countries pledge military commitment after United States announces 17,000 troop increase.

2009 (March): President Obama unveils new US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2009 (May): US commander General David McKiernan replaced by General Stanley McChrystal to provide "new thinking."

2009 (July): US military launches major offensive in Helmand province.

2009 (August): Presidential and provincial elections tainted by widespread insurgent attacks, patchy turnout, and serious fraud.

2009 (September): General McChrystal says war could be lost in twelve months unless significant increase in troop strength.

2009 (October): Karzai wins in fraudulent August presidential election.

2009 (November): Karzai sworn in for second term as president.

2009 (December): President Obama boosts US troop numbers by 30,000, bringing total to 100,000, but he promises to begin withdrawal of forces by 2011. Al Qaeda double agent kills seven CIA agents in suicide attack on a US base in Khost.

2010 (January): Insurgents boldly attack in Kabul, leaving twelve dead, including seven militants.

2010 (February): NATO-led forces launch Operation Moshtarak in bid to control southern Helmand province. Top Talib commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar captured in Pakistan.

2010 (April): President Karzai accuses foreign observers of fraud in disputed 2009 election and suggests West planning a coup. White House calls remarks "genuinely troubling."

2010 (July): International conference endorses Karzai's timetable for transferring security to Afghan forces by 2014. General David Petraeus takes command of US and ISAF forces.

2010 (August): Dutch troops leave Afghanistan. Karzai tries to ban foreign

security firms.

2010 (September): Afghans vote in parliamentary elections despite Taliban; Estimates are that 40 percent vote.

2010 (November): NATO summit in Lisbon announces withdrawal of most Coalition troops by 2014.

2011 (May 2): Osama bin Laden killed in Abottabad, Pakistan.

2011 (September 9 and 11): Tenth anniversary of Ahmed Shah Massoud assasination and 9/11 attack on World Trade Center.

2012 (February): Riots Koran burning by US military personnel at Bagram.

2012 (March): US staff sergeant kills 16 Afghan civilians in a rampage.

2012 (April): British ICRC delegate brutally tortured before execution by unknown assailants in Baluchistan. Pakistan blames tribal extremists, but humanitarian agencies suspect ISI involvement.

2012 (May): NATO conference in Chicago re-asserts commitment to withdraw most foreign troops by end of 2014. Promises to support Afghan security forces. US intends to deploy Special Forces and keep access to military bases for at least another decade.

2012 (May): UNHCR holds Geneva Afghan refugee conference to discuss new "solutions' strategy" with Pakistan and Iran. Both countries stress that two million refugees in Pakistan and one million in Iran will not be 'forced' to return, but must head back by end of 2013.

2012 (May): New French President Francois Hollande says France will withdraw troops by end of 2012 - a year earlier than planned. Former Taliban minister, Arsala Rahmani, of High Peace Council shot dead in Kabul. he had been crucial in contacting rebel commanders.

2012 (July): Tokyo donor conference pledges $16bn in civilian aid up to 2016. US, Japan, Germany and UK to supply majority of funds. Afghanistan agrees to new conditions to counter corruption.

2012 (August): The US disciplines six soldiers for burning copies of the Koran. They do not face criminal prosecution. Three US Marines reprimanded for a videotape of marines urinating on bodies of dead Taliban fighters.

2012 (September): US turns Bagram high-security prison over to Kabul government, but retains control over some foreign prisoners. Taliban attacks Bagram air base the next day. Series of attacks by apparent police and Afghan soldiers leads US to suspend police training. US soldiers killed in the Afghan war reaches 2,000.

2013 (February): President Karzai and Pakistan's Asif Ali Zardari at UK-brokered talks in London agree to work for a peace deal within six months. They back opening of an Afghan office in Doha and urge the Taliban to do the same. Renewed fears that Pakistan will again impose its own interests in Afghanistan and that other key players will be not be part of the negotiations.

2013 (July): Taliban opens its office in Doha.

INFOBRIEFS

Agriculture: Key to the nation

By Anthony Fitzherbert

> *"Without our land, there is no food;*
> *Without water, there is no life;*
> *Without trees and flowers, there is no soul;*
> *Without our soul there is no country;*
> *Without our country there is no poetry or music;*
> *Without these we are not Afghans." Tribal elder from Nangarhar province*

> *Kabul can be without gold, but not without snow.*
> *(Old Afghan saying)*

According to all official reports Afghanistan's economy is still based primarily on farming. This may still be true, however, accurate data does not exist for rural Afghans' many sources of 'unofficial' and largely unrecorded non-farm and off-farm income. This includes the unrecorded remittances of numerous mainly rural, Afghan migrants now working in the cities and abroad. Income generated as the result of the international presence remains generally unquantified and unqualified as is also much of the 'unofficial' cross border trade.

An estimated three out of four Afghans still live in rural villages or refer to rural settlements as their home locality or 'manteqa'. However, this is changing rapidly and official statistics are misleading. The Afghan population has more than doubled in the last 35 years to its roughly 30 - 32 million. With an annual growth rate of 2.22per cent the rapidly increasing population is placing intolerable pressures on limited viable land resources, not to speak of the fragmentation of land holdings in addition to social disruption due to conflict, drought and poverty. Since 2002, the rural population has been flocking to the country's burgeoning cities. Improvement in roads and communications is speeding up the process, pulled by perceived urban opportunities and pushed by rural poverty. Rapid and largely uncontrolled urban expansion is largely at the expense of the good agricultural land that surrounds the main cities which traditionally provided much smaller urban populations with fresh agricultural produce.

Urban expansion is also placing additional demands on scarce water resources needed for irrigated farming. Refugees may have returned home but many thousands of rural Afghans seeking work abroad continue to migrate legally and illegally each year. The definition of who is an economic migrant and who a refugee

becomes harder to make. Most go to Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, Iran, Pakistan and the Arabian peninsular, but also further a field to Turkey, Europe, North America and even Australasia. Those who remain in their villages, although still relying on farming for much of their subsistence, are increasingly dependent on more diverse sources for their survival, including a variety of non-farm and off-farm sources of income. Remittances from family members working away from home are particularly significant. For poor villages in the highlands this often accounts for as much as 60 to 70 per cent of working age men (17-45). Even in moderately prosperous villages, this can amount to 25 or 30 per cent of working age men and this trend is not just confined to the landless. Even if remittances are small, the fact that so many hungry men are away means that they do not have to be fed from the limited resources of their home villages. Diverse income is not always obvious to the casual observer and is often overlooked by aid agencies. They often fail to grasp the complexity of the rural communities in which they are working. Possibly because they are increasingly working to accomplish objectives and agendas set by donors who are remote from reality.

Nonetheless, Afghan agriculture continues to play a vital role in partially meeting the country's food security needs. In Afghanistan, the rapidly growing urban population is increasingly dependant on basic grains such as wheat and fresh and processed food products of all kinds imported by private entrepreneurs at prices with which local production and manufacture have difficulty competing. In the present uncertain political situation, Afghan entrepreneurs are reluctant to invest in local food processing. It is easier, less risky and more profitable to trade in food products imported from the rest of the world.

Victim of its climate and geography

Afghanistan is landlocked and has a dry continental climate typical of mountainous Central Asia. Winter snow and spring rain, especially the "snow-pack" in the high mountains – are vital, but unpredictable sources of water on which agriculture is dependant. In the dry western and southern regions precipitation seldom exceed 300 mm (12 inches) per year. Three fourths of the land is either mountain or desert, more suited to the seasonal grazing of livestock than crop production. The sparseness of the vegetation is compensated by the expanse of the mountain range-lands more conducive to nomads or pastoralists than for settled agriculture.

Yet where there is sufficient water for irrigation and good land, intensive and often productive agriculture is practiced. The climate is excellent for the production of many temperate fruits and nuts.

Only 12 to 13 per cent of the country's land area (63,000 sq. km) is cropped on a periodic basis. Less than 6 per cent is cropped regularly. More than half of this is irrigated, the rest being rain-fed. Roughly 85 per cent of Afghanistan's agricultural output is produced from only 5 per cent of its overall area. The most productive locations are those river basins and plains benefiting from the precipitation which occurs in the mountains of the north eastern and central Hindu Kush, the central massif of the Koh-e Baba range in the Hazarajat and the eastern ranges, including those of Nuristan, Loya Paktya and the Safed Koh / Spingah ranges, that form part of the frontier with Pakistan. These highlands serve as the principle 'water towers' feeding Afghanistan's rivers that flow out from the mountains like the spokes of a wheel. These irrigate valleys and plains, where depending on altitude and the availability of summer water, farmers obtain from one to two crops in a season. In certain favoured locations such as the districts round Jalalabad and the lower Laghman / Kunar valleys, skilled farmers can produce up to four crops of vegetables in a season. But this is the exception.

To grasp the effects of more than three decades of war on Afghanistan's agriculture, it is necessary to appreciate that, even without conflict, life in Afghanistan has always been extremely challenging. The enormous variations in land type, the presence or absence of perennial water for irrigation, the differences in altitude at which crops are grown (from 300 m to over 3,000) all have a profound effect on agricultural possibilities, the farming or pastoral systems practiced and the crops grown. In a country dominated by complex mountain systems, the different aspects of individual valleys, their relationship to the surrounding ranges, their relative exposure to sunshine and shadow, to the prevailing wind, rain and snow fall all have a profound influence on what is grown or grazed. Even taking account of the possible effects of 'climate change', the region has always experienced considerable variations in weather. Floods, land slides, droughts, blizzards and earthquakes have always been part of life, which has always been a struggle.

The combined presence of plentiful water and fertile soil gave rise to the foundation, settlement and growth of Afghanistan's main cities, including significantly Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz,

Taloqan and Herat, not forgetting Mazar-e-Sharif the successor of the ancient city of Balkh. Secure cropping is entirely dependant on irrigation. It is widely acknowledged that there is considerable potential to increase the efficiency of irrigated agriculture.

Much less secure is rain-fed (lalmi) cropping which suffers from seasonal variation. Most of the rain-fed crop land lies in the belt of loess foothills and alluvial plains that stretches west to east across northern Afghanistan, from Badghyz in the west to Takhar and Badakhshan in the east. Depending on the rainfall

the lalmi crop land is ideally cultivated on the basis of a crop / fallow rotation, but in years of drought there is often a virtual crop failure. However, in years of timely precipitation Afghanistan can achieve almost 70 per cent self-sufficiency in basic grain (wheat) production, much of this from the lalmi land. This cannot be relied on. Good years are invariably interspersed with years of drought. There was a serious drought in the early 1970s, during which many people died. In contrast, the late 1970s experienced good precipitation and some of the best wheat harvests recorded. This was helped by timely rain and snowfall and the introduction of improved strains of wheat, an overspill from the 'Green Revolution' taking place across the Indian subcontinent.

Again, in the early 1990s, precipitation was generally good, which helped agricultural recovery in the years following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. However, this was followed over four seasons, between 1998/99 and 2001/2002, by the most severe drought in recent Afghan history, which caused great hardship. This drought which overlapped the defeat and withdrawal of the Taliban regime in late 2001 was followed in the winter/spring of 2002/2003 by excellent snow and rainfall which resulted, in the best harvest until 2009. The national wheat yield in 2003 was 80 per cent greater than that of 2001 and better than the previous record year of 1978. Years of moderate to low precipitation characterised the years between 2004 and 2007. Both 2008 and 2011 were years of serious drought when negligible harvests were obtained from the rain-fed lands. The dry season in 2011 resulted in a national wheat shortfall of 700,000 tonnes. In contrast the harvests recorded for 2009, 2010 and 2012 were comparable or better than 2003. The current 2013 season looks like being another year of good harvests. Differences in total national wheat yields can easily vary between 40 and 50 percent between consecutive seasons due to varied precipitation and production from the 'lalmi' land. These differences can on occasions be even greater, which makes predicting future national grain balances a season in advance almost impossible.

Land Tenure and subsistence farming

Afghan Agriculture remains predominantly subsistence in character. Most land holdings are small, being between five and 15 jerib (one to 3 ha) and often less for irrigated land being the norm. Larger holdings are found mainly in the north. The availability or unavailability of family labour is a defining factor.

Various forms of land tenure exist side by side ranging from those actively farming their own freehold (mulk) land; different forms of tenancy arrangements, paying an agreed annual rent (keroyeh) re-assessed annually; sharecropping arrangements (deyghani) under which the *dehqhan* retains an agreed percentage of the crop depending on the relative proportion of the land-owner's inputs and those of the sharecropper's including labour. Generally the sharecropper receives between one quarter and one third of the crop in return for his contribution, including his family's labour. The land owner provides the land and water, with either the owner or the dehqhan providing some or all of the other inputs such as seed, fertiliser and draught power.

Wheat is the staple food crop, grown in all localities and at all altitudes (300 m to 3,000 m) both under irrigated and rain-fed conditions. There are a few large commercial grain farmers, mainly in the north. On the whole wheat is cultivated primarily for household consumption rather than as a cash crop. Households are large and comparatively few farmers are self sufficient in wheat from their own land. The short fall must be purchased from the market for cash. As most of the flour sold in the bazaars is imported (mainly from Pakistan and Kazakhstan), even households in remote villages are effected by world grain prices and cross-border politics. The Afghan urban population is now almost entirely dependant on flour imported by private traders. In drought years some contribution to the grain deficit is usually made by the international community through agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP), but assessments have shown that this is usually much less than the flour imported by private traders. Rice, maize and barley, pulses (lentils, field peas, broad beans and various Phaseolus beans), potato, sundry green and root vegetables and oil seed crops (flax, linseed, sesame, mustard etc) of all kinds are all cultivated by rural families for household consumption. Winter fodder for domestic livestock is provided from a combination of crop bi-products, mainly straw, stover and a variety of fodder legumes, including clover and lucerne supplemented by wild grasses and selected forbs gathered from the surrounding mountains. Barley, fodder pulses and oil seed cake are fed sparingly to livestock. Some pulses, such as mung beans, chick pea and peanuts, are cultivated specifically as cash crops. Potatoes, while widely cultivated for household consumption also serve as a commercial crop, particularly in

localities such as central Bamiyan, where they now dominate the cropping system, driven by demand of Kabul and other urban markets. Certain locations in Wardak, Ghazni and Logar also grow potatoes specifically for a Pakistan market. Increasingly, a commercial 'winter' crop of potatoes is grown round Jalalabad taking advantage of the mild winter climate.

A local boom in market gardening

It is common, for households to cultivate vegetables for individual consumption, usually within or close to the family compound. This has been encouraged over many years by many NGO programmes, particularly in remoter mountain districts. In the twelve years since 2002 there has been an impressive development of successful "all year round" commercial production of fresh and root vegetables or all kinds in the well-watered districts close to Jalalabad and of summer vegetables in the Shomali plains of Parwan. The main driver for this has been the growing demands of Kabul and other urban centres, including Peshawar in Pakistan. Similar "market garden" production thrives around Afghan towns, such as Kandahar, Herat, Mazar and Kunduz in which localities modern systems using polytunels and hybrid seed are now commonly practiced. Although to some extent assisted by international agencies, much of this development in areas with good soils and plentiful irrigation is the result of indigenous enterprise. This has been stimulated by growing urban demand, improving farm to market roads and communications including the present widespread use of the mobile telephone by the rural population.

Cotton no longer the 'white gold'

There is an old saying dating from the settlement of Pushtun clans in the northern river valleys in the 1890s and early 1900s that you went to Kunduz "to make your fortune or die". The prospect of riches from growing cotton, known as "white gold"; contrasted the prospect of death from malaria. Afghanistan's cotton industry was thriving in the 1960s and 70s in the north (Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan) and (to some extent) also in the south (Helmand), where the American programme viewed cotton as a key agro/industrial crop. Since the 1980s, however, cotton production in Afghanistan has been in trouble. It is presently of marginal importance and the crop is cultivated mainly for local and domestic use. Despite international attempts to revive it in

recent years, both the trade in ginned cotton and the manufacture of cotton goods are presently moribund. The country's national manufacturing capacity was destroyed in the 1980s and 90s. Cotton production remains plagued by low prices, the high cost of production, fractured market chains, institutional corruption and government meddling. Almost more valuable than the cotton fibre are its by-products, cotton seed cake for animal feed orcotton seed oil for cooking.

Problems with melons

Afghanistan's renowned melons, particularly those grown in the north and northeast, have a ready market in Afghanistan's cities as well as in Pakistan and even further in India. However, in recent years, the melon crop has been plagued by destructive infestations of the Balochistan melon fly. . However, recent trials covering the growing melons with cheap cotton bags is proving very effective.

Forbidden crops: Opium poppy and cannabis

Narcotic crops are dealt with more fully elsewhere but as both opium poppy (Papaver somniferum), and Cannabis sativus form an important part of their farming systems and livelihood for those who cultivate these crops, they require mention. Technically both are field crops subject to their own requirements for rotation, cultivation, irrigation, fertilisation, weeding and harvesting. Like any other crop, poppy and cannabis are subject to diseases, pests, weather and fluctuations in prices. Indeed were it not for the international proscription on the illegal cultivation of opium, and the negative consequences of their derivatives, both poppy and cannabis are in many ways ideal small farmer cash crops. Both fit well into local cropping systems and the environment. Cannabis is a full season crop requiring a long growing period so it excludes the land from food crops for one season, but it is a relatively inexpensive crop to grow under Afghan conditions. Cannabis also attracts less official opprobrium than opium, and can produce a good income.

Poppy is a labour intensive crop that requires careful tending. Poppy provides multiple benefits for the grower in addition to the sale of its narcotic resin, which has a ready market and is one of the few crops against which farmers can easily obtain credit. Although prices fluctuate and carry some risk of punitive government action, it can be easily stored, taking up little space. It

does not deteriorate in quality over time, merely loosing moisture.

Poppy is a short season annual crop, coinciding with wheat. It has the advantage of maturing earlier than wheat, and requiring less irrigation, and is harvested earlier than wheat. In low elevation locations where a second summer crop (maize, sunflower, pulses etc) is possible as in the southern and eastern provinces, these useful summer crops can thus be planted earlier. The young poppy crop must be carefully weeded and thinned. This cleans the field greatly benefiting the following crop. Poppy needs to be grown as part of a crop rotation. If this is ignored, it results in disease and poor yields.

After harvesting, the dried stalks are a valuable source of fuel. The seed, which is not narcotic, has a ready market in the international confectionary trade and is a source of high quality cooking oil. The extract from the dried seed capsules is a commonly used rural herbal medicine.

After a reduction from an estimated record of193,000 hectares in 2007 to123,000 hectares in 2009 and 2010, the last three seasons have seen the area under poppy increasing again with 2013 possibly exceeding 2007. The last two seasons have seen the area under poppy increasing again, a trend that is expected to continue in 2013. Total production and total income do not necessarily run parallel with increases and decreases in the total acreage planted. Opium poppy is highly vulnerable to disease, pests and weather conditions and the market price is highly fluid. In 2010 the opium crop was severely effected by disease and yields per jerib (1/5 ha) were very low. Again in 2012 the crop was badly effected by unseasonable cold spring weather. The yields as well as the farm gate price were lower compared to the previous year.

According to UNODC, the 2011 crop was estimated to have produced a total farm gate income of over US$ 1.4 billion for the growers, or the equivalent of 9 per cent of national GDP. Export earnings in 2011 crop are estimated to have been worth about US$ 2.4 billion or the equivalent of 15 per cent of GDP. On the other hand the farm-gate value of the 2012 crop despite the increased acreage is estimated to have fallen by 49 per cent from its 2011 level to the equivalent of 4 per cent of GDP (or the same as in 2010.) UNODOC's annual report for 2012 can be read online at:http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Summary_Findings_FINAL.pdf.

Despite opium's impact on the national economy, political life and international standing, less than 6per cent of Afghan

farmers actually cultivate poppy. Even at its maximum extent of 193,000 ha. in 2007, poppy amounted to only 12.3 per cent of the total intensely cultivated land and no more than 6per cent of the total cropped land of 3,208,480 ha. Despite the crop's impressive contribution to the country's economy, rural Afghanistan is not "wall to wall" opium poppy as is sometimes the popular impression. The crop is mainly confined to specific locations, and even in provinces shown as cultivating the crop, this may be confined to a few isolated locations. Further more, in 2012, 73 per cent of the total opium crop was concentrated in the six southern provinces (out of the total 34) of which almost half (49 per cent) was concentrated in Helmand.

It is possible to travel through province after province, and district after district, in Afghanistan (as the author has frequently done) and never see an opium poppy. Yet the farmers in these other provinces and districts are not particularly well off. Indeed many are very poor. They are not growing 'magic' crops. Only a small minority of Afghan farmers in exceptional locations, such as those around Jalalabad, are growing crops that compete with poppy in terms of potential cash returns. The answer does not just lie in finding alternative crops, although this may be part of a solution. Rather, what is required is a development package that promotes livelihoods in broad terms, and not necessarily confined to agriculture. This must be coupled with improvements in infrastructure and even more importantly that most elusive of conditions in the Afghan context, the provision of good government and security. This is no easy matter particularly in areas where opium production is most entrenched. Some excellent field research work over the past 17 years shows that the factors driving farmers to cultivate opium poppy are both extremely complex and also location specific. As are the possible solutions. In the absence of good government, security and alternative sources of livelihood, draconian eradication programmes have invariably proved to be counter productive. Whilst the problem is unlikely to get easier after 2014, it should also be born in mind that the heavy presence of foreign armies in southern Afghanistan since 2006 has done nothing to solve this problem. Opium production is now more concentrated in southern Afghanistan than ever before. In eastern Afghanistan after a decline in recent years, opium production is once again on the increase, demonstrating the difficulty of sustaining reduction in 'hard core' locations.

Fruit and Nut Exports: Reality or illusion?

The Afghan climate makes it possible to grow many types of temperate and Mediterranean fruits and nuts, for which the country has been justifiably famed in literature since Mughal, Temurid and earlier times. Unfortunately the country's historic trade in dried fruit and nuts, which contributed more than 40 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings in the 1970s, lost its position during the years of attrition. Although production and exports have recovered to some extent since 2002 assisted by a number of donor funded programmes, Afghanistan is still struggling to regain its previous international position. Although commonly proposed as the "great white hope" for an agricultural export future, in reality Afghanistan offers nothing that is not already being produced by other countries in larger quantities, and economies of scale consistent with accepted international standards. Paradoxically, production costs in Afghanistan are comparatively high. Over the past 30 years its trading position has been usurped by countries such as Turkey, Mediterranean EU, Australasia, the USA and South America (Chile etc).

Production and trade in fresh as well as dried fruit and fruit juices in Afghanistan, although consistently highlighted for its 'great potential' remain hampered by problems of fractured market chains, the country's landlocked position, high transport costs, lack of reliable power and cold storage, poor harvest management, low farm gate prices and inconsistent quality. The country's state of chronic insecurity, that the foreign presence has done nothing to dispel, continues to discourage indigenous Afghan investment in agro-processing. Afghanistan's neighbouring countries are either direct competitors or wish to control trade routes and markets. Most of Afghanistan's dried fruit (raisins, apricots and plums) and nuts (almonds, pistachios, walnuts and pine-nuts) as well as fresh fruit, such as grapes, apples and stone fruit, continue to find their main outlet in or through Pakistan, (in the case of pistachios--Iran), where quality demands as well as prices tend to be lower.

Some exploratory market testing has been carried out by various organisations with small quantities of produce, both fresh and dried, exported to the potentially profitable markets of the Arabian peninsular, Southeast Asia and Europe. Some of these, albeit limited, consignments have been well received and have demonstrated a potential. But scaling up the trade in quality produce at the right price has proved problematic. Poor consistency of quality, the cost of production and local insecurity have all too often made it unprofitable or unfeasible. Small successes, although often trumpeted by the donors to prove their credibility, have so far proved to be largely ephemeral. The enthusiastic promotion of the large scale export of certain fruits such as pomegranates have, to date, proved to be illusionary in practice. Arguably the perennial horticultural crop showing the greatest potential for export are almonds. There is a growing domestic market in Afghanistan, both for fresh and dried fruit and nuts and fruit juices and nectars. However, domestic products find themselves competing with cheap imports. Local production of

fruit juice meets stiff competition from juice imported both from neighbouring countries and from as far away as Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Even local fresh fruit finds itself competing with imports. The markets of Afghanistan's towns are flooded with Chinese pears, Pakistani citrus and even Afghan apples, bought cheaply at harvest time and later re-imported by traders at a higher price from Pakistan where they have been held in cold storage. Lack of reliable power in cities such as Kabul make cold storage there difficult and expensive.

Problems for Afghanistan's pastoral economy

Afghanistan is an essentially pastoral economy that historically relied on the seasonal use of its extensive plains and mountain rangelands by transhumance and nomadic tribesmen and their flocks. Settled village households traditionally keep small numbers of animals, cattle, sheep and goats, primarily for household use and sale when 'needs must'. In settled situations winter fodder requires access to land and access to a combination of crop bi-products, legume hay, wild herbs and grasses.

Conflict and successive periods of drought as well as outbreaks of disease have combined to kept livestock numbers in check. There have been a number of imaginative animal health programmes, which have had a positive impact dating back to the early 1990s. Funded by various donors these programmes have been implemented according to various models, by different agencies. They have mainly targeted the more easily accessible sedentary village livestock (cattle, sheep and goats) rather than the migratory flocks. Access to the migratory flocks is, by definition, more difficult for veterinary models based on static veterinary field units (VFUs) manned by paravets and Basic Voluntary Services (BVS) with few means of transport. The migratory flocks belonging to the 'kuchi' and 'maldar' clans (Pushtun, Baloch, Arab and Turki) remain particularly vulnerable to drought and outbreaks of disease, yet they are by far the most significant producers of meat, fibre and preserved dairy products (e.g. qurut-dried whey). The migratory flocks have traditionally made up the main base of Afghanistan's livestock economy. These are meeting increasing challenges which have not yet been adequately addressed.

Although the transhumance and nomadic clans consistently demonstrate remarkable powers of survival and recovery from conflict, drought and disease, the old systems of transhumance are proving increasingly difficult to sustain. Migration patterns are

increasingly restricted and distorted. As the human population of 'kuchi' and 'maldar' has increased, in line with the country's demography, they have been forced to expand their livelihood options outside herding. Recent studies indicate that the majority of members of a 'kuchi' clan are now seeking work outside their original pastoral tradition. Only a small section of the group are actively leading a pastoral life. It does not require large numbers of people to herd sheep and goats. Group survival depends on being opportunistic, which includes doing casual labour and knowing how to benefit from available aid programmes. More traditionally the kuchi acted as 'bankers' to remoter settled villages along their migration routes and acquired land as a result, as for instance in the Hazarajat.This includes knowing how to benefit from available aid programmes. The 'kuchi' have always been opportunistic. This includes acting as 'bankers' to the remoter settled villagers along their migration routes.

Destruction of the rangelands

Over the past thirty-five years, there has been considerable destruction of the rangeland. This is often blamed on "over grazing" but this is a misleading over simplification and not entirely accurate. By far the most destructive force has been the ox plough and the tractor. Disregarding the fragility of the environment, huge tracts of rangeland have been converted into largely marginal rain-fed crop land. This has been particularly serious in the central and northern and northeastern provinces, including mountain land and plateaux at high altitudes, not excluding extremely steep slopes. In turn this is leading to increasing erosion and run off, not to speak of the destruction of what was some of the best seasonal grazing. In such fragile environments, cultivation scars remain for many years without recovering their original rich botanical complexity, even after farming has been abandoned.

In addition to the wholesale stripping by up-rooting of Artemisia and Ephedra and other woody perennials for fuel is a serious problem. These deep rooted plants provide important ground cover that stabilises the soil and provides grazing, often in the winter months. With the improvement of road systems into the mountains, the collection of such environmentally important ground cover is increasing beyond just supplying the winter fuel needs of poor mountain villagers. Convoys of lorries loaded with these woody plants to feed the bread ovens (tandor) of cities

such as Kabul have now reached almost industrial proportions. (See forests, timber and fuel wood) Government officials are sometimes complicit, or turn a blind eye to such practices.

Many pastorals now find their migratory routes cut off by both local and international politics (e.g. the frontier with Pakistan). Access to previous summer and winter pastures is often blocked by the hostility of the local settled population, either because these now claim the grazing for themselves or because of negative historical experience. Increasing restrictions on the seasonal movement of flocks is placing additional "out of season" grazing pressure on the intermediary rangelands. In turn this can lead to accusations of overstocking and overgrazing, but the causes need to be understood before the solutions can be found.

Destruction of the forests

The modern history of Afghanistan's few forests is one of unremitting tragedy. Always limited, its forest were mainly confined to the wonderful coniferous and mixed deciduous woodlands that covered the mountains of the country's eastern provinces which catch the end of the Indian monsoon. More open woodlands of pistachio, wild almond, juniper and other comparatively drought resistant trees previously covered large tracts of Afghanistan's central, northern and north eastern provinces. A few centuries ago it is estimated that about 5per cent of modern Afghanistan's surface area was covered in forest. By the middle of the 20th century between 3.1 and 3.4 million hectares still remained. By 2008, as the result of 30 years of attrition, Afghanistan's forest cover was estimated to have been reduced to between 1.0 and 1.3 million ha. less than 2 per cent of the total land area. But, much of this is seriously degraded and only 0.5 million ha. has a crown density of 10per cent. (UNEP data) The annual decline has been equal to the removal of about 30,000 ha. a year. This continues despite various programmes and initiatives aimed at stemming and even redressing the decline.

During the 1960s and 70s in the still heavily forested mountains of Loya Paktia, the West Germans supported a well-regarded community-based forestry and natural resource management project. Nothing continues, except where some local communities have begun to realize their loss and are taking action to preserve and manage what remains.

The wholesale exploitation of the forests of Loya Paktya and Kunar

for timber and fuel wood that started in the 1980s, continued through the 1990s with local ‘commanders’ often in league with Pakistani timber merchants and military. To some extent Nuristan escaped the worst of this exploitation because of its remoteness and also the protection provided by the Nuristanis themselves. But since 2002 the Nuristan forests have been the scene of insurgent activity in which both locals as well as foreign jihadis have been engaged in fighting US special forces. Unfortunately neither have the same vested interest in the preservation of the Nuristan forests as do the Nuristanis themselves, which has not helped the situation.

Whilst the exploitation of magnificent cedars and pines for timber has been the most newsworthy, the wholesale denigration of the lower elevation holly oak and wild olive woodlands along the frontier mountains of Paktya and Khost being cut for winter fuel is often overlooked. Traditionally holly oak (Quercus balut), wild olive (Olea feruginea/O. cuspidata) and juniper (Juniperus spp) were coppiced by the rural villages harvesting fuel wood. This was sustainable, but the present industrial demand for fuel to supply the wood-burning bakeries and home heating in Kabul and other cities is adding intolerable pressures, as did the teaming refugee camps in NWFP in Pakistan in the 1980s and 90s. With the improvement in roads, holly oak logs from Khost and Paktia are now being transported as far as Bamiyan and the northern cities.

The problem is serious. It urgently needs to be remedied before even more long-term environmental destruction is caused. Some agencies have been introducing alternative cooking and heating solutions including solar stoves, but to date this has been a “drop in the ocean” and has yet to bring about any radical change. Various plantation schemes and projects although admirable in themselves have merely scratched the surface. They have often been poorly managed, with inappropriate species and unsuitable locations. Of greater sustainable hope is the fact that some local communities in Kunar, Nuristan and Loya Paktia are becoming increasingly aware of the seriousness of the problem which also threatens floods, landslides and loss of sustainable income from well managed timber and such natural products as pine nuts and edible fungi. They are banding together and even appointing ‘arbaki’ (traditional tribal forest guards) to protect what remains of their woodlands.

Only scattered remnants remain of the once widespread open pistachio (Pistachia vera) woodland in a belt stretching across the whole of northern Afghanistan, but these are now being more effectively protected not only as the result of various donor funded programmes, but also as the result of the wishes of local communities and their leaders who see them as a valuable resource. Some gains are being made as the result of donor funded plantation schemes. This is admirable,

but in comparison with the scale of the problem, they remain modest.

Sorting pistachios

Agricultural development and conflict:

Starting in the early 1950s and continuing through the 1960s and 70s, international assistance for Afghanistan's agriculture was primarily through large-scale irrigation schemes whose dams, weirs, and canals were aimed at controlling the waters of Afghanistan's main rivers, expanding irrigated agriculture and providing hydro-electric power. These schemes were mainly supported by the rival powers, the USSR and its allies on one hand and the USA on the other. Each adopted their own model for such development. Typical of these were the US supported the Helmand-Arghandab project in southern Afghanistan, developed on the agro-industrial model of the Tennessee Valley scheme, and the USSR supported a project in Nangarhar on the Kabul-Panjshir River based on the Soviet model of state farm plantations. Other irrigation development schemes included weirs and canals on the Panjshir River and its tributories to irrigate the Shomali plain in Parwan, supported by the Chinese. These were also constructed on the Kunduz river and its tributaries in the north, supported by the USSR and East Germany. There were some other smaller schemes. Some planned in the 1970s were never implemented due to the war.

The Helmand-Arghadab development was based primarily on the

agro/industrial production of cotton and other cash crops in the Helmand valley, and orchards and vineyards along the Arghandab river in Kandahar. Hundreds of small farming families from all over Afghanistan were settled on virgin land newly brought under irrigation from the surrounding 'dasht' on the Helmand plains. The new irrigation networks and the power generated from dams on the Helmand and Arghandab rivers (in particular the Kajaki dam on the Helmand) were designed to be managed and controlled by a central authority, the Helmand/Arghandab Water Authority (HAWA). A parastatal cotton ginning and processing factory was established in Lashkargah, the 'custom-made' centre of operations for the scheme built in central Helmand, under the management of the Bost Cotton Corporation. From the outset the Helmand development was beset by problems of poor clay soils, poor drainage and waterlogging which required constant management. Management deteriorated after the Soviet occupation and the departure of the Americans. Both HAWA and the Bost Corporation still exist although functioning imperfectly, beset by the insecurity that prevails throughout so much of southern Afghanistan.

Cotton was also intended as the economic basis of the irrigation developments on the Kunduz river, where soils are better. Most of the original irrigation channels off the Kunduz and Takhar rivers were dug by local Uzbeks, settler Pushtuns moved from the south and east by various kings, as well as Turkmen refugees fleeing the Bolshevik occupation of the Emirate of Bokhara in the 1920s. In the 1960s and 70s, more formal structures were constructed on the Kunduz river in Baghlan and up stream of Kunduz itself by Soviet and East German engineers.

In Nangarhar, the USSR established state-owned plantations of exotic tree crops, such as olives and sweet citrus, and two large dairy units stocked with Holstein cows. These 'state farms' were irrigated from water drawn by gravity from the Soviet built Nangarhar canal downstream towards Baticot and even pumped to a higher elevation at Hadda just outside Jalalabad. The products from these 'farms', including the olives, sweet citrus and even the dairy products were destined for controlled export to the Soviet Union. Private farmers were effectively by-passed. The innovations introduced on the government farms never caught on in the private sector beyond the state farm boundaries. The problem with the land taken over for these state farms was that it was mainly alluvial gravel with little or no good top soil. This

had to be dug up and transported from side of the Kabul-Kunar River, before the citrus orchards could be planted. The selection of olives was to some extent dictated by their adaptation to dry stony conditions and the varieties selected were from the Black Sea littoral. The olive plantations survive to this day although largely unproductive. The citrus plantations hardly survived the departure of the Soviet 'advisers' in the late 1980s.

All these irrigation development schemes suffered seriously from neglect and the breakdown of management and control system during the 1980s. Today the HAWA and the Bost Cotton Corporation do not operate efficiently, despite the international support they have received, especially since 2002. In Helmand during the 1980s and 90s, opium poppy effectively replaced cotton as the most viable cash crop. This increased in the 2000s.

The power station on the Helmand river at Kajaki, which continued to function to some extent through these turbulent years due to the heroism and ingenuity of its Afghan staff, is still not operating to full capacity in 2013, despite considerable expenditure since 2002. The Dahla dam on the Arghandab is badly silted and has lost much of its efficiency.

Recent attempts to revive and promote cotton as an alternative to opium have failed. The Bost Corporation is rumoured to be riddled with corruption and farmers, unsure of being able to sell their cotton crop are compelled to seek other means of gaining an agricultural livelihood, the most obvious one being opium. The irrigation networks developed under the American programme in the 60s and 70s are plagued by difficulties arising from lack of maintenance as well as the nature of the location, including poor drainage, poor soils, high water tables and, increasing salinity. Overlying all this is the profound insecurity that continues to beset the whole region despite of (or because of) the heavy presence of foreign military forces.

In Nangarhar, much of the state farm infrastructure was destroyed and looted after it was occupied by the mujadideen in 1988/89. Many moveable facilities and equipment were taken to Pakistan and sold, including the dairy herd from Baticot which is rumoured to have been taken by the Pakistan military. The facilities at the Hadda government farm near Jalalabad managed to survive mujahed looting but have suffered from years of poor management and lack of funds. The Darunta dam on the Kabul-Panjshir upstream of Jalalabad is severely silted and its power capacity impared. No one has yet devised an acceptable plan for

the privatisation of the Nangarhar state farms and their plantations which suffer from lack of official motivation. Only in the last few years has any serious attempt has been made to introduce varieties of sweet citrus to the private farmers in the better irrigated districts of Nangarhar, and the lower districts of Laghman and Kunar. This is a belated attempt at import substitution to meet the Afghan demand for citrus presently being met by fruit imported from Pakistan.

Since 2002, private farmers in the better irrigated districts surrounding Jalalabad as well as those of the lower Kunar and Laghman valleys are thriving. In these locations private farmers, with a plentiful supply of irrigation water, mild winters, and good alluvial soils have developed into sophisticated market savvie market-gardeners. They are producing multiple crops of different vegetables including winter potatoes, as well as fruit to supply the growing demands of Jalalabad and Kabul, and even Peshawar.

In the lower Kunduz river valley in Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces, the irrigation systems constructed in the 60s' and '70s and earlier are currently being gradually restored under the EU Funded Panj-Amu River Basin Project.

The Chinese have done some repair work on the Parwan irrigation systems including the huge siphon under the Gorband river. Other rehabilitation work has been done under a World Bank-MEW-FAO project. Since its devastation by the Taliban in the late 1990s the Shomali plain is now well on the way to recovery. Villages have been rebuilt and the farms are once again providing fresh fruit and vegetables to the Kabul markets.

However, local insecurity in Ghazni has prevented the completion of repairs to the Band-e-Sultan dam. Constructed by German engineers in the early 1900s on the site of an earlier dam build in the 12th century Sultan Mahmoud of Ghazni on the upper Ghazni river, the Band-Sultan was breached by a flash flood in the spring of 2005. .

Some other dams such as the Band-e-Sardeh on the Jilda-Gardez river in Andar district of Ghazni, built by the USSR in the late 1960s is seriously silted. As is also the Dahla dam on the Arghandab upstream of Kandahar built by the American as part of the Helmand-Arghandab project. Insecurity is a serious hazard in both locations.

Since 2003, attempts to revive commercial cotton production as well as the production of sugar beet in Baghlan have effectively

failed. FAO has a project to rehabilitate the sugar beet factory in Pol-I Khumri, but it remains questionable whether it will prove cost effective to grow sugar beet and manufacture sugar in Afghanistan. There is a strong mindset among the older generation of Afghans, who wish to 'turn the clock back' to what is seen as the golden age of the 1970s.

In the main Kunduz irrigated districts crops such as rice, mung beans and maize and other summer crops have replaced cotton as the main summer cash crops. Melons (of all kinds) remain an important commercial crop although seriously affected by the Balochistan melon fly.

Agricultural support services

The agricultural support, research and the extension services as developed during the 1960s and 70s were heavily 'statist' and top down. This included the promotion of artificial fertiliser by the Afghan Fertilser Company and the production of seed by the Improved Seed Enterprise (ISE) and cotton by the Spinzar Corporation in the north and the Bost Cotton Corporation in Helmand. The role of the state was increased after the Communist revolution in 1978 and the Afghan government's attempts at draconian land reform. The institutional mindset established in those days still influences the outlook of many in the present Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). Despite recent serious attempts to reform the administration, MAIL's approach to its responsibilities at the central level remain deeply entrenched in the past and difficult to change. Since 2008 the MAIL has been lead by a dynamic minister from the newer generation. Although there are notable exceptions and undoubted improvements in certain sections, at the provincial and district level the government services remain generally weak, lacking in capacity, motivation, mobility and funds and poorly supported from the centre.

Some of the benefits of the Green Revolution that swept the Indian sub-continent in the mid 1960s and 1970s were also felt in Afghanistan, with the introduction of improved varieties of wheat and new horticultural techniques. This helped to achieve the cropping successes of the late 1970s. Some of these individuals became refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s after the Soviet occupation, where they provided invaluable expertise to the non government aid programme that developed in the late 1980s and through the 1990s.

The destruction of the 1980s

Everything changed after the Communist Revolution of April 1978, the introduction of draconian land reforms and the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in December 1979. These events lead directly to a predominantly rural insurgency, which was met with increasingly destructive force. Such progress as had been made in developing Afghanistan's agriculture and its infrastructure in the 1960s and 70s was set at nought during the conflict.

The nearly decade-long Soviet occupation saw the ruination of much of the country's agricultural production base. By far the most wide-spread damage was the result of neglect, due to the mass exodus of the rural population whose villages had been bombed and rocketed or otherwise damaged in the fighting. In the course of this war of attrition some 22,000 villages were destroyed or severely damaged. The rural populations fled and whole rural districts lost most of their population. Village irrigation systems fell into disrepair for want of the maintenance traditionally carried out through community 'hashar' work. Karez systems, where these existed, lacked skilled manpower (the karezkan) to maintain them. As a result, thousands of hectares of land fell out of cultivation or were farmed only spasmodically. Fruit trees and vines withered for lack of care and water. There is some localised evidence of cases where agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation systems were deliberately destroyed or damaged and orchards cut down to provide fields of fire or to deprive the insurgents of cover. However, despite a lot of propaganda to the contrary, neglect and lack of maintenance caused more widespread damage than deliberate destruction by the Soviets. The work of rehabilitation continues to the present day and is expected to continue for years to come.

In the case of the formal irrigation systems established by the USA, the USSR and others in the 1960s and '70s management systems effectively collapsed. In Helmand, in particular, poor drainage has caused water tables to rise and salinity to increase. Since 2002, despite the availability of more funds, these remain serious problems to this day made more intractable by the continuing insecurity that besets southern Afghanistan.

During the 1980s, thousands of cattle, camels, sheep and goats are reported to have been killed by bombs or landmines, but many more were stolen or sold by their owners as they fled as refugees. Pastoral migration systems were seriously disrupted

during those years and remain impaired to the present time. During the ten years of Soviet occupation Afghanistan's already limited road infrastructure almost completely collapsed.

The destruction of the 1980s was particularly severe in the strategic provinces and districts bordering Afghanistan's southern, eastern and western frontiers, those posing a threat to the main strategic highways and cities.

To a very large extent this was a conflict between the "new ways of thinking" espoused by an educated 'secular and urbanised', class many of whom had been educated in the USSR, and a largely illiterate, deeply conservative and religious rural population. This urban/rural aspect to the present insurgency is still relevant today.

Although agricultural support services collapsed throughout much of the country in the 1980s, they continued to operate comparatively effectively in some of the northern provinces bordering the USSR. Government infrastructure that fell into the hands of the mujahideen tended to be destroyed and looted. In Kabul the ministries, including those responsible for agriculture, irrigation, water resources and power as well as the university faculties and research stations continued to operate although their outreach and influence was increasingly limited.

By 1989, despite pockets of comparative normality, agricultural production in Afghanistan is estimated to have fallen by 70 per cent from what it was in the late 1970s. The situation was assessed by an innovative set of surveys initiated by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in 1987/88 which continued through 1991. At the same time SCA carried out field trials, where local security made this possible, to test the performance of a number of different wheat varieties in different environments in Afghanistan. The wheat varieties identified as appropriate where adopted by the FAO programme in 1989 for larger scale multiplication and wider distribution throughout Afghanistan.

The post Soviet years: 1989 to 2001

Starting in 1987, several western aid agencies, anxious to restore food security inside Afghanistan and assist refugees to return to their villages once fighting ceased, began to plan how they might direct humanitarian assistance across the Pakistan frontier. After the Geneva Accords of 1988, this endeavour was joined by the United Nations, including the FAO, WFP, UNOps and UNODC, all of whom developed programmes addressing different aspects

of rural rehabilitation. They were briefly joined by USAID and its contractors until US humanitarian support was withdrawn in 1991, once it was seen that victory over the 'Communists' was assured.

Despite initial confusion about who should be doing what, the twelve years that followed saw the gradual emergence of an innovative agricultural programme that learned how to operate effectively at community level. This despite the continuing absence of an internationally acceptable government in Kabul and periodic, but usually localised, internecine conflict. Difficult though it was, this period saw the development of a number of interesting programmes relating to (i) the testing, production, multiplication and distribution of quality seed, particularly wheat, but also other crops; (ii) the establishment of a network of private nurseries to assist the re-establisment of village fruit orchards and vineyards; an effective programme controlling plagues of locusts and sunn pest in the northern provinces; (iv) establishing non-government 'private' animal health services; and (v) practical, systematic models for the rehabilitation of traditional irrigation systems. In the absence of 'government' these programmes were compelled to work closely with rural communities.

Total international funding for rural rehabilitation was comparatively modest compared to what has been made available post-2001. After the Taliban came to dominate much of the country funding became even more difficult to find. The drought of 1999 - 2002 brought in emergency funds to help alleviate the problem of intense food insecurity in certain locations and the displacement to IDP camps of many thousands of drought stricken villagers as well as kuchis.

After the fall of the Najibullah government in April 1992, the subsequent factional fighting created a new wave of almost half a million mainly urban IDPs, settled in wretched tented camps between Jalalabad and the Pakistan frontier. The fighting did not seriously effect the rural rehabilitation programme which depended more on 'local' security. Despite events in Kabul, some of the provincial administrations, which had effectively ceased to function throughout much of Afghanistan, continued to operate to some extent as in, Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar, Kunduz and Baghlan. However, law and order was fragile. All these towns were subject to periodic bouts of social unrest and looting. For instance agricultural infrastructure in Mazar and Baghlan (e.g. the seed processing facilities of the ISE) that had remained intact up to 1991 were three times looted in the years between 1992

and 1998. They were repeatedly rebuilt with the assistance of the FAO. Almost alone, the Herat administration continued to function under the protection of former mujahed commander, Ismail Khan. This continued, even after the city fell to the Taliban in the late summer of 1995. This continued beyond 1995, with Herat becoming the centre of the FAO's 'in country' supported wheat variety selection and seed multiplication programme.

The Seed Programme: 1988 to 2001

Starting in the late 1980s, an imaginative NGO programme for testing wheat varieties in different parts of Afghanistan was initiated. This focused mainly on promising lines from the CIMMYT programmes in Pakistan's NWFP and Baluchistan provinces. By, 1989 several varieties had been identified as suitable for different environments in Afghanistan. With international funding resulting from the Geneva Accords of 1988, it became possible to put these into a rapid multiplication programme initially off shore in Pakistan under FAO management. As the main UN agency responsible for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan's agricultural sector, the FAO took the lead in the wheat seed production and distribution programme. At that time FAO worked through international and Afghan NGO partners where government agricultural institutions had effectively ceased to function, which was much of the country, Where an administration continued to function, as in Herat, Baghlan, Mazar-i Sharif (and later in Kabul and Jalalabad) FAO supported the Improved Seed Enterprise (ISE) wherever it still existed.

During the initial four seasons, 1989 to 1993, many players acted as agents for the seed distribution programme. The initial objective was to get good quality seed into as many rural communities as possible. The project relied on the excellent multiplication factor possible with wheat to increase local 'seed' as well as grain made available after the first harvests. Further distribution in subsequent years relied on the strong tradition of "farmer to farmer" exchange to spread the improved varieties. The total quantity of 'certified' wheat seed available at the time for distribution across the whole of Afghanistan was never more than about 3,000 tonnes. No cash was involved and as the quantities of seed were comparatively small, most reached intended destinations and no more than 5 per cent is estimated to have gone astray. Once in the hands of farmers it was almost invariably planted. Excellent yields were obtained. This eased the way for the three

million or more refugees, who returned to their villages during the early 1990s, by helping them start farming again and by degrees improve their local food security. By the mid 1990s a good start had been made to the restoration of productive life in thousands of villages. Land was gradually brought back into cultivation as irrigation systems were rehabilitated, crops planted, orchards and vineyards re-established, and homes rebuilt. Almost all the reconstruction was undertaken by the rural populations themselves without any outside assistance. This generally took place once a basis of local food security had been assured.

During these initial three to four seasons the seed was multiplied under careful supervision and strict certification procedures in Pakistan, From there it was transported all over Afghanistan. It was a logistical exercise of formidable proportions as the desinations in village groups and 'manteqa' were numerous, individual consignments of seed comparatively small and road conditions abysmal. From 1993 onwards the total quantity of seed for distribution was considerably reduced. Emphasis shifted to the production of smaller quantities of high quality seed for 'in country' multiplication. The FAO's seed programme, as it developed, was managed with fewer NGOs selected for their proven technical ability and strategic location. By 1995, the emphasis had shifted completely to 'in-country' seed multiplication working intensively with five or six NGOs, where there was no agricultural administration and through support for the ISE where it continued to have capacity. In 2001 the FAO lead seed programme through its IPs was working with more than 5,000 private contract farmers, with an inventory of more than 15 lines of wheat selected after field testing with farmers for their performance and acceptability under different conditions. Five or six of these selected lines were to prove outstanding. Also, included were varieties of barley, maize, rice and pulses. The lines from which most of these selections were made originated from material provided by CIMYYT and ICARDA from their international programmes. Emphasis was placed on the principle, that quality seed has a value and should not be distributed free a policy that was pursued from 1993 onwards until undermined by the emergency conditions created by the drought and the events and their consequences of 2001.

Drought and Taliban rule: 1998 to 2001

During the final years of the Taliban, the whole aid endeavour became dominated by the drought that started in the winter of 1998/99 and continued with devastating effect until 2002. Thousands were forced to leave their villages as water and food ran out. They migrated to special IDP camps established by the international community, mainly in the north and west. From the onset, the drought lead to distortions in how aid was delivered. A psychology of 'free distribution' was again introduced, from which the post 2002 programme has had difficulty weaning itself. By 2001, seed for the 'emergency' programme was again being purchased 'off shore' in Pakistan, but this time its provenance was ineffectively supervised. It was also of poor quality. A real conflict of interest developed between the 'emergency' programme and the more mature and carefully nurtured 'in country' seed programme. This was based on the principles of high quality seed produced according to a classic seed industry model and by closely supervised local Afghan contract seed growers. This conflict raged for almost two years (2002 and 2003) before it was resolved. Even now in 2013 the issue of "free hand outs" versus "encouraging a sustainable market economy" continues to bedevil the philosophies of many donors and their aid contractors.

The Seed Programme: 2002 to 2013

During the first two seasons (2002 and 2003), the seed sector was marked by considerable lack of co-ordination and much chaos as many donors and agencies, many new to Afghanistan, flooded into the country. They treated the situation as a new 'emergency' rather than what it was, a country beset by chronic longstanding problems that required a steadier approach. Many of the newcomers, often straight from 'emergency' situations elsewhere in the world assumed that nothing had been going on in Afghanistan during the 1990s. This was particularly felt in the seed sector where the carefully nurtured programme of the 1990s was overwhelmed by a series of poorly thought through and poorly managed, free seed distributions. This was often based on poor quality material carelessly procured implemented by agencies that should have known better. This chaos was gradually but not completely brought to order in the years that followed.

In 2003, the older FAO lead seed multiplication programme morphed into a modified form funded by the EU which is now in its second phase. Since then, the EC-funded programme developed into the core of Afghanistan's present seed industry. The overall aim of the so called 'Variety and Seed Industry Development Project' (V&SIDP) is to improve the productivity of major staple crops (mainly wheat, but also, barley, maize, rice and pulses). The V&SIDP works with the Agricultural Research Institute (ARIA) of Afghanistan with FAO providing the TA support. Its aim is to develop new varieties and produce 'breeders' seed for further multiplication. This is achieved through working with a combination of the Improved Seed Enterprises (ISE), and a network of private commercial seed established with initial support from the programme. By 2013, the MAIL had an inventory of 32 approved varieties of wheat as well as seed of other crops and some vegetables. There are currently 117 private commercial seed processing units operating in 28 of the country's 34 provinces. About 30,000 tonnes of 'certified' wheat seed is being produced each year as well as some quantity of maize, rice, pulses (mainly mung bean) and some vegetable seed. The V&SIDP is generally thought to have been successful, although not above reproach. Criticism is largely directed at the private seed enterprises, some of which struggle to remain economically viable. Tempted by the artificially high prices paid for seed by donor funded programmes certain firms are reported to have become careless of quality and

have sold low quality material under false pretenses. This core programme continues to be confused by ill-advised and poorly executed seed distribution promoted by different donors. All too often, these have been driven by political and military imperatives rather than genuine farmer needs, particularly in areas of conflict such as Helmand. Seed distribution exercises, funded largely by the Americans and British, have tended to operate according to their own agenda and with little coordination with what is going on elsewhere. The problem, persists although things have improved since the passing of the seed law and establishment of a national seed policy in 2009.

Perennial Horticulture: 1989 to 2001

Another aspect of the rural rehabilitation programme developed between 1989 and 2001 focused on the re-establishment of village orchards and vineyards which had suffered badly during the 1980s. This was supported by the UN, primarily the FAO, and other mainly European, donors. Field projects were implemented by NGOs with an interest in perennial horticulture and forestry. An initial emergency phase (1989/90), during which budded saplings were transported from nurseries close to the Afghan frontier in NWFP and Balochistan, was quickly abandoned in favour of supporting the establishment of 'in country' local tree nurseries within Afghanistan. Some of these nurseries were managed, and continue to be managed by the NGOs themselves, but the most sustainable model proved to be that of assisting interested private Afghan farmers to establish small commercial nursery enterprises. These were particularly successful in provinces, such as Wardak, Ghazni and Logar, where modern orchard practice had been introduced in the 1970s. Here the demand for quality budded fruit trees (apples, apricots, plums and others) by farmers keen to re-establish orchards was considerable. They were prepared to pay decent prices for budded saplings from nurserymen in whom they had confidence. During the first years many new orchards were re-established. The results of this development can be observed today. The drought that started in 1998 and continued through to 2002 brought this initial boom in orchard plantation to a halt as irrigation water became an increasingly sparse and has been built on in recent years. But, the idea became well-established.

Perennial Horticulture - 2002 to the present

Since 2002, a number of donor-funded projects have continued

to support the perennial horticultural sector. These programmes have been mainly (but not exclusively), funded by the US and EU working through a number of implementing contractors. Perennial horticulture has also been part of the FAO's country programme, primarily working in support of MAIL/DAIL. Support has included TA: for the establishment of fruit tree nurseries, including those managed by the government, by NGOs themselves and by private Afghans. Sometimes the establishment of fruit and nut tree plantations was, or still is, part of broader natural resource and watershed management programmes, as in the EU funded Panj-Amu River Basin programme, in which the re-establishment of wild pistachio and other trees has been an important focus of attention. Unfortunately there has been little coordination between the various initiatives supported by different donors, nor has there been any uniformity of objectives or methodology. The quality and success of these projects has too often been marked more by enthusiasm than reality. A number of relatively high profile initiatives have proved to be ephemeral or at best of limited significance.

Arguably the most significant of these perennial horticulture initiatives since 2002 with a long term vision of Afghanistan's future fruit and nut production, is the EC funded Perennial Horticultural Development Programme (PHDP), which against many odds has been bringing some order out of chaos. The PHDP, which started in 2006 and since 2012 is in its second phase, works closely with MAIL in Kabul and DAILs in the provinces. It also works with the private sector. PHDP has the following aims: (i) horticulture policy reform, (ii) support for government research

farms, (iii) the completion of a "National Collection of Fruit and Nut Varieties," (iv) dissemination of quality planting and grafting material, (v) support to farmers and about 1,000 private nurserymen in 58 districts and 21 (out of 32) provinces for tree nursery and orchard development. PHDP includes support for the emergence of professional associations such as 28 nursery growers groups; a National Almond Industry Association and an umbrella organisation aiming at nationwide coordination of the horticulture industry development. In the field PHDP works through a selection of implementing experienced partners. These work with rural communities and have made considerable progress at both establishing the national collections and a registry of fruit tree nurseries, both private and public. PDHP is one of the most highly-regarded programmes of its kind in Afghanistan. It is one of the few that is effectively attempting to build a sound basis for the future. The EU's main contractor is Landell Mills (bath) UK with a consortium of NGOs lead by the old established French NGO, MADERA.

Livestock health and husbandry

Over the years, greater attention and funds have been devoted to issues related to livestock health than to livestock husbandry, including improving general and pastoral management, nutrition and breeding.

Livestock health

Up until the early 1990s, animal health services in Afghanistan were managed by the government. A private veterinary service barely existed. All through the 1960s, 70s and 80s this was supported by the FAO. Although the government service continued through the 1980s, it became increasingly dysfunctional in many provinces, although continuing to operate to some extent in the north and north west. During this time the FAO programme was funded by UNDP. Starting in the early 1990s, an alternative NGO led system was developed, on a model developed by the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA). This is based on a network of private veterinarians and paravets assisted in establishing their own 'veterinary field units' (VFUs) and encouraged to support themselves by selling their services and medicines. This proved to be quite successful and developed during the 1990s into a model that has been widely adopted in Afghanistan. A dual system soon emerged. Government services continued to operate in the

north, whilst in areas controlled by the mujahideen UNDP also supported the alternative 'Dutch' system. From 1995 onwards, FAO (as the more appropriate technical organisation) took on the responsibility of supporting both systems.

2002 to 2012

Since 2002 the situation has continued to be mixed with various international donors supporting veterinary schemes. The 'Dutch' model placing emphasis on encouraging a private commercial veterinary service remains in favour with some, while other INGOs such as the Aga Khan Foundation prefer to manage animal health projects with veterinary personnel whose salaries are paid by themselves. At the same time international funding has been provided (mainly by the EU) to strengthen a reformed government veterinary service. To confuse the issue, there are also instances where Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) from the US, New Zealand and other countries have provided veterinary services, with funds from their national governments. The situation remains confused. A concerted effort is being made to rectify the situation.

Since 2004 the EU has been the main donor supporting a national animal health programme. This programme aims to assist MAIL better perform its role, notably building service delivery capacity in epidemiology surveillance and animal health service provision: rehabilitation of border inspection posts, sub-national public veterinary offices and diagnostic laboratories, a Central Veterinary Diagnostic & Reseach Lab. (CVDRL). At the same time, funds have been provided in support the privatisation of over 200 veterinary 'service providers' based on the Dutch model. Work is currently underway to revise animal health legislation, taking care to ensure all legal instruments are both relevant to the Afghan context and reflect good practice according to internationally accepted standards. The aim is to strengthen the central and provincial government services (MAIL/DAIL) in their support and regulatory role while at the same time encouraging the private sector to work with relevant government agencies. FAO has been mainly involved with regional and trans-boundary issues.

Livestock Husbandry: pastoral management

In the 1970s and 80s, modern dairy development was mainly confined to a few state farms. A large sheep fattening project supported by the World Bank was being developed

in Herat Province with the main objective of finishing sheep for exporting to Iran. This was all swept away by the war.

Most NGOs supporting animal health programmes have components aimed at improving animal husbandry and management including housing, nutrition and breeding as well as grazing practices and pasture management. The latter is part of the watershed management on the upper catchments under the EU funded Panj/Amu River Basin Project. Among the many research studies carried out under the auspices of the Afghanistan Evaluation and Reseach Unit (AREU) were four studies conducted in 2005/2006 on Livestock Husbandry, products and nutrition.

During the late 1990s FAO made several attempts to support the development of small farmer peri-urban milk production round some of the main cities, including Kandahar, Kabul and in the north. Success and sustainability was mixed. With German government funding the best of these projects gradually developed more sophisticated and sustainable models in the mid 2000s in Kabul, Mazar and Kunduz which are now running by themselves. These were based on the formation of village-based cooperatives formed into a dairy union, with their own processing plant and marketing capability. This model is being replicated in Herat, funded by the Italian government and in Nangarhar funded by IFAD. More recently it was used in Nangarhar and funded by IFAD.

In addition to FAO's projects, a number of dairy projects have been promoted by various agencies according to different models supported by different donors. The US-backed Land-o Lakes project seems to have relied heavily on reconstituting US powdered milk. The Dutch initiative in Baghlan has concentrated on cheese production. Arguably among the most successful small farmer dairy cooperative developments, from a sustainable point of view has been the model supported by FAO. Kabul, Mazar and Kunduz are now running successfully. This model is being replicated in Herat, funded by the Italian government and in Nangarhar funded by IFAD. There are also some successful enterprises established by private initiative

Re-stocking nomad flocks: A debate

Work with nomadic and transhumance pastoralists has been mainly confined to assisted-feeding and re-stocking after severe stock losses due to drought, epidemic disease and conflict. The

cost effectiveness of these re-stocking projects is debatable when compared with the traditional ways in which such nomadic groups re-stock in balance with available seasonal pastures. Opinions are divided and the debate continues. In times of drought, pastoralists down-size by selling surplus breeding stock. Epidemic disease is another problem, but herders in Afghanistan seldom wait until animals die before they are sold or slaughtered. Even during the most severe drought of 1998 to 2002 in Afghanistan, there were never scenes reminiscent of the Horn of Africa or the Sahel. Never was the Afghan dasht strewn with the desiccated carcasses of sheep, goats and cattle. Their owners had sold them before they perished. Traditionally flock numbers have increased remarkably rapidly when the grazing improves. Nomad strategies in Afghanistan for re-stocking after disaster, born of many generations of experience, are complex. Suffice it to say that after the considerable losses suffered by Afghan nomads during the 1980s, by the mid 1990s prior to the advent of drought, stock numbers are thought to have recovered to pre-conflict levels

without any outside assistance.

The pest control programme

During the 1970s the Ministry of Agriculture was responsible for taking the lead in pest control for crops and horticulture. During the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult to manage programmes because of the war. For much of the decade, the USSR continued to carry out annual trans-boundary campaigns in northern Afghanistan as an extension of its own Central Asian programme. These focused on the plagues of Moroccan locusts (Dociostaurus maroccanus) and the Sunnpest (stink bug) (Eurigaster integriceps) infesting the wheat crops of Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 these campaigns ceased. The result was a series of plagues of both locusts and sunn-pest in the early 1990s which reached emergency proportions. These were eventually successfully countered by a series of imaginative annual control programmes in which the FAO took a lead through the 1990s. Since 2007, the MAIL has increasingly resumed a leading responsibility for these campaigns with funds provided by different international donors. Locust and sunn-pest are now more or less under control in northern Afghanistan and although many of the locations under greatest threat are now effectively in the hands of insurgents opposed to the Afghan government, DAIL has been able to successfully successfully provide local communities Although it appeared as new problem for the wheat crop in Helmand in 2004 and 2005, it also seems to be being kept reasonably under control by the farmers themselves, despite the insecurity.

Since the mid-2000s the Baluchistsan melon fly (Myiopardalis parlalina) has been causing serious damage to the valuable melon crop. No effective chemical control has been discovered. However, trials with covering the growing melons with cheap cotton bags has provided effective protection and is gaining acceptance. Emphasis is increasingly placed on the principles of 'integrated pest management' (IPM). This is now the policy of FAO's projects with MAIL and IPM is increasingly factored into NGO managed crop and horticultural projects. MAIL/DAIL are officially responsible for providing IPM advice. Although at present their capacity of low FAO have a project specifically aimed at capacity building in IPM methods using the Farmer Field School (FFS) system funded by the Norwegian government. Both field and fruit and nut crops suffer Both field crop and fruit/nut crops

suffer considerable pre-and post harvest losses attributed to the many diseases and pests. Although generally improved since the 1990s the effectiveness of control programmes tends to be patchy.

Irrigation Rehabilitation: River basin development, watershed and natural resource management

Reliable crop production in Afghanistan depends on irrigation. Over millennia various traditional systems have developed their form dictated by the source of water, geography, geology and topography. By definition these traditional systems have been developed, owned and managed by the communities that depend on them. They are, therefore, intrinsically sustainable.

Traditional irrigation systems in Afghanistan take a number of different forms. The most widespread are gravity-fed canals, drawing water from perennial and seasonal rivers, streams and springs. In locations of more intermittent and unreliable river flow opportunistic systems of 'spate' management have developed. Where the total 'command area' exceeds the amount of land that can be cropped in any one year with available water systems of cropping different sections of land in rotation over several years is widely practiced in the lower river valleys.

In the highlands, systems have been developed based on the construction of small dams and night storage basins (*nawar*) combining water harvesting with small scale irrigation. Characteristic of the 'Persian' world (and other places where its influence has been felt) is the *karez* (Afghanistan) *qanat* (Iran) system by which the subterranean water held in alluvial aquifers is led to the surface through a system of shafts and tunnels. This is dug into the overlying alluvial strata washed down from the mountain ranges.

In each case, appropriate community management systems have emerged. Most widespread is the *mirab* system under which communities appoint a 'water master' or hierarchy of 'water masters' (depending on the scale) responsible for the management of individual community and farmer water turns, the settlement of water related disputes and for organising the 'hasher' or muster of community manpower required to carry out necessary maintenance and repair work. In the case of *karez*, construction and maintenance is carried out by specialists known as *karezkan*. Other traditional systems include the use of the Persian wheel *ahad* and systems of drawing water from shallow wells.

All these systems require the cooperation of the water users. In the 1980s, when communities were disrupted by conflict and drought, the management of many of these systems was weakened or even temporally abandoned. Traditional systems throughout Afghanistan were neglected and fell into disrepair. With the return of populations to their villages in the 1990s many systems recovered, often with the help of aid agencies. Although

seriously weakened in places, tradition has proved to be resilient.

In addition to the informal systems described above, the 1960s and 70s saw the development of a number of large scale 'formal' irrigation schemes, supported by the rival super powers, based on dams and networks of canals. These were managed by local official authorities ultimately responsible to Kabul.

Most systems suffered from neglect during the 1980s. According to official sources, in 1978 approximately 3.4 m. ha of crop land in Afghanistan was being effectively irrigated by one system or another. Over the following 10 years it is estimated that the amount of effectively irrigated land had been reduced to about 30per cent of this figure, while an additional 60per cent (2.04 m. ha), although working to some extent, was less than effectively operational. A balance of about 10 per cent had fallen out of commission as the direct result of conflict or neglect.

After 1989 donor funded resources were too scarce and the political situation too uncertain to carry out more than some emergency 'patch work' repairs on the 'formal' systems developed

in the 60s and 70s in Helmand, Nangarhar, Parwan, Kunduz and elsewhere. In the 1990s, rehabilitation work concentrated mainly on the rehabilitation of traditional systems, started in the early 1990s. Some patchwork repairs were carried out on the more formal systems, mainly to carry out emergency repairs. Funds were to scarce for more than this. Rehabilitation initially mainly focused on the provinces bordering Pakistanin the east and south.

With limited funding, much of the work in the 1990s was car was slow and of mixed quality. Some was excellent, but most of it was not. Among the most effective models was the one developed and promoted by the FAO in Kunar, Laghman, eastern Nangarhar and Khost. This was based on mapping the entire river basin and its network of herring-bone irrigation systems in order to identify and prioritise work in coordination of all the agencies working in that particular valley or set of valleys. The emphasis was on organising the work in a systematic fashion in full agreement with the communities concerned. This was to ensure that work completed in one place, usually upstream or across the stream did not adversely affect others. In these areas much land had been abandoned when the populations had fled as refugees. This was was restored to productive irrigated agriculture during the early 1990s. Although this model was successfully adopted by some NGOs, with sufficient funds and engineering expertise, much of the rehabilitation carried out in 1990s remained piecemeal. It was also often much of poor quality, and the results ephemeral.

The political situation did not help. Increasing armed opposition led the Taliban to deliberately destroy rural infrastructure including irrigation systems in locations where they met sustained resistence, notably in the southern Shomali plains of Parwan, as well as in some of the Sh'ia and Ismaili valleys in the Hazarajat and Baghlan. In other places, even those that accepted Taliban rule continued to lack proper maintenance continued.

Post Taliban: 2002 to the present

The post-Taliban period has seen large amounts of international funding made available for the rehabilitation and improvement of the country's irrigation systems, both formal and traditional. The result, although still of mixed quality has led to some improvement. Since 2002, there has been a widespread private Afghan initiative for drilling deep tube wells, dependant on fuel-powered pumps to bring water to the surface. These deep wells, often several hundred feet deep, are particularly common along the

trunk road between Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar and throughout the southern provinces away from the main irrigation channels. Much of this informal development is on 'virgin' rangeland (dasht) 'sold' or acquired by corrupt officials and commanders without official authority or reference to vulnerable water tables. It is feared that hundreds of community-owned *karez* have ceased to function as the result of fragile water tables being over exploited by a few rich entrepreneurs pumping water from deep wells. The present boom in deep drilling has been made possible by the availability of affordable rigs and motor pumps made in India, Pakistan and China. This has been further complicated by misguided handouts as virtually free gifts of hundreds of units of drilling equipment and pumps by aid contractors funded by USAID or the various national PRTs. In Helmand, there has been a proliferation of deep well development across the 'dasht' north of the main Boghra weir and irrigation canal. These new settlers on the 'dasht' are mainly Pushtun tribesmen who have had to move from their home villages as the result of conflict, shortage of land or because they are opportunistic. Many of these new settlers are deeply disaffected with the government who they blame for their misfortunes. They are also mainly growing opium poppy as the only crop capable of producing returns that can cover both the capital investment and the running farms with deep well water.

Irrigation programmes after 2002-2013

As early as 2002, led by the World Bank and the FAO with the new interim Afghan Government, it was agreed to adopt a water resource rehabilitation policy for Afghanistan based on the country's five main River Basins: (1). The Kabul/Panjshir/Kunar plus some minor rivers (draining into the greater Indus River Basin); (2). the Helmand/Arghandab river basin (including the Farah Rud) draining into the Sistan Basin; (3). the Harirud basin, including the Murghab sub basin in Badghyz (draining into Karakum deserts of Turkmenistan); (4). the Panj/Amu Dariya basin (including the Kunduz/Taloqan/Kokcha sub-basins) draining into the Amu Dariya river and Uzbekistan in the North East. (5). The collective small rivers draining into the enclosed basin of northern Afghanistan.

As a concept for water and natural resource development, the River Basin approach has much to recommend it. However, from a political point of view it poses difficulties. River basins tend to cut across the established political map of Afghanistan and do not

coincide with provincial and district administrations. Although the principle of River Basin authorities has been accepted by the Government of Afghanistan in principle, it has met resistance from provincial governors and administrations whose authority looks as if it may be undermined. The issue has to be satisfactorily resolved.

Initially, it was thought that the River Basin concept was a logical basis on which to divide development responsibilities among the main donors (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the USA and the EU etc). In reality, only one donor, the EU, has seriously adopted a River Basin approach in its entirety, notably in the Panj/Amu basin. Working through its contractors, in close collaboration with the MEW, the Panj/Amu programme started in 2004 with the Kunduz River Basin. This expanded in its second phase in 2007 to include the whole of the Panj/Amu basin from Badakhshan to Bamiyan.

In the lower Helmand/Arghandab basin the US effectively and logically took lead responsibility because of its historical connections. Progress has been seriously affected by the security situation and ISAF military imperatives in southern Afghanistan. The USA also effectively leads in the Kabul/Panjshir/Kunar basin, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman, where similar military imperatives related to security and governance are serious considerations.

The rehabilitation of traditional irrigation systems

Small scale local irrigation rehabilitation and construction work continues to be carried out by many donor contractors and NGOs. This includes work under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). Typical work includes rural infrastructure and engineering works of all kinds. Irrigation rehabilitation work under NSP as well as a dozen or more other smaller rural development projects funded by different donors remain scattered, piecemeal and largely uncoordinated. As in the 1990s, the quality varies from excellent to poor.

In addition to these piecemeal efforts, one significantly large project has been attempting to address this problem on a national scale in a more coordinated fashion, funded by the World Bank. Early in 2002, the World Bank together with FAO providing the technical assistance started working in close collaboration and support of the then Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment (MIWE) later to become the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW). This developed into

the most significant and widespread attempt to systematically rehabilitate Afghanistan's traditional irrigation systems. This nationwide project, the Emergency Irrigation Rehabilitation Project (EIRP) ran from 2004 to 2011. It is now in its follow up phase, the Irrigation Reconstruction and Development Project (IRDP), which started in 2012 is scheduled to conclude in 2018. In addition the rehabilitation of traditional irrigation systems, EIRP/IRDP also has important components that include the installation of a network of Hydrological/Meteorological stations on all Afghanistan's main rivers and their tributaries. It is also resposible for carrying out feasibility studies for a dam and irrigation development of the lower Kokcha river in Takhar and small dam construction on the rivers of the enclosed northern basin. By its conclusion at the end of 2011 the EIRP programme (total value USD 134.5 million) was responsible for completing the rehabilitation of a total 710 irrigation schemes and 18 larger schemes.. Ongoing work still in progress is being completed under IRDP.

Afghanistan effectively lost its capacity to collect hydrological and meteorological data during the 1980s and is presently almost totally reliant on obsolete data compiled in the 1960s and 70s. Under EIRP/IRDP an attempt is being made to re-equip Afghanistan with its lost capacity. Some 105 Hydrological stations and 36 gauging stations were installed as well as a number of meteorological stations before the end of 2012. Some work remains and will be completed under IRDP. This is proving a slow task, made more difficulty by widespread insecurity and the danger of stations being looted. Although progress is being made, it will, at best, be a number of years before sufficient data has been collected for analysis to be meaningful.

Not only is this essential for future management of Afghanistan's water resources, but also for dealing with the trans-boundary issues that Afghanistan has with its neighbours with whom it shares its rivers. There are already unresolved issues with Iran over the shared waters of the Helmand and the Harirud.

Many of the dams built on Afghanistan's rivers in the 1950s, 60s and 70s and even earlier are in poor shape and frequently seriously silted. The Band-e Sultan on the Ghazni river in Khwaja Omari), constructed by German engineers before World War I, was breached by a flood in 2005. This has yet to be fully repaired due to local insecurity. Final additions planned for the Kajaki dam on the Helmand, but not completed before 1979, have not been carried out, largely because of local insecurity,

as well as unresolved issues with Iran. The same goes for plans on the lower Helmand to raise the height of the Kamal Khan weir in Nimroz. One of the consequences of over-exploitation of the Helmand waters by both Iran and Afghanistan, made more difficult by the increasingly unreliable flow of the river itself is the drying up of the unique Hamoun wetlands in the Sistan basin.

Plans for several dams in the 1970s, have been revived and await funding. The Salma dam on the Harirud, upstream of Chesht-e-Sharif, is currently under construction by Indian engineers. Progress has been held up by a combination of funding issues and local insecurity but the aim is to complete the dam by the end of 2014. Although a feasibility study was completed in 2011 for a dam and irrigation canals on the lower Kokchar in Takhar, there have been difficulties in finding interested donors. ADB may fund part of the scheme. Both schemes involve potential issues with riparian neighbours.

Environmental and conservation issues

Afghanistan suffers from multiple environmental problems from many causes: including deforestation, the cultivation of the mountain rangelands for unsustainable dry land crops, and the stripping of the hillsides of deep rooted woody ground cover (Artemisia spp etc) for fuel; erosion, the silting of rivers and dams, the drying of wetlands due to the over exploitation of water resources (significantly the the Helmand, Hamoun in the Sistan Basin and the Ab-e Estada alkali lake in Ghazni/ Paktika), the decimation of wild life (of all kinds) due to the proliferation of guns and absence of hunting controls, industrial and chemical pollution and poor waste disposal.

In 2002, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) undertook an extensive series of field-based post conflict 'snap shot' assessments of the state of Afghanistan's rural and urban environment as the basis for future engagement and policy. Since then UNEP has been responsible for fostering the passing of an Environmental Law (2007) covering both rural and the urban environment. A Forest Law was passed in 2011 in which UNEP and FAO played a vital part. A Rangeland Law remains under discussion as certain issues remaining unresolved including the lack of accurate data. UNEP has also assisted in supporting the National Environmental Agency (NEPA). Founded in 2004, NEPA reports directly to the

Prime Minister's Office and has developed into an effective, if comparatively small agency uncluttered by the political legacy of past administrations. In addition, UNEP is assisting with the development of pilot National Parks, notably in Bamiyan on the Shah Foladi section of the Koh-e-Baba mountain range. The UNEP programme also works with Kabul and NEPA on issues associated with Climate Change. There are at least two Afghan NGOs concerned with environmental matters. The Wildlife Conservation Foundation (WCF) supports projects related to wildlife conservation, most significantly associated with the Band-e-Amir (Bamiyan) and Pamir Protected Areas in the Wakhan.

In particular, the EU funded Panj Amu River Basin Programme (PARBP) includes an important component related to the better management of the Upper Catchments with responsibility for watershed and natural resource management, such as improving grazing and upland cropping management, reforestation, the construction of gully plugs and other erosion control structures. It also tries to empower and encourage mountain communities to manage their natural resources better. A number of independent agencies, notably the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) have significant high altitude watershed and natural resource management components in their programmes in Bamiyan, Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan. The French NGO, MADERA has had an involvement in forest management in Kunar and Nuristan dating back to the late 1980s.

Serious insecurity in these provinces has made development more difficult in recent years. Various projects, funded by USAID have had components devoted to tree plantations implemented by the US Conservation Corps or the WFP in partnership with FAO, UNOps and UNEP under the Green Afghanistan Initiative (GAIN). Results have been mixed and projects generally designed to be completed within too short time frames. Despite some successes, a number of wasteful mistakes have been made in terms of the incorrect diagnosis of problems and solutions, including the selection of inappropriate tree species, the selection of unsuitable sites for plantations, lack of competent management and follow up.

There are indications that lessons have been learned and approaches modified. There are signs of improvement in project implementation, particularly in long term projects such as the 'Upper Catchment' of the Panj/Amu River Basinproject.

Possibly the most impressive examples of sustainable environmental conservation and watershed management have

actually been those examples where charismatic local Afghan leadership has inspired local communities to take the initiative to protect and manage their environment. Usually this has been achieved with very little outside support. One remarkable example can be found in the interconnected highland valleys of Tagab-e Kishim in western Badakhshan. In the Tagab valleys, local community leader Haji Aurang has for the past 18 years, through persuasion and strength of character, rather than by force and the gun, inspired the local villagers to protect their mountain environment. Hunting, fishing and cultivation for rain-fed farming has been effectively controlled. Grazing is now better managed and the unsustainable cutting of trees and gathering of woody ground cover for fuel banned. The results are astonishing, particularly in comparison with similar neighbouring highland valleys in Badakhshan and Takhar. Trees and ground cover of many species have regenerated and the mountain sides in the summer are a botanist's paradise.

Farm mechanisation and communications

The ox plough is still the main method for cultivation throughout much of highland Afghanistan. This is particularly the case in steep valleys where fields are often too small and access for tractors almost impossible because of steep banks and deep irrigation ditches. A pair of oxen ploughing is still a common sight even in richer lowland villages. They still have a place in small fields and for cultivation between rows of fruit trees.

Tractors, however, are now widespread throughout the country. In much of lowland Afghanistan in the eastern, southern and northern provinces almost all cultivation is now done with tractors. This does not mean that all farmers own a tractor, Those in the community who do cultivate the land of their neighbours for a charge. Even in the highland valleys of central and northeastern Afghanistan a few individuals with tractors serve the needs of many. Another important role of the tractor in conjunction with a trailer is transporting agricultural produce and straw, building material, manure and also people.

Sowing is still almost entirely done by broadcasting seed. Reaping and harvesting grain and pulse crops is also done by hand. Attempts to introduce the seed drill and the reaping machine started as far back as the 1950s but for various reasons neither have yet caught on. Throughout the south and east it is mainly tractors made in Pakistan or Iran.

In the north tractors made in Belorus are in common use.

Between 2003 and 2005, a flourishing farm machinery bazaar developed in Lashkargah Helmand, where literally scores of brand new tractors of various models, made in Pakistan, Iran and Turkey were being traded, together with hydraulic trailers and a wide range of cultivation equipment. All being sold for cash. This astonishing market, which owed its origin entirely to private entrepreneurship disappeared in 2006 with advent of foreign fighting units and the increase in local resistance and conflict. Although the traveller through rural Afghanistan can still observe threshing done in the age old fashion with oxen and donkeys and men winnowing grain by hand, a revolution in threshing methods spread across much of Afghanistan in the 1990s with the adoption of the tractor powered mobile threshing machine. Today there is hardly a township in Afghanistan that does not have a Batala agent. It only requires a few people in any location to own threshing machines and tractors to serve the needs of the local farmers for a charge as an agreed percentage of the grain / straw threshed. In addition to the comparatively clean sample of grain, the straw is finely chopped and suitable for both feeding livestock and for traditional building with sun dried bricks (khesht) and plaster (kargel literally 'straw and mud). There are other machines that 'polish' rice and hull maize.

In recent years various USAID projects have been making efforts to introduce the use of the two wheeled tractors, mainly the Chinese model made in Dong Feng. More than 6,000 units were reportedly imported to Afghanistan Afghanistan in 2011/12 under USAID AVIPA programme and effectively dumped on the country without training and effectively free. This was been widely criticized. Little is known about their present whereabouts. Other USAID projects such as Ideas New managed by DAI in Jalalabad and ACDI Voca in Mazar have taken the introduction of two wheeled tractors more seriously by combining it with farmer training. Recent reports indicate that that the cost benefits of two-wheeled tractors are gradually beginning to be recognised by small farmers. After some initial scepticism, demand for these tractors is increasing. Although the market was initially programme stifled by the 'dumping' of thousands of 'free' two-wheelers there are now indications that private initiatives are developing to provide services and spare parts and even trade in new models. It remains to be seen how quickly and effectively this develops.

Agro-chemicals: Afghan farmers were introduced to the use of chemical fertilisers and the use of pesticides and herbicides during the 1960s and 70s. A factory manufacturing Urea as a bi-product of natural gas was built by the Soviets outside Mazar-i Sharif which still operates. Private traders import fertiliser from a whole variety of countries. These may be found in almost every country bazaar. In addition select aid programmes have imported fertiliser often in association with a 'seed distribution programme'. The same applies to agro-chemicals and chemicals, some now internationally unacceptable can be found on sale. Pesticides of many kinds, some now internationally banned can be found on sale in most rural bazaars. Various projects have tried unsuccessfully to bring some order into this.

Rural farmer to market roads: In the last 12 years, there have been noticable improvements in the state of rural roads. Many major roads are now asphalted, while minor roads have been graded. The quality of the work remains variable. The question is how maintenance and repairs will be financed once international donor funding is reduced. Farm to market transport and communications has been enhanced for many previously cut off provinces and districts, such as Badakhshan and Bamiyan.

Land mines: Short-term rehabilitation efforts during the 1990s also involved removing landmines from access roads, farmland and irrigation ditches. Overall, the presence of land mines have never seriously held up the agricultural rehabilitation process. Although one land mine in a field constitutes a serious risk, more serious than mines laid indiscriminately in arable land has tended to be mines layed by all sides in strategically important positions. Irrigation ditches that provided cover for mujahideen, access roads, passes and strategic approaches to military positions have always been favourite places. Part of the present established process for rehabilitating irrigation channels includes getting the nearest mine clearance team to check for land mines. Although mine infested locations may be away from the cropped land, they are often on hillsides used by villagers for grazing livestock. There are places where cluster bombs dropped by the US Airforce on the retreating Taliban are still a hazard. In recent years, particularly in southern Afghanistan, IEDs present as deadly a hazard for the local population as for the ANA and NATO forces..

Agricultural aid and development after 2002

Perhaps the most fundamental change that took place after the 2002 has been that for the first time since the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989, the international community, in all its forms, has been engaging with the Afghan government. Various key ministries have also been reformed or modified since 2002.

The MEW was re-formed in 2006 when the former ministries of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment (MIWRE) and 'Water and Power' (W&P or 'Ab o Bargh') were amalgamated as the Ministry of Energy and Water. Responsibility for all things related to the environment has been given to the newly-formed National Environmental Agency (NEPA). MEW remains a very powerful ministry with the attitudes to go with it, reinforced by being headed by one of the 'jihad's' most organised and successful mujahed commanders, Ismail Khan (see key players).

The present Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) is responsible for agriculture and horticulture as well as livestock husbandry and health, range lands and forests. In 2006, MAIL was made responsible for 'on farm' water management. Nonetheless some confusion and overlap still exist, if not in law, at least in perception between MAIL and MEW regarding water and watersheds. The Ministry of Energy and Water is responsible for hydroelectric power and dams and all major irrigation schemes as well as the management of river basins and watersheds, which also implies an interest in rangelands and forests.

For historical reasons going back to 2002 when the World Bank project for the rehabilitation of traditional irrigation systems was being developed MEW was selected to manage this sizeable (eventually US$ 135 million) World Bank Funded programme under the EIRP, now being followed up by IRDP (US$ 95 million). MEW is also responsible for the River Basin development programmes. In order to emphasis and flag MAIL's responsibility for 'on farm water management' this has been reinforced by being given responsibility for a World Bank funded project of the same name.

The Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) is responsible for the more social aspects of rural reconstruction and development. This includes a package of internationally funded National Programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). MRRD is also responsible for the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA), mainly supported by USAID with a number of other donors. MISFA provides loans for small rural enterprises as well as supporting

NGO lead microfinance institutions. It has not proved very successful at developing credit lines for farmers or crop production. Effective collaboration between these ministries, especially where technical responsibilities overlap, continues to be a challenge that defies the institutional modifications intended to support this process. The individual personalities of Ministers and their personal relationships still count for as much as institutional Frameworks. MRRD in particular was radically reformed early on in 2002 and with considerable effect under a dynamic minister. Indeed, the focus of attention beamed on MRRD in the early 2000s, aroused considerable envy particularly on the part of the Ministry of Agriculture, who, with some justification, considered that they were being sidelined.

The reform of the MAIL, as the ministry most stuck in its 'statist' past, has proved to be difficult. Since 2008 there has been a concerted effort to bring MAIL up to date under the leadership of the present minister and turn it into a more dynamic institution. Some success has been achieved, yet old attitudes are hard to change and progress is mixed. At the provincial level things have improved although they still lag behind. Insecurity has not helped as do lack of funds and transport. Much depends on the character and inclination of different provincial governors. Some are more progressive and dynamic than others.

Donors and contractors

In the past twelve years, one of the greatest changes has been at the level of field and community level rehabilitation and development work. All through the 1990s and up to 2002 almost all field level rehabilitation and development work in Afghanistan was being carried out at community/ village level with little regard for official 'government'. This was true of both UN technical agencies as well as the NGOs / aid agencies (international and national), funded by various national governments and private donations. After 2002, with the formation of an internationally recognised Government and the arrival of hitherto undreamed of funds, the 'development' scene immediately became a great deal more complex in both form and character. For a start the principle was immediately established that all work should be approved by, if not actually carried out, by the GoA and the ministries responsible. That at least has remained the theory and the ideal, although often effectively in default.

After 2002, different donors including national governments and international development banks arrived with infinitely more available funds than had even been dreamed of in previous years. During the years of turmoil, only certain UN agencies and those NGOs intrepid enough to brave the prevailing circumstances were operating in Afghanistan. All this changed when the interim government was recognised by the international community and funds started to pour in. This attracted development and commercial firms of every kind from many countries, most of them more accustomed to working as technical and professional contractors than as humanitarian agencies. The new arrivals included representatives of national academic and international research institutions seeing opportunities in Afghanistan. Many disparate organisations, both good and less than good, were attracted the scene. Most of the agencies (UN and NGO) who had weathered the years of mujahideen and the Taliban, continued to operate. Unfortunately few donors or newly arrived agencies, even those who should have known better, seemed to pause long enough to consider the lessons learned in Afghanistan over the previous 20 years. There was a radical change in attitude as well as 'modus operandi' that affected all the aid agencies operating in Afghanistan, including those with a long history in the country.

One of the most significant changes has been that even purely humanitarian agencies have had to learn to operate as contractors on the same basis as the commercial consultancy firms. If not, they found themselves sidelined. This led to a subtle change in the outlook of many INGOs who have had to adjust their approach to the pursuit of projects with time lines and targets decided by distant donors, or miss out on funds as these became available. This has been the case, even when funds have been earmarked for projects designed to be carried out within technically unsuitably short time-frames or with ill conceived objectives beyond the technical capacity. To this mixture of newly arrived consultancy firms, academic institutions, research agencies and including the UN agencies and NGOs long established in Afghanistan was added the controversial dimension of the semi-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), an adjunct of the NATO/ISAF operation's attempt to win 'hearts and minds'. With the withdrawal of NATO forces these PRTs are in the process of being closed down. Even when headed by civilian operatives, the PRTs operated according to the

military imperatives of a dozen or more ISAF countries. The most significant among them, because they were the most generously funded, were the USA PRTs, followed by those of the UK and other NATO countries. In particular and with some justification, many NGOs complained that the existence of pseudo-military NATO PRTs, doing reconstruction and development work seriously compromises the essential neutrality of the aid endeavour which had hitherto preserved their security through many turbulent years. With some justification many INGOs have complained that the presence of these pseudo-military NATO PRTs, doing reconstruction and development work has compromised the essential neutrality of the aid endeavour, which had hitherto preserved their security through many turbulent years. : Effective coordination of objectives, activities and strategic direction between organizations, donors and even Afghan government ministries has proved almost impossible. Unfortunately even at the provincial and district levels, different agencies and NGOs all too often work in isolation and remain ignorant of what others are doing in the same general area. Some governors have made effective efforts to coordinate the development and reconstruction activities in their provinces, but this is not the norm and since personnel are frequently moved there is little consistency. Lack of coordination and collaboration is the norm and the issue is repeatedly highlighted in critical appraisals of the Afghan development scene. As much as the government in Kabul may complain, effective coordination has proved beyond their capacity to control. Indeed the government has problems managing effective collaboration between its own ministries. With regards to the NGOs, the reasonably effective coordination provided by ACBAR in Peshawar and SWABAC in Quetta throughout the 1990s when the aid / development effort for Afghanistan was still based in Pakistan was effectively lost in the confusion of the move to Kabul in 2002. It has not been effectively revived since.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of different programmes since 2002 has been variable. Some have been excellent and certainly all are not failures. Often success has been achieved by modest projects with achievable objectives and time lines that are appropriate to the present state of devcelopment. In many cases, however, the quality

of development projects has not been commensurate with the level of funding. Some of the most richly endowed projects have proved to be the least successful and most wasteful. Many donors have failed to pay attention to the low absorptive capacity of rural Afghanistan when setting objectives. Time-frames have often paid little heed to agricultural or horticultural cycles, particularly when it comes to tree crops. Some programmes demonstrated a wasteful profligacy and served no apparent purpose other than enriching the contractors and wasting millions of dollars. Some have made the situation worse by dumping large quantities of poor quality seed and fertiliser, or blindly distributing large numbers of free water pumps and two wheeled tractors without bothering to train farmers on how to use them. Plane loads of suitable tree saplings, flown in from the northwest USA have ended up as dry sticks on parched mountain sides.

Too many projects have overlooked the resilience of traditional Afghan farming and pastoral systems developed to cope with the exigencies of a precarious existence.

A parting shot

Today, notwithstanding years of devastation, much of Afghanistan's basic production pattern although damaged, remains remarkably robust. The system simplicity has changed little over the centuries. This has proved a major strength in locations where fighting has stopped and a degree of local security (for local Afghans) prevails. Afghan farmers have shown a remarkable ability to adapt to sophisticated technology, such as high-yielding crop varieties, inorganic fertilizers, agricultural chemicals, appropriate forms of mechanisation (threshers and tractors), polytunnels and the mobile telephone, when these can be clearly recognised as having benefits in terms of yields, returns and savings in time and efficiency.

The rural Afghan population is also showing considerable aptitude to diversify their livelihoods off farm as opportunities offer, including economic migration. After all these years of changing fortunes and in the face of both 'well guided' but all too often 'misguided' foreign assistance one thing stands out very clearly. That is the incredible resilience

and robustness of the Afghan farmer and pastoralist and their ability to survive and do better than survive, everything that fate, conflict, climate and foreign intervention can throw them. Long time observers of the Afghan scene have remarked that after all that the country and its inhabitants have suffered over the past thirty-five years, in terms of conflict and natural disaster, it is surprising that things are not a great deal worse.

To the outsider unfamiliar with how they work the traditional farming and pastoral systems may seem primitive, but they have stood the test and vicissitudes of time and should not be dismissed out of hand. These systems are now under great stress from a combination of almost intolerable pressures caused by a rapidly increasing population, changing climate, environmental degradation, urbanisation, conflict, political uncertainty, lack of good government and the mistakes resulting from expensive interventions made by foreigners. It is not so much a lack of donor funding that is the issue, but that much greater care and understanding needs to be taken in how these resources are used.

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INSPIRE: The chicken or the egg?

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

Three decades of conflict have destroyed food supply chains as well as virtually eliminated the skills needed to keep them running. Eggs can be produced anywhere, but until a few years ago, northern Afghanistan was still importing most of its eggs from Pakistan. The problem was not only a lack of chickens, but also a shortage of know-how to keep the chickens alive. One enterprising Pushtun lost more than 5,000 chickens after the hot summer months had overheated his chicken coops.

An agricultural survey indicated that the Afghan poultry industry in Badakshan suffered from a shortage of trained poultry farmers, balanced feed and outdated practices. The whole chicken and egg supply chain needed rebuilding.

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) helped by establishing parent stock farms and hatching units. In collaboration with the Kabul Poultry Association, the AKF purchased 200 three-month old "Golden Layers" –principally for egg production – at 135 Afghanis (US$ 2.70) per chicken. These layers were transported to Badakhshan and given to two hatching unit farmers, both trained in parent stock farming. The Foundation also provided two incubators, with a capacity of 400 eggs each. The AKF provided eggs and feed for the first two batches. The key objective was to demonstrate to other farmers the effectiveness of commercial poultry production.

Ten months later, both farmers began to purchase their own parent stock, without further need for subsidies. A year later, they bought a second incubator with their own funds. The incubator had been produced locally, and the refurbished poultry operation was now able to move forward on its own, without needing any additional outside support.

The next step in upgrading the poultry operations was to focus on the treatment of newborn chicks. Too many had been dying in transport from hatching to the rearing centres, where the chicks spent seven weeks before being sold to poultry farmers.

The AKF provided technical assistance regarding temperature control, feeding, vaccination/medication and shed cleaning. It then organised and funded visits to Kabul for 10 entrepreneurs. The objective was to broaden their knowledge and understanding of commercial-scale poultry farming. The entrepreneurs visited micro- and small-scale poultry hatching units, feed manufacturers, input suppliers, and medicine and vaccine stores. They also met with the Kabul Poultry Association, which provided training in parent stock farms (livestock breeding), hatching units, rearing centres and poultry farms.

Finally, the project helped send a poultry specialist to Badakhshan. The purpose was to strengthen local business development service providers. His job was also to ensure that poultry management training, vaccinations, feed manufacturing, technology dissemination and business management services, were locally available.

Balanced feed increases egg production and chick growth, so the programme focused on training farmers in how to use local ingredients and indigenous technology. Barley, wheat, maize, fish powder, blood powder (for protein) and bone pieces (for calcium) were ground together to make high quality feed. This reduced dependency on feed from Kabul, while keeping the local price at a reasonable level.

As production levels increased, poultry farmers created their own association to set up a proper feed manufacturing facilities. As a result, farmers were able to reduce costs and take advantage of economies of scale on feed, vaccinations and medication. The association also facilitated better access to microcredit as well as government facilities and resources. In addition, the AKF helped establish 10 veterinary field units (VFUs) in Badakhshan, staffed by trained para-veterinarians and basic veterinary workers. These provided medicine and vaccines, and helped in diagnosing disease. AKF also supported nine veterinarians who established livestock input/supply stores. The end result is that Badakshan's now thriving poultry industry has begun exporting chickens and eggs to other provinces. The answer to the old riddle 'Which came first: the chicken or the egg?' is that upgraded skills produce both.

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Al Qaeda in Afghanistan

By Jason Burke

Drive through the outskirts of Kabul, past the National Museum where priceless statues were smashed by the Taliban in the late 1990s, past the ruined palace of the former king, and along the rutted road that runs toward the village of Rishkor. Beyond the patch of wooded glades and streams known as Daoud's Garden (named for the former Afghan president), is an old Afghan Army base. During the summer of 2001, this compound was one of the main training camps for Pakistani and Arab volunteers undergoing training in basic military tactics before being dispatched to the frontlines to fight alongside the Taliban. It was also home to a smaller camp where specialized courses in urban terrorism were taught to selected al-Qaeda recruits. Along with two or three other camps, it was where advanced training in terrorist techniques – counter surveillance, intelligence gathering, bomb-making – was given to specially selected "graduates" of other camps specializing in more mundane subjects.

Today Rishkor is the site of a major base where American special forces teach Afghan National Army commandos how to crawl through minefields, immobilize suspects, clear houses in the dead of night and master the other skills likely to be needed when the US finally withdraws its combat troops. These days, Daoud's Garden, at least on a weekend, is full of picnicking families.

Al-Qaeda did not build Rishkor. Militants had been training there for some time before Osama bin Laden founded the group, and its recruits and a dozen or so Arabs from the Pakistani frontier town of Peshawar showed up in 1988. Even before then, other militants from around the region had used it, and before that it had been an Afghan Army base. Al'Qaeda's use of Rishkor like its engagement with Afghanistan more generally was an opportunistic, often manipulative, largely pragmatic exploitation of the resources Afghanistan offered, and continues to offer, with scant regard for the interests or views of those who actually live there.

By the summer of 2011, al'Qaeda's involvement in Afghanistan was negligible. According to Western intelligence officials, there were only around a hundred militants linked to the group and other Arab or central Asian organizations with similar ideologies in the country at any one time. Most of these were relatively low-level militants who were sent across the border from bases in

Pakistan to get first hand experience of combat against NATO forces. Some enjoyed their time on the frontlines in Afghanistan. A German volunteer detained on his return to his Germany told a court that he had valued "every minute" of combat, camaraderie and hardship. Others found conditions tough. Often unable to properly communicate – few Afghan militants speak Arabic, Turkish, Uzbek or European languages – and without the physical resilience necessary for the months in the field, many struggle.

A minority of the international militants in Afghanistan are more senior. These are often experts in particular techniques, sometimes veterans of combat elsewhere, usually Iraq. Committed, hardened, knowledgeable and extreme in views and actions, they act as a "force multiplier" for Afghan insurgents. Embedded with small groups of indigenous fighters, they increase combat power and motivation, advising on tactics and arms and providing a morale-boosting link to the international network of radical Islam. Such men are however extremely few in number – perhaps only a few dozen across the country. Even European intelligence services admit that among them, only a handful actively pose a threat to Western nations by harbouring ambitions of launching international strikes.

If this is the current situation with al'Qaeda in Afghanistan, it is worth reviewing how we got here. It is a story full of myth and legend.

First of all, there was radical Islamic activity in Afghanistan, and of course the region more generally, long before al'Qaeda came on the scene at the end of the 1980s, indeed long before the "Jihad" against the Soviets. Successive waves of Islamic revivalist activism swept over what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan from the mid-19th century onwards, the local version of the reaction against European expansion and colonialism during the period. In the late 1960s, Afghanistan was awash with the radical ideologies of the time, both revolutionary left wing thought and revolutionary Islamist thought.

The 1980s, of course, saw the war against the Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan – as well as a resurgence of conservative and politicised ideologies across the whole of the Islamic world. The conflict attracted a number of international radicals, largely from key Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Syria. One of these, of course, was Osama bin Laden, who was born in the Saudi Arabian port city of Jeddah in 1957. Another was Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian who took over the leadership of al-Qaeda following bin Laden's death in 2011.

It is important to dispel two persistent myths about this period. The Arab militants in general, and Osama bin Laden in particular, were not directly funded or trained by the CIA. American aid was transferred to Afghan mujahed groups by the Pakistani ISI. The "foreign militants," such as bin Laden, had their own channels of finance and they did not need US aid. Equally important, training from the West was given to Afghans, not to Arabs. The idea that bin Laden was some kind of "Frankenstein" created by the CIA simply does not stand up. Secondly, the military contribution of men like bin Laden to the Afghan Jihad was negligible. Most Arab and foreign militants in the region in the 1980s were engaged in logistics, propaganda or relief activities not combat. Bin Laden himself only became involved in frontline warfare – and only then fleetingly – between 1987 and 1989. That fact has also been obscured in recent years.

Bin Laden left the region in 1990, shortly after the foundation of al-Qaeda. He was not to return until 1996. During the first half of the 1990s however, Islamic militancy of the most radical global form thrived in the region with dozens of training camps, many run by Pakistani organizations or Afghan extremists such as Abdul Rasul Sayaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Both had links with Pakistani militant organizations and a wide range of international activists committed to violence. One such camp, run first by Sayaf and then by Hekmatyar was on the outskirts of Jalalabad, at Darunta, by the hydroelectric plant and tunnel. Like Rishkor, this was a former Afghan Army and Soviet base, converted to new uses against a new enemy.

When bin Laden returned to Afghanistan in 1996, he did so not as a guest of the Taliban but as the invitee of the newly formed movement's enemies (ed. note: Bin Laden was essentially a refugee at this point. Pressure on Sudan from the US had forced bin Laden to leave his base in Sudan and to find a new safe haven). Three major commanders operating in the east invited the leader of al-Qaeda to Jalalabad, largely in the hope that they could tap his network of wealthy Gulf donors. Within months however, the advancing Taliban had forced them out and bin Laden had to rapidly build a relationship with the Taliban, which was now controlling the region. By deploying cash, charm and offering apparently well-informed advice to the parochial and susceptible Mullah Mohammed Omar and his entourage, the Saudi-born militant secured his new haven.

The following six years saw the most intense involvement of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Bin Laden and his senior associates had one main objective: to use Afghanistan as a base from which they could finally pursue a global campaign of spectacular violence to radicalize and mobilize the world's Muslims, thus provoking a series of uprisings across the Arab world and elsewhere, and forcing America to withdraw its support for Arab regimes, for Israel and its forces from Islamic countries. In the long-term bin Laden hoped that this would lead to the establishment of a new Caliphate.

Through this period Afghanistan served a number of purposes for al-Qaeda. First of all, it provided physical safety. Senior leaders were able to meet, plan, issue statements and organize. Successive press conferences – held in contravention of the wishes of the Taliban - and successive attacks – in 1998 in east Africa, in 2000 off the Yemen and finally in 2001 in America – showed how important this was. Secondly, Afghanistan provided a space to rally potential supporters and to train volunteers. So the country became – to a greater extent than it had previously been – the hub of global jihadi activism. Al'Qaeda was not the only radical group operating on Afghan soil of course. There were Pakistani groups, Uzbek groups, and many other Arab groups who were often rivals to bin Laden's outfit in the competitive world of radical Islam. But through the increasingly close relations between bin Laden and Mullah Omar throughout the period, al'Qaeda took over much of the training infrastructure in Afghanistan.

As the Taliban grew short of experienced fighters towards the end of the decade, the volunteers that al'Qaeda supplied to frontline units made up in fanaticism what they lacked in tactical skill, and the Taliban came to depend on them more and more. The relationship between bin Laden and Omar did not signify any great affection between Afghans and the Arabs however. Senior Taliban officials – as well as ordinary people – complained bitterly to me about the presence of the militants in their country throughout this period. Equally, al-Qaeda banned its recruits from talking to Afghans – even those who provided most of the cooking and cleaning staff in the camps – and was continually disparaging about them in internal communications.

This antipathy became immediately clear when war broke out. The planning of the 9/11 plots had not only been kept from the Taliban leadership but was entirely against their wishes and violated the promises bin Laden had repeatedly made to Mullah Omar. Deeply controversial even within al-Qaeda, militants'

discussions about the strike on America centred on whether such an attack would jeopardize the group's resources – the terrorist infrastructure - in Afghanistan. The potential consequences for the Afghans themselves were not discussed. When conflict came, liaison between the Taliban and the international militants was minimal. One Taliban commander I interviewed in Peshawar in 2002 remembered how angry he had been when bin Laden's guards had roughly prevented him from approaching their leader during the flight from Jalalabad at the end of 2001.

More than a decade later, with NATO troops now preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan, relations between al'Qaeda and Afghans have taken on a new significance. Could the Taliban be trusted to keep international militants out of Afghanistan in the event of some kind of deal? What is the influence of jihadi thinking on the main insurgent commanders? Does the long antipathy between Arabs and Afghans still exist? These are the key questions worrying Western policymakers. Some analysts talk of a fusion between al Qaeda and the Taliban. However the evidence is that it is a wary relationship, based on pragmatism and a shared history, but full of mutual mistrust. Key individuals with good contacts on both sides can improve cooperation but there is no structural alliance between the Taliban, predominantly focused on a local struggle, and the increasingly marginalized al Qaeda militants, who remain focused on an international agenda. It is perhaps ironic that the parochialism, fierce independence and xenophobia that has proved such an obstacle to the Western project for Afghanistan in recent years may, through the resistance it poses to the al-Qaeda project for the country, aid the America and its allies as they desperately search for a way to leave without risking a new 9/11.

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Aid after the Taliban

By Edward Girardet

Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Afghanistan has played host to an enormous influx of aid agencies and resources. In 1999, there were 46 international NGOs registered with the Afghan ministry of planning. By November 2002, this had shot up to 350 registered agencies, plus some 500 more 'passing through'. International staff working for the UN numbered nearly 700. In all, expatriate aid workers, journalists and business people in Kabul and elsewhere totalled around 3,000 by mid-2003.

By 2005, the number had risen to an estimated 5,000 with some 2,200 or more registered local and international "NGOs", many of them private companies. The factional roadblocks which plagued Kabul during the 1990s were replaced by traffic jams. By 2013 with the start of the western military pullout, international aid agencies were already in the process of cutting back as donor funding began to wither. As Afghanistan climbed to the top of the media and political agenda, so the amount of international aid rose to keep up. Emergency relief from rich country donors swelled from an average of US$ 100 million per year, during 1995-2000, to over US$ 300 million in 2001.

Then, in January 2002, donors pledged US$ 4.5 billion over five years to meet both relief and development needs. While this seemed a dizzying amount, compared to what the country had received before, some analysts noted that in the grand scheme of post-conflict reconstruction, it didn't amount to much. Aid allocations for Afghanistan in 2002 totalled around US$ 75 per person, compared to US$ 325 per person in Bosnia (1996-99) or nearly US$ 200 per person in Rwanda (1994) and East Timor (1999-2001). When aid money was compared to cash spent on the West's military operations in Afghanistan, it looked skimpier still.

Meanwhile, the amounts pledged were only part of the story. What mattered more was the actual impact of aid. According to Afghan analyst Chris Johnson, "most estimates are that two-thirds of the money pledged at the donor conference in Tokyo in January 2002 was for humanitarian assistance, much of it as food aid." Certainly, millions of Afghans were suffering severe food insecurity after the worst drought in living memory. Then there were the 1.5-1.8 million refugees who returned, far more than an-

Continued aid after international troops withdraw is likely to be crucial to Afghan survival. The trick will be to avoid the mistakes that followed the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. Photo © Edward Girardet

ticipated with multiple short-term needs. Food aid is cheaper for donors to hand out than cash and often they may buy up surplus grain to shore up their own domestic markets. In 2002, the Afghan government raised concerns that excessive amounts of foreign food aid were distorting the agricultural economy, pushing down crop prices and preventing farmers from working their way out of crisis. Opium poppies proved a tempting alternative for many struggling to survive. As for reconstruction, the situation was worse. Armed attacks by pro-Taliban groups rose sharply during 2003. In order to discredit the re-construction efforts of the US-backed Karzai administration, they widened their targets to include aid workers, their offices and projects.

In March, a foreign delegate working for the International Committee of the Red Cross was assassinated in cold blood near Kandahar. According to a September 2003 report by CARE International and New York University's Center on International Cooperation, attacks against UN and NGO workers shot up from between 1-3 per month during late 2002 to around 20 per month by late summer 2003. Attacks continued through 2004 and into 2005. In mid-2004, five volunteers with Médecins sans Frontières were murdered in northwestern Afghanistan prompting the international aid group, which had been working here for 24 years, often clandestinely during the Soviet war, to pull out.

Huge swathes of southern Afghanistan, from Khost and Paktia to Uruzgan and Helmand, are now virtually off-limits to foreign aid workers. Reconstruction of the flagship Kabul to Kandahar trunk road - finally completed in late 2004 - slowed to a crawl, as private contractors, road workers and their 700-strong security team became targets. Insecurity and delays have sent recovery costs soaring. In January 2002, the World Bank estimated the cost of reconstruction at US$ 10 billion. By mid-2003, the Afghan government put it at US$ 30 billion.

According to CARE, "the gap between needs and pledges is one concern, but the gap between promised support and actual reconstruction is more troubling". By May 2003, US$ 6.7 billion of aid had been paid or pledged. Yet of this sizeable sum, just US$ 192 million worth of projects had been completed. Pegging Afghanistan's needs at around US$ 20 billion, that meant that 18 months after the fall of the Taliban, just one percent of reconstruction needs had been met. Nor can the delays be blamed on the Afghan government.

According to CARE: "Despite repeated requests by the Afghan government to give it the financial authority to lead the recon-

struction process, donors refused." There was a paradox at the root of all this: the weak capacity of the Afghan government is used as an excuse to bypass their authority; yet, unless donors helped build local capacity to manage the recovery process, the government would remain weak and resources would continue to flow into the pockets of highly paid consultants and foreigners.

Ironically, there was a further danger that, over the next few years, aid flows would decrease just when the Afghan government was becoming more capable of absorbing them. While the situation had improved by mid-2003 the Ministry of Finance was finally able to oversee the coordination of donor aid. Huge amounts of funds in 2005 were still directed to outside contractors with little for the Afghans themselves.

Security, however, remained the overriding issue. Without it, reconstruction would grind to a halt. Yet unless more attention was focused on rural areas, popular disaffection would grow, playing into the hands of anti-government forces and leading to greater instability. (This was precisely what happened. In 2013, numerous ordinary Afghans, particularly in rural areas, were disillusioned with the international community's failure to produce real change). The initial refusal of the international community to extend peacekeeping forces (ISAF) beyond Kabul frustrated aid agencies and Afghans alike. Finally, in February 2005, NATO, which now commanded the peacekeepers, agreed to broaden its operations, eventually covering the whole of Afghanistan. Already in 2003, ISAF had begun deploying handfuls of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) combining lightly armed soldiers and reconstruction experts to key urban centres in the north. But, as The Economist noted in August 2003: "PRTs will at best be only a catalyst. They are too small to effect much change by themselves: the 72-man British one in Mazar-e-Sharif is charged with an area the size of Scotland."

A bewildering variety of different relief and development priorities, pro-grammes, roles and funding structures were established by the Afghan government, the United Nations, World Bank and NGOs since the departure of the Taliban. Up to September 2001, the UN issued annual consolidated appeals for Afghanistan and other 'complex emergencies'. This changed in early 2002, with the presentation of the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People (ITAP).

The ITAP aimed to outline a comprehensive international aid strategy to meet relief, recovery, and reintegration needs. It

spanned the period October 2001-December 2002 and asked for a total of US$1.78 billion. Its programmes covered three main areas: 1) Quick-impact recovery projects; 2) Urgent recurrent costs of the Afghan government; and 3) Critical, unmet and continuing humanitarian needs. In all, the ITAP attracted around US$1.2 billion with over two-thirds of this money going on food aid and repatriating refugees.During the course of 2002, the Afghan government developed a National Development Framework (NDF), resting on three pillars: 1)Humanitarian, Human and Social Capital, 2) Physical Reconstruction and Natural Resources, 3)Private Sector Development. Cutting across these three strategic areas are the key issues of security, administrative and financial reform, and gender. This framework became the basis for Afghanistan's National Development Budget (NDB), endorsed by donors in October 2002. In December 2002, the ITAP was replaced by the UN's Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan (TAPA), which covers the period January 2003-March 2004.

Introducing the appeal, the UN secretary-general's special representative to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, said: "humanitarian needs will increasingly be met by addressing their underlying causes, as part of a broader strategy linked to recovery and reconstruction". He added that the appeal intended "to underscore the transition from the independent UN appeals of the past to one that reflects international partnership with the new national authorities and civil society." To reflect this new spirit of partnership, the TAPA was organised according to the three pillars of the NDF. The TAPA appeals for a total of US$ 815.3 million, with 70 percent of the funds going on three main areas: helping refugees and the displaced to return home, strengthening livelihoods and social protection for the critically vulnerable, and promoting education and vocational training.

During 2002, the return of nearly 1.8 million refugees and 400,000 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs) put enormous pressure on the already shattered infrastructure and economies of Afghanistan's towns and villages. A further 1.2 million refugees and 300,000 IDPs were expected to return during 2003. Aid agencies' focus was on providing transport, food and non-food items (e.g. shelter and cooking kits) to help those wishing to return. To ensure that returnees reintegrated permanently, agencies were working to improve shelter, water, education and health services in communities to which Afghan exiles return. The UN also tried to protect returnees while enhancing the capacity of government

departments involved in repatriation. The budget for refugees and IDPs totaled US$ 283 million up to March 2004.

The second largest sector in the TAPA was livelihoods and social protection, budgeted at US$ 195 million. Twenty-four years of war and five years of drought had destroyed both the national economy and household livelihoods. Rain-fed crops and levels of livestock had been decimated. The UN identified eight highly vulnerable groups in need of assistance:

1) Critically poor (est. six million) who needed food aid or cash for work;

2) Urban poor (216,000 vulnerable in Kabul alone) who needed jobs;

3) Cold season vulnerable (est. two million) who needed 'winterization' (e.g. shelter materials, blankets);

4) Returnees (1.8 million in 2002, est. 1.2 million in 2003).

5) Internally displaced people (est. one million remain in camps) who needed ongoing humanitarian assistance;

6) Kuchi nomads (est. 1.3 million, of whom 50-75 percent were vulnerable) who needed jobs and livestock;

7) Disabled people (est. one million, most critically poor) who needed humanitarian assistance;

8) Poppy growers threatened by opium ban. A dedicated livelihoods and vulnerability analysis unit (LVAU) was established in the ministry of rural reconstruction and development to promote cross-sectoral assessments and action to help the poorest Afghans.

The third largest sector in the TAPA was education and vocational training, with a budget of US$ 124 million. According to the Ministry of Education, by the end of 2004, almost five million children were enrolled in school, yet many, particularly girls, remained deprived of educational opportunities. Furthermore, two thirds of those enrolled for education were studying in the open air or in tents, with virtually no learning materials or furniture. To meet needs, 2,500 new schools had to be built, while as many again were in need of major repairs. Other priorities included: 'food for education', teacher salaries and training, developing and printing 16 million textbooks, early childhood development and literacy (especially for women), vocational education (especially for ex-combatants), higher education and strengthening the ministry of education. The United States was the most generous donor, accounting for more than one third of aid over this period.

Children at risk

By Joanna de Berry

Afghanistan has the second highest under-five mortality rate in the world. For those who survive past their infancy there are multiple threats; 2009 saw an estimated one thousand children killed in conflict-related violence. From the data on reported crimes against children collected by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (SEE REPORT) in 2010, there is evidence of shocking levels of child rapes and sexual assaults, with the assumption that many more violations go unreported. Equally shocking is the killing of children by insurgents or rogue elements within the government, such as the horrific massacre of at least six young Afghans in a suicide bombing in early September, 2012 outside the gates of ISAF in Kabul.

Afghan children take on heavy responsibilities early in life. It is estimated that about half of the families in Afghanistan rely on child contributions to sustain their household income. Through work children are exposed to detrimental environments, physical exertion and exploitation.

Children suffer conditions as a result of the strain of poverty and the cumulative effects of three decades of conflict, which have pushed many families to breaking point, eroded the protective ability of communities and led to a habit of impunity for perpetrators. The national and international development community working to protect children is dedicated to documenting and raising the profile of the threats to children and to advocating the continued need to invest in programs and institutions to guard them.

But the focus on deficiencies can mask the other side to the story. Against all odds, Afghan children can enjoy a childhood; they play, they learn, they laugh. Like many aid workers before and after me, I was constantly amazed at the resilience and fortitude of the children I worked with in Kabul. They were witness to things one would never wish on a child, and far from the carefree idyll we hoped their youth could be, but in general were not overwhelmed. Instead, so many lived with their humanity and hope intact.

Much of the credit for this must go to Afghan parents. They bear the brunt of difficult events to shield their children, while teaching them to cope when bad things do happen. Parents go out of their way to allow their children to be happy, through treats and encouraging them to have time with friends, to balance out the fear and uncertainty. The lessons of coping are strongly root-

ed in child rearing and family social values in Afghanistan.

Closer examination into how parents raise their children and the morality they try to instill, consistently shows that parents foster courage and gratitude among their offspring. Children are expected to learn how to overcome fear – by confronting their fears and by being reassured when they are afraid. They are taught how to be thankful, and are directed to notice and to be grateful when they are better off than those around them. Much of these values are linked to religious faith; children are taught prayers to say when they are scared, and are encouraged to understand that everything that happens to them is in the hands of God, beyond their control and therefore to be expected. And parents emphasize a strong notion of right and wrong, which they consider enables children to be exposed to bad events but not necessarily be negatively influenced by them.

Parents in Afghanistan today were themselves children affected by conflict, their own growing up marred by the dangers and brutality of poverty and violence. The values they teach their children are neither theoretical nor aspirational but have been tried and tested in their own lives as true resources for human struggles. Given all of this, Afghanistan remains a complex and risky place to be child. The investments of parents into children's mental protection and spiritual strength are well honed, and enduring down the decades. These resources shield children from trauma and equip them with the ability for endurance that is such an integral part of Afghan existence.

Afghan children, burdened with responsibility, and always at risk.
Photo©Edward Girardet

An Afghan skateboarder takes off in Bamiyan. Skateistan is one of the few sports activities in Afghanistan that lets girls compete as equal with boys/ Photo courtesy of Skateistan.

INSPIRE:
Skateistan a refuge for children

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

It is easy to forget that refugees and war torn societies need more than just food and shelter. They also need to express themselves. Sports and recreational activities bring communities together. Kids, teen-agers and adults need to find normality, particularly in a country in which 70 per cent of the population is under 26.

One of the most inspiring developments in post-2001 Afghanistan is Skateistan, the brilliant initiative of a local NGO determined to make the exhilaration of skate boarding accessible to the young people of Kabul. The idea traces its roots back to 2007, when two young Australians arrived in the Afghan capital with three skateboards. They soon found themselves mobbed by kids desperate to learn how to use the skateboards. A few impromptu lessons that briefly transformed an empty fountain into a 'skatepark,' became a full-time activity and led to the creation in October, 2009, of a 1,750-square metre Skateistan park. Supported by international donors and industrial sponsors, it now provides boys and girls (ages five to 17) with the chance to play in a safe environment and an indoor skate park.

Since then, Skateistan has developed into Afghanistan's first skateboarding school (admission is free) with separate alternate days for male and female students. It also hosts classes for handicapped children. Along with the Women's Garden, it offers one of the few recreational spaces for girls and young women in Kabul. International volunteers provide instruction, but some of the original Afghan skateboarders are now also teaching. Other volunteers operating out of their own countries (Austria, Norway, Australia, Sweden…) help fund-raise or offer in-kind support through various activities such as skateboard jams, skateboard art shows and information booths at events.

One of the key achievements of Skateistan is to bring Afghan youth together regardless of their tribal, ethnic, religious or sociological backgrounds. Rich and poor find equality through skating. Skateistan also hosts classroom projects and discussions. Currently, some 350 kids (50 percent of them street children and 40 percent girls) attend the school.

Skateistan offers children a means to express identity that extends beyond skateboarding. Photo courtesy Skateistan

Activities range from theatre to journalism and environmental health. The students themselves decide what they want to learn while the NGO provides them with the resources necessary to learn new skills or simply to tell their stories. Peace building, tolerance and leadership are encouraged.

The central idea of Skateistan is to provide a protected space in which tolerance and civil behaviour based on trust have a chance to develop along with opportunities for education. The group has won the Peace and Sports Award twice. Skateboarding is so new to Kabul that the usual restrictions against girls participating haven't had time to develop yet. "To give girls in Kabul a venue for exercise, have fun and play together is one of the most important lessons Skateistan was created," maintains organization director, Oliver Percovich. Skateistan participated in the 2012 Women's Day celebrations with street skating demonstrations in Babur's Garden by some of Afghanistan's top female skateboarders. Skateistan has established similar schools in Mazar-e-Sharif and Cambodia.

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Contact: www.skateistan.org

Editor's Note: On the morning of Saturday, September 8, 2012, a suicide attack (conducted by an unknown teenager believed to have been recruited by insurgents) killed at least six young Afghans. The bomb was detonated outside ISAF headquarters, where many street children work selling trinkets, newspapers, scarves and sweets to help support their families. Four of the dead children were enthusiastic members of the Skateistan project. The Skateistan tragedy story on the BBC World Service. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19580747

Buzkashi: A game of control

By Whitney Azoy

Buzkashi (Persian for “goat grabbing”) may be the wildest game in the world. Massive stallions rear and lurch. Their riders, buffeted from all sides, lean from the saddle and try to grasp a 40 kgs. animal carcass. Then it’s up and across the Central Asian steppes at full gallop in an unparalleled show of equestrian skill and daring.

Buzkashi originated with nomadic forebearers of the same Turkic peoples (Uzbek, Turkomen, Kazakh, Kirghiz) who are its core players today. The game quite likely developed, in much the same way as American rodeo, as a recreational variant of everyday herding or raiding activity. Stemming almost certainly from the time of Genghiz Khan, it remains a vivid and potentially violent pastime in formerly Soviet Central Asia, China’s Xinjiang Province, and – most authentically – northern Afghanistan.

Other Afghan ethnic groups have recently joined buzkashi culture: Tajiks, Hazaras, and even Pushtun migrants from south of the Hindu Kush. Beginning in the early 1950s the Kabul-based central government hosted national tournaments, first on the birthday of King Mohammed Zahir and then on anniversaries advantageous to subsequent regimes. As central authority collapsed

during the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989), so did the tournament.

Buzkashi has two main forms: the traditional, grassroots game (*tudabarai)* and a modern, governmental sport *(qarajai).* Both feature powerful horses and riders who struggle for control of a goat or calf carcass. While regarded primarily as playful fun, both forms of buzkashi also exist as an implicitly political arena in which patron/sponsors seek to demonstrate and thus enhance their capacity for controlling volatile events.

Sponsors own champion horses, hire specialized riders (chapandazan), and host ceremonial gatherings (toois) in which buzkashi is played. In northern Afghanistan, sponsorship has traditionally been exercised by khans, elite members of the informal, ever-shifting power structure. A tooi's centrepiece is a day or several days of buzkashi: a status-oriented initiative in which the social, economic, and political resources of the khan sponsor (tooi-wala) are publicly tested. If those resources prove sufficient and the tooi is a success, its sponsor's "name will rise." If not, the tooi-wala's reputation can be ruined.

Some traditional games (*tudabarai*) involve hundreds of riders with no formal teams or spatial boundaries. The expert chapandazan dominate play, but "everyone has the right." The tudabarai objective is to gain sole control of the carcass and ride it free and clear of all other riders. "Free and clear," however, is difficult to adjudicate, and disputes are frequent. Tumultuous play can then shift to real violence and serious injury. Such shifts discredit the tooi sponsor.

Since the onset of war in 1978, sponsorship of traditional buzkashi has shifted from old-style khans to newer, younger military commanders (commandaan). Their backgrounds may be more modern, but their attention to buzkashi – and political status – is as pronounced as ever. The most powerful northern commanders – Fahim, Dostum, Atta, and Daud –have all kept buzkashi stables and sponsored memorable games. Government sponsored buzkashi (qarajai) is more standardized and thus easier to control. Two teams, totalling no more than two dozen riders, compete on a bounded field with specified scoring flags and circles. The Kabul tournament referees were typically military officers, and quarrelsome riders were threatened with prison. Government control over previously volatile buzkashi was complete by the last pre-Marxist era tournament (1977).

Then things fell apart. Rural buzkashi sponsors and riders

opposed the PDPA almost to a man. Marxist leaders faced growing difficulty in staging the Kabul championships. Regime prestige suffered, and the effort was abandoned after 1982. Private buzkashis, however, continued in the North despite Soviet linkage with anti-regime "banditry" and subsequent Taliban accusations of "wasteful frivolity."

The buzkashi season in northern Afghanistan runs from October to March. Toois are still held in the countryside. While the central government as yet lacks sponsorship capacity, local leaders often provide a game on Friday afternoons. The country's foremost buzkashi is currently held as part of Now Roz (New Year) celebrations beginning March 21 on a field called Dasht-e-Shadian in the southern outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Buzkashi is not native to Kabul, but you may be lucky. Games are played on the outskirts of town most Fridays in winter. Check local radio for details on Thursday evenings. Meanwhile buzkashi followers have their own standard for post-conflict government capacity. "It's easy to measure," I was told in 2010. "When government can again bring teams from all northern provinces, when government can again field a two week Kabul tournament – then people will know who is in control."

Whitney Azoy *is the author of Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan (3rd edition), Waveland Press, 2011.* http://www.amazon.com/Buzkashi-Afghanistan-G-Whitney-Azoy/dp/1577667204/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1323176410&sr=8-1

Drugs:
The opium poppy conundrum
By William Dowell

Afghanistan's prominence as the world's leading producer of illegal opium and heroin is one of the most difficult and potentially dangerous side effects of the last decade of inconclusive warfare. The country has always produced opium, but until the 1990s, it was considered a minor player. By the end of that decade, however, opium and heroin output had surpassed Burma. The infamous Golden Triangle had given way to the Golden Crescent, composed of Iran, Pakistan, with Afghanistan far in the lead.

Today, Afghanistan produces more than 90per cent of the world's non-pharmaceutical opium, and it is responsible for nearly all of the heroin and opium supplying addicts in the Russian Federation as well as the former Soviet Central Asian Republics. It is the main supplier of narcotics in Iran and Turkey, and more significantly, it provides nearly all the heroin flowing into the European Union. Afghanistan, in short, produces a narcotics flood that makes the old line French connection pale in comparison.

Opium growing has not only become the major pillar of the economy (if one discounts foreign aid). It has also become a major global industry. An astonishing 181,000 hectares of choice farmland, roughly 700 square miles, are currently devoted to large scale opium poppy cultivation. The landmass covered is larger than all of the territory devoted to cocoa cultivation in Latin America. It is clearly Afghanistan's main financial lifeline. In some provinces, whole villages are pressed into serving as "mules" to carry drugs across Afghanistan's notoriously porous borders. The impact outside Afghanistan is more insidious than the threat of any terrorist attack from al Qaeda or the Taliban. The EU counts at least 1.5 million addicts, most of them supplied from Afghanistan. The Russian Federation experiences more than 30,000 deaths a year among its nearly 2.5 million addicts.

Rightly or wrongly the Russians believe that their wide spread addiction problem, which dates from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, was at least partly fueled by America's Central Intelligence Agency. They believe the CIA encouraged opium growing as

Drugs are a driving force that risks turning Afghanistan into one of the world's most dangerous narco-states. Eradication of opium poppy fields, nevertheless, remains a tricky proposition that can easily backfire. Here a deceptively attractive opium opium poppy field flanks an ordinary village. Photo UNODC

a cold war tactic intended to weaken Moscow's competitive edge and to impose the kind of trauma that Americans experienced in Vietnam . Whether these suspicions are justified or not, they are quite real to the Russians, and since one of the two main heroin smuggling routes crosses through Russian territory on its way to Europe, it complicates western efforts to control Afghanistan's borders.

Several factors contribute to Afghanistan's steady ascent to become the world's leading narco-state. A major incentive has been the need by warlords and local commanders to raise hard cash in order to buy weapons. Given the lack of central authority and the struggle between competing factions, a reliance on selling opium poppies, which bring in as much as $4,000 per acre was a no-brainer. This was especially true since Muslims do not see the same kind of religious prohibition against drugs—particularly hashish—that they do against alcohol. Afghanistan is also the world's leading producer of hashish.

In 2001, the Taliban did briefly try declare cultivation of opium poppies un-Islamic, and for a very short period, the cultivation of opium looked as if it might be brought under control. Afghanistan's output dropped to less than 200 tonnes. The hiatus did not last long. The al Qaeda attack against the World Trade Center in New York and the immediate US response, which ultimately drove the Taliban from power shattered whatever control that might have previously existed.

But the determination of the Bush administration to focus only on breaking the Taliban and driving out al Qaeda also became an important factor. Early on, US commanders determined that recruiting the mujahed commanders constituting Afghanistan's United Front, or Northern Alliance took priority over illicit drug trafficking. This provided a green light to some of the country's major opium traffickers. The result was a decade of policy making that was essentially schizophrenic.

The US State Department, Britain's Foreign Office, ISAF and NATO opposed the traffic verbally while both US and British military commanders considered the traffic as secondary to immediate military objectives, and tended to give it a low priority. Winning the war, they were convinced, required gaining the acquiescence of local commanders, and that was not likely to happen if they tried to stop what many Afghans felt was essential to survival. Just in case anyone missed the point, the US command (under the Bush administration) denied US Drug Enforcement

agents helicopters, which had been promised to them, and even tried to refuse operational space at Kabul's airport.

The subsequent state of affairs recalled the old Hollywood western movies in which an American Indian chief remarks that white men tend to speak with a "forked tongue." The US spent more than US$6 billion over a decade on counter-narcotics efforts, while US military commanders, who were clearly calling the shots, made it clear that they felt they more important priorities. At one point, the New York Times reported, US commanders actually distributed leaflets making it clear that their troops had nothing to do with ongoing opium poppy eradication campaigns.

Afghan soldiers prepare to burn captured opium. Photo courtesy ISAF

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the main, if not only reason for supporting the administration of president Hamid Karzai was self-interest. Money and corruption, in short, soon became the basic glue holding the government in Kabul together. No one doubted that even if Karzai might possibly be clean, members of the president's family were not, and trafficking in opium was too attractive a proposition to overlook. When in early 2012, the Afghan air force was accused of transporting heroin outside the country, the government did everything it could to block a US investigation. Another consideration was the growing realization that foreign intervention, albeit a haphazard

and uncoordinated exercise, promised to be a limited proposition. Any one who wanted to survive had better have substantial cash reserves on hand when the moment came to cut and run.

The critical issue from the standpoint of narcotics control was aerial eradication. The most feasible way of eliminating poppy cultivation was to spray it with herbicide from the air. Karzai agreed to any number of incentives to farmers to go with alternate crops, but he blocked all efforts at disincentives, and aerial spraying stood at the top of the list. Apart from memories of the Soviets having poisoned wells and destroyed fields, there was the American experience using Agent Orange in Vietnam, which still results in births of deformed babies and unexplained cancers. Arguments that this time the US would do it right did not carry weight. At one point, the US ambassador was reported in the New York Times to be ready to don swimming trunks and plunge into a vat of the herbicide to prove that it was safe, but Karzai refused to budge. Afghan farmers, he argued, would rebel and think that Kabul was trying to poison them. It would be a replay of the Soviet experience with Karzai left holding the bag.

The softer approach was to offer to pay farmers not to grow poppies, but this tactic had its drawbacks. In many cases, according to UN investigations, local officials simply pocketed the money and never passed it on to the farmers. In other cases, the farmers harvested the poppies and then collected payments for not planting more poppies after the harvest. In some regions there are several growing seasons in the year, so the idea was not only costly but unsustainable without a massive input from western donors.

Paying farmers not to grow poppies, also encouraged many to get in the business. The prospect of collecting payments for not doing anything was too much for any wily Afghan farmer to ignore. The other constraint to poppy reduction campaigns was that they tended to create a heightened demand effectively raising the price for opium, and adding to the incentive for anyone who owned land to get in the game. Even the Taliban's 2001 decision to declare opium un-Islamic was open to suspicion. There were suggestions that the Taliban's real purpose had been to create a shortage in order to drive up the price on stocks that it already had. Whether that was really the Taliban's strategy or not, the ban had that effect. The price for opium that had been hovering around US$30 a kilogram, suddenly skyrocketed to US$700 a kilogram, by the time the opium was exported, its price had increased 20 times

the original amount. As it turned out, the Taliban had a small fortune's worth in its warehouses. The same phenomenon has followed various control efforts by the US and ISAF. The bottom line is that a partial solution to opium cultivation only increases the market value, making the narcotics traffickers wealthier, and increasing the incentive for more people to get in the business.

The economics are clearly on the side of opium cultivation. The crop for 2011 was estimated to be worth around US$1.4 billion, or roughly 9 per cent of Afghanistan's economy. The going price for a kilogram now hovers around US$320. An acre of land can easily produce opium worth US$4,000. In comparison, a farmer who grows a traditional crop can only expect to earn a fraction as much for his efforts.

Other factors enter into the equation as well. Farmers need to get their produce to market and in many areas the roads are bad or non-existent. Produce takes up more space and is considerably more expensive than opium poppies to transport, and there is always the danger that conventional crops will go bad. Today, many farmers simply lack the capital they need to get out of the opium business. In contrast, opium poppies, and to an even greater extent, heroin, constitute the Afghan equivalent of gold. The crop has an incredibly long shelf life. It is easier to move, and it can be cashed in for real money at any time. The fact that so much money collects around narcotics traffic also skews the traditional Afghan social balance. Drug traffickers become powerful, and are courted by the international community. The availability of easy money raises prices and makes life more difficult for anyone who insists on working honestly. Even unskilled manual labor can see the advantage of going with drugs. The average price for an unskilled worker employed in poppy cultivation is US$11 to US$12 a day, five times the normal rate for a laborer. Since the average per capita GDP in Afghanistan is a little more than US$300 a year, it doesn't take long for even uneducated Afghans to do the math.

The prospects for the future hardly look more promising. At one point, nearly all 34 provinces in Afghanistan were engaged in opium cultivation. Efforts to stem production succeeded in reducing the number of opium growing provinces to only 17. But that overlooked the fact that traditionally as much as two thirds of Afghanistan's opium had come from only two provinces: Helmand and Kandahar. A concerted campaign in the Helmand river basin did succeed in reducing cultivation by up to 33per cent,

but the troops that were instrumental in carrying out that policy are being withdrawn, and funding is drying up for programs to get farmers to engage in alternate types of farming. The plan is clearly to turn enforcement over to Afghanistan's hastily trained police and its newly created army, but both are experiencing rapid turn-over, and both suffer from the fact that many filling their ranks are only semi-literate and are barely educated. Since the government in Kabul and local provincial authorities are rife with corruption, the chances that anyone will be able to effectively stop the only available source of economic viability in the country seems slim at best. In fact, opium production is likely to bounce back like a drug-resistant organism, only this time it is the drug that will triumph.

Once again, well-intentioned western efforts at controlling Afghanistan's opium cultivation will almost certainly be an increased incentive to engage in the traffic brought on by artificially created scarcity. When one considers the effect on the economy of a massive pullout of international forces and pared down reconstruction efforts, the urge to turn to opium cultivation and radically increased production of heroin seems irresistible.

It does not take much imagination to calculate the inevitable cost of losing control over Afghanistan's potential for becoming a narco-super state. Sales of opium and heroin are likely to put vast fortunes in the hands of warlords. They have already shown themselves to be merciless killers, shaped by the chaos of war over the course of decades. The US government recently placed a US$22 million bounty on the heads of the top five leaders of al Qaeda and the Taliban who are still at large. What will happen when Afghanistan's narco-warlords are in a position to offer billions for an attack against key western interests?

An alternative for the West might be to try to seal off the borders of Afghanistan—at least for narcotics trafficking—but that is not very realistic. One of the major routes for narcotics smuggling passes through Russia, and as we noted earlier, the Russians have accused the West, and more specifically, the United States, of trying to use Afghanistan's opium as a tool to weaken the Kremlin. The other route passes through the Pakistan border and then through Iran. The Iranians are not likely to feel particularly concerned about the potential damage to the West and Pakistan's control of its own borders is tenuous at best. US drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan have hardly garnered much

public support for US or Western objectives in either place.

The bottom line is that once US and NATO troops have withdrawn, it will be difficult to see how anyone will be able to limit the expansion of illicit opium cultivation and the production of heroin. The only hope is a fortuitous agricultural blight that would plunge the country into even deeper poverty or bad farming. In 2004, the opium poppy yield, which had been running at 45 kilograms per hectare dropped to 32 kilograms per hectare. A failure to rotate crops and attempts to raise poppies on unsuitable land were generally blamed for the decline.

In the end the real question may not be so much one of curtailing the uncontrollable flood of narcotics that is likely to result, but rather how the traffickers and cartels are likely to spend the nearly unlimited funding that the uncontrolled expansion of Afghan heroin will make available to them, especially when that funding is combined with extremist strategies that target the West as a primary enemy. When a Pakistani terrorist, Ramzi Youssef, who tried unsuccessfully to bomb New York's World Trade Center in 2003, was shown that despite his efforts the building was still standing, he replied, "If we had had more money, it wouldn't be." Seven years later, Osama bin Laden, who was hiding in Afghan cave, provided the funds to prove Ramzi Youssef's grim prediction correct.

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*Afghanistan still produces more than 90 per cent of the world's opium. Counter-narcotics efforts over the past 12 years have focused on destroying opium poppies at the source by pressuring Afghan farmers to stop growing opium poppies, but this strategy has been less than successful largely because it has frequently been applied unequally. Those Afghans with close contacts to the government or to warlords tend to be left alone, while those without political connections have watched their crops destroyed, often without compensation. A veritable narcotics war being fought in areas along the borders with the former Soviet republics pits security forces against traffickers, but the struggle is further complicated by the fact that some of these forces also have stakes in the illicit trade, some of which themselves have stakes in the illegal trade. Drugs and rural livelihoods specialist **David Mansfield** looks at the problems of understanding current opium poppy situation in Afghanistan.*

Addicted to Numbers: Lies, Damn Lies and Drug Statistics

By David Mansfield

Convention requires that any account of the drugs situation in Afghanistan be littered with statistics. The hectares of land cultivated with opium poppy; the amount of the crop eradicated; the quantity of opium produced, the economic returns on opium and the latest opium prices are all metrics that are used to support conclusions in articles and reports on narcotics in Afghanistan. Typically, these statistics will be presented as facts, attribution inferred and policy positions advocated.

For example, when the number of hectares of opium poppy cultivated in Afghanistan are estimated to have increased, counter narcotics efforts are deemed to be failing. Subsequent media articles are likely to warn of imminent 'floods' of heroin hitting the continent of Europe at low prices. There will be references to a concomitant increase in the number of deaths among problem users, (or 'addicts' as they are more pejoratively termed). More often, statistics will be used to "call for action," perhaps more eradication, the distribution of agricultural inputs, and more resolute action against traders or the abandonment of drug control measures altogether.

Even in learned journals and in the "quality press" there is likely to be little consideration of the veracity of the statistics used to describe the issue of drugs, or whether correlation is being confused with causality. Typically, when drugs statistics are presented, the audience sits up and takes note. Better still, if it is a statistic on Afghanistan attributed to the United Nations, it will be taken as fact and usually cited without question. Little consideration is given to the inherent challenges of deriving accurate statistics concerning the scale and nature of an underground economy in a country that cannot produce even the most basic demographic statistics. (Current population estimates vary from 25-35 million).

Estimates of the economic returns from selling opium poppy constitute one of the most distorted, yet often cited statistics in the debate over drugs in Afghanistan. Typically the returns on opium are estimated as "gross" returns and compared with wheat. References to the profits from opium production significantly outstrip those for wheat. The reader is immediately confronted with a picture in which the righteous farmer opts for the less profitable wheat, while the farmer motivated by greed produces opium.

Yet wheat is a low input crop. It requires less water, less fertilizer and significantly less labour than opium production. In fact, the amount of work required for opium production means that many farmers in Afghanistan will need to hire labour, particularly during its short but intensive harvest season. The cost of labour is such that poorer farmers will elect to grow only as much opium poppy as can be managed by their own family. In this way, they can minimize production costs. In contrast, wheat is typically cultivated using only family labour. In the rain-fed areas of central and northern Afghanistan where land is more abundant, it is the amount of wheat seed available coupled with the amount of rainfall that will determine how much land will be cultivated, not the number of family members on hand to tend the crop.

Given the significant differences in the amount of inputs required to produce opium compared to wheat, a comparison of gross returns is misleading. It presents a distorted picture of both the economic position of the majority of farmers in Afghanistan and their motives. The fact is that opium poppy and wheat are grown for very different reasons.

Wheat is typically grown for both use at home and for its commercial market value. The household consumes the grain, while the straw is fed to the livestock and used in the construction of mud-and-stone houses. It is a staple part of the rural economy.

The vast majority of farmers cultivate it – even those who also produce opium. Opium, on the other hand, is grown as a cash crop,and it provides access to credit. Equally crucial, the need for farm hands during harvest time means that the poor can be employed. Or it can enable landless farmers the chance to obtain land under sharecropping arrangements. Were wheat the dominant crop, many would have no jobs or sharecropping rights, which, in turn, would mean fewer people with the ability to obtain extra cash or even enough food for their families.

For rural households with insufficient irrigated land in the more remote parts of Afghanistan, located far from agricultural markets and where non-farm income opportunities are limited, many Afghans would simply not be able to cultivate enough wheat. For this reason, opium production remains one of the few ways that they can guarantee food security.

As with so many statistics about drugs in Afghanistan, the wheat and opium comparison is an absurd abstraction. It fails to represent the complex choices (some of which are far from voluntary) that farmers face. Inaccurate and incomplete data are often incorporated in calculations of opium and wheat returns. But the failure to understand the interdependent nature of how households struggle to survive by grappling with different rural activities is also responsible. The portrayal of the Afghan farmer as "homo economicus" – a rational self-interested actor with full access to reliable information on which to base decisions – also conflicts with the on-the-ground realities of rural Afghanistan, where between 75-80 percent of people live. It is not as if the ordinary Afghan farmer has automatic access to the factors that determine production and markets. These are often well out of his hands and are determined by patron client-relationships, traditions and, in many parts of the country, chronic insecurity. As such, those who seek to compare wheat and opium poppy, as if saying that apples are no different from pears, are only providing a grossly simplified model of decision-making in Afghanistan.

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Essential sources

- **David Mansfield's** work for AREU can be downloaded at http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?/EditionId=621&ParentId=7&ContentId=7

- **World Drug Report, 2011** - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2011/WDR2011-ExSum.pdf

- **Drug Use in Afghanistan,** UN Survey 2009 http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghan-Drug-Survey-2009-Executive-Summary-web.pdf

Essential data

- Afghanistan remains the world's largest illicit opium-producing country, accounting for 74per cent of global opium production in 2010. This is down from 88per cent in 2009 and 92per cent in 2007. Among the reasons for this drop were lower yields, primarily the result of crop diseases. Many farmers, too, opted not to grow opium poppy. (Source: UN).
- Estimates place the market retail value of Afghan-produced opium in Europe, Russia and North America at 194-200 billion dollars a year at 30per cent purity. Other sources, notably the United Nations, believe it is far less and is more like 65-70 billion dollars a year.
- According to UN and other sources, Afghanistan itself earns an estimated US$3 billion from the trade. Some suggest that the Taliban and other insurgent groups earn US$300 million a year from opium production in Afghansitan. The rest is earned by the traffickers, including warlords, corrupt government officials, police and others. The reality is that no one knows.
- An estimated 800,000 Afghans in 2010 were drug users, making Afghanistan one of the top five user countries in the world. (Source: UNODC)

The Durand Line: Unfinished business

By Charles H. Norchi

The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is an artifact of the "Great Game," the 19th century struggle to keep Imperial Russia from encroaching on India, the jewel of Britain's colonial crown. Afghanistan's role, as the British saw it, was to serve as a buffer.

Abdur Rahman Khan, who was Amir of Afghanistan until 1901, received a mission to Kabul from the Indian Foreign Secretary Sir Mortimer Durand, who intended to delineate British and Afghan responsibilities in the Pushtun tribal areas that today straddle both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan frontier. Durand persuaded the Amir to agree to a demarcation line, in effect, a new border between Afghanistan and what was at that time still India, in return for an increase in his British-paid subsidy from 12 to 18 lakh (1,200,000 to 1,800,000) rupees. The two men signed the agreement in Kabul on 12 November, 1893. This stipulated in part:

"Whereas certain questions have arisen regarding the frontier of Afghanistan on the side of India, and whereas both His Highness the Amir and the Government of India are desirous of settling these questions by friendly understanding, and of fixing

"Whereas certain questions have arisen regarding the frontier of Afghanistan on the side of India, and whereas both His Highness the Amir and the Government of India are desirous of settling these questions by friendly understanding, and of fixing the limit of their respective spheres of influence, so that for the future there may be no difference of opinion on the subject between the allied Governments, it is hereby agreed as follows: The eastern and southern frontier of his Highness's dominions, from Wakhan to the Persian border, shall follow the line shown in the map attached to this agreement....

"The Government of India will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of Afghanistan, and His Highness the Amir will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of India.

"The frontier line will hereafter be laid down in detail and demarcated…by joint British and Afghan commissioners…having due regard to the existing local rights of villages adjoining the frontier…

"Being fully satisfied of His Highness's goodwill to the British Government, and wishing to see Afghanistan independent and strong, the Government of India will raise no objection to the purchase and import by His Highness of munitions of war, and they will themselves grant him some help in this respect. … the Government of India undertake to increase by the sum of six lakhs of rupees a year the subsidy of twelve lakhs now granted to His Highness."

The British Political Agent at the time, Richard Issaq Bruce, recorded in his 1900 memoir, The Forward Policy, the following observations: "[O]n November 12, 1893, the famous agreement between the Amir of Kabul on the one part, and Sir Mortimer Durand on the part of the government of India on the other, was signed; by which the boundary dividing India from Afghanistan, from Wakkan to the Persian Border, was defined and fixed. No measure has been carried through since our occupation of the Punjab so pregnant of possibilities for the pacification and strengthening of our frontier, and the civilization and attaching of the Border tribes to our rule."

The agreement was signed, but the border, which became known as the Durand Line, was neither "fixed" nor demarcated, and tribal groups did not take kindly to the new arrangement. The British Special Commissions, tasked with demarcating segments of the Durand Line, were met with antagonism and outright attack, particularly in Waziristan. (Some of these demarcations, notably around the Khyber Pass area, were based on salt lines across rock faces or in gullies.) British and Indian troops engaged in bloody skirmishes with the tribes, owing to, as Winston Churchill noted in The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier War (1898), British attempts to demarcate and enforce the Durand Line. Stability, which had been a principal objective of the Durand line strategy, was fleeting. Churchill wrote "…in these valleys the warlike nature of the people and their hatred of control, arrest the further progress of development…an absolute lack of reverence for all forms of law and authority…"

Today, in the early 21st century, the Durand Line remains an

intense and dangerous threat to regional stability. The authority of the Afghan and Pakistan governments remains weak in the border areas, where tribal culture is strong. In many parts, the same tribal groups live in both sides of the Line. The reality is that Pushtuns are divided by a 19th Century treaty, which successive Afghan governments have questioned. Neither the Soviet-backed regime of the 1980s nor the mujahed and Taliban administrations that followed recognized it. And today, the government of President of Hamid Karzai has refused to acknowledge the Durand Line, or at least remains evasive about it. Afghan-printed maps in the bazaars of Kabul, Herat and other cities pointedly show the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan as the Indus River well beyond Peshawar (a former Afghan winter capital) to the east. Even Afghan non-Pushtuns assert that they consider the real border to be the Indus.

In the tribal areas, culturally-driven demands ranging from limited autonomy to self-determination persist. The region of the Line is a sanctuary for private armies, for ideological militants, such as the Haqqani Network or Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, and a base for the projection of organized violence. These trends will continue until the unfinished business of the Durand Line has been resolved.

International law favours settled boundaries that convey title to state territory based upon principles of sovereignty, allocation of jurisdiction, divisible spheres of action, and accountability. The countervailing policy is the human rights principle of self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and which demands respect for peoples that lines may arbitrarily divide. The Durand Line is an artifact of 19th Century power games that must now be bent to 21st Century human rights norms.

Completing the business of the Durand Line would entail answering these questions:

- Does the 1893 Agreement connote an international border, or respective spheres of influence?
- On whose behalf, by whose authority, was the agreement concluded? Did the Amir have the legal capacity to enter into an agreement on behalf of all Afghan tribes?
- What is the effect of unequal bargaining power?
- Was the agreement concluded under duress?
- What were the expectations and the

intent, of the respective parties at the time?

- Have those expectations substantially evolved?
- If India upon independence assumed international legal obligations created by the legal acts of Britain, did Pakistan also assume those obligations as a successor state to India? Or, is Pakistan a new state that does not automatically assume the legal obligations of India?.

Clearly, this business of the Durand Line is a critical issue that both Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also the international community need to settle. Otherwise it promises to emerge as a catalyst for renewed conflict and regional destabilization for years to come. And the process must account for the Pushtuns who have endured the dissolution of empires, the rise and fall of states, the ebb and flow of trade and ideas, multiple wars, and elite claims to territorial title affecting ancient tribal lands ---including the Durand Line Agreement.

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The Economy: From aid to sustainability

By Edward Girardet

"Our problem is our geographical location and our resources. For this reason, Afghanistan has always been at war."

--Ahmed Shah Massoud, 1997

Over three and a half decades of war since the outbreak of fighting against the communist regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in mid-1978 have had a shattering impact on this country's economy. Despite limited efforts at reconstruction before and during the Taliban era (1994-2001), much of Afghanistan in 2002 remained destroyed or in a state of dereliction, the bulk of its forests ravaged, portions of its mountains eroded. (SEE DEFORESTATION) Equally trenchant, more than a third of the population, some five million people, including many of its educated elite, had fled as refugees to Pakistan, Iran, India, North America, Europe and other countries. (SEE REFUGEES) Some returned at the end of the Soviet war, but many fled again during the Battle for Kabul of the early 1990s or the civil war between the Taliban and the United Front (Northern Alliance) forces of Ahmed Shah Massoud. Severe drought conditions during the late 1990s and early 2000s aggravated by the lack of infrastructure for local populations to cope, produced new waves of refugees in search of food or new livelihood, particularly in the towns.

While reliable casualty figures are extremely difficult to come by, up to 1.7 million Afghans are believed to have died from the consequences of war between 1978 and 2013. The overwhelming majority of these deaths occurred during the communist era, notably the 18 months of civil conflict (July 1978 to December 1979) and the nearly decade-long Soviet occupation (December 1979 to February 1989). Not only were Afghans killed from Red Army or Afghan government bombings, ground assaults, executions and massacres, but many succumbed from the impact of war, notably exposure to the wind and cold while fleeing the country, malnutrition, disease, lack of access to basic health care and other causes that might not have occurred in times of peace. This dragging conflict further inflicted large-scale devastation on

many rural areas either from direct military action, but largely from abandonment or negligence with local inhabitants unable to maintain their farms, such as repairing fragile irrigation systems. The combined effects of this repression resulted in the disintegration of many rural areas and small towns.

To the shame of many Afghans, however, it was not the Soviets but the civil war of the 1990s that inflicted the greatest damage on Kabul and other cities. Most of the major towns suffered little from the war of the 1980s. Factional fighting among the mujahideen resulted in the systematic destruction and looting of numerous modern industrial and agricultural production facilities. Additional devastation was caused during the battles for supremacy between the Taliban and the United Front. This included deliberate 'scorched earth' destruction by the Taliban, notably the uprooting of vineyards, the mining of irrigation systems, and the razing of houses and bazaars. Heavy bombing and ground operations by US-led Coalition Forces against suspected Talib and al Qaeda positions inflicted further damage, with civilian casualties similar to those killed during the September 11 attacks in the United States an estimated 3,000-4,000 Afghans by mid-2003. (By 2013, some 30,000 Afghans, both military and civilian, are believed to have died in operations carried out either by the Coalition armies and their Afghan counterparts, or the insurgents).

A nation in collapse

The economic situation facing the international community in 2002 following the US-led intervention was dismal: a completely shattered industrial infrastructure, an agricultural sector afflicted by drought and landmines, a burgeoning illicit trade in drugs and smuggled goods, recalcitrant warlords pocketing huge tax revenues, and a deteriorating security situation hardly conducive to private sector investment.

While many foreigners involved in Afghanistan today act as if it all began with the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, it is imperative to understand what happened beforehand. Prior to the Soviet invasion of December 1979, agriculture and animal husbandry accounted for over half the nation's GDP. During the 1970s, modernization programmes under Presidents Mohammed Daoud and Nur Mohammed Taraki had begun to open up other economic areas. Financed largely through heavy borrowing and

donor assistance, these initiatives sought to improve education and health services, at least in urban zones. They also established state-owned industries in sectors such as mining, energy, transport and communications. In turn, such initiatives helped create small and medium-sized consumer goods or support enterprises in and around the towns.

In 1978, during its last days of peace, Afghanistan was largely self-sufficient in food and a major exporter of agricultural products. During the Red Army occupation, the Kabul regime mainly with Soviet and Eastern bloc funding tried to expand the country's infrastructure. This went hand in hand with efforts to promote further industrial expansion, such as the establishment of textile and cement factories, as well as large-scale agricultural production. Increased mujahed resistance and general insecurity soon brought many of these projects to a halt, prompting a major economic decline.

Anxious to prove the benefits of their presence, the Soviets felt bound to prop up the PDPA government with heavily subsidised food imports. Ironically, this ensured that Afghans in the cities were better off than many Soviet citizens. Some of the crossborder international aid agencies providing clandestine assistance to civilian populations in resistance-held areas were quick to latch on to the availability of ample stocks in the bazaars. They found it cheaper to buy wheat secretly in nearby government-controlled towns rather than bring it in by costly horse caravans from Pakistan.

While numerous villagers in the 1990s began rebuilding their homes and re-cultivating their farms in zones where peace had returned, some have seen their holdings destroyed once, twice or even more with renewed outbreaks of fighting. Following the mujahed takeover in Kabul in 1992, Afghans who could afford it started repairing their houses and businesses, even constructing new buildings. This in turn encouraged new trade such as the import and sale of construction materials as well as jobs for craftsmen. Many of these edifices were damaged again in the rocketing and inter-factional conflict of 1993-94, when some half a million people found themselves displaced by heavy fighting. As war subsided in parts, a new but short-term industry was created, notably scrap metal recuperation, by Afghan and Pakistan entrepreneurs. They virtually cleaned up the countryside of wrecked roadside tanks, trucks and other military equipment.

By the mid-1990s, the bulk of Afghanistan's remaining modern

infrastructure had been destroyed or lay in a state of disrepair. Traditional irrigation systems lay ruined, while the industrial sector was reported to be down to less than 20 percent of pre-war production. Only a small handful of manufacturing activities, such as handicrafts production, were earning foreign currency at the time of the events of 9/11. Many formerly significant sectors, notably commodity exports, cement production and agro-processing, had been wiped out or severely damaged.

A degree of recovery in Taliban and United Front areas free of conflict occurred during the late 1990s, with projects such as "food for work" road building programmes, irrigation rehabilitation and the establishment of horticultural nurseries by international aid agencies. Agricultural production increased and substantial numbers of refugees returned home. In the cities, it was a different matter. Conditions worsened steadily under the Taliban. Roughly 80 percent of the population in Kabul was considered to be 'vulnerable', that is, unable to afford more than a basic diet of bread and tea. This included people from all walks of life: doctors, civil servants, teachers, casual labourers... While the economy continued to turn over, sort of, prices tended to reflect costs with barter representing a significant portion of overall trade. Following rampant inflation during the 1990s, the Taliban sought to impose price regulations. But street currency trade, one of the few thriving licit economic sectors, remained pegged to the US dollar. The Afghani, the national currency, was more or less destroyed by the constant printing of new notes by the United Front government (recognized by most countries) whenever cash was needed.

In 1999, a severe drought hit Afghanistan. This dragged on into 2002. Given the wholesale breakdown of both the state and civil society, the drought led to famine mainly in the northern parts. Crop production in traditional rain-fed areas was halved and livestock severely depleted, erasing the modest gains achieved earlier in the decade. Large numbers of people lost their means of livelihood and were forced to leave their homes, either as "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) or as refugees in neighbouring countries. Humanitarian agencies were obliged to step in with stop-gap emergency food aid. By early 2003, good rains with heavy snow in the mountains promised to break the drought, prompting organizations such as the World Food Programme to radically cut food rations in a bid to encourage IDPs to return home. Many IDPs from the northern provinces, however, were

reluctant to head back because of continued insecurity caused by clashes between rival political factions, but also because they had no more homes or animals left. Inadequate rains and snowfall led to renewed drought from 2008 to 2010 causing significant failure in rain-fed crops in six northern and western provinces. It was only in 2012 that the drought was finally broken.

Post-Taliban recovery

With the temporary collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, the international community was able to move forward with the reconstruction process with pledges totaling US$ 4.5 billion over the next five years. Even though parts of the Afghan capital had been rebuilt during the Talib period, much of the city remained gutted. Its southern and western sectors sported the haunting look of an Afghan Dresden. Whole swathes of shell-ravaged office buildings, apartment blocks and residential houses looked out onto rubble-lined streets, while cableless pylons and the torn remnants of trees pointedly reminded one of the days when Kabul's urban population enjoyed leafy avenues, functioning trolley buses and regular electricity. In the countryside, where entire villages had been eradicated, all that remained were adobe walls worn and crumbling with the rain and wind. Along the main roads stood the ghostlike vestiges of schools, factories, industrial depots and former customs posts.

Already by mid-2002, there was growing disappointment with the way the international community was handling recovery. This included the hijacking by the warlords of the June 2002 Loya Jirga, which had offered so much hope to ordinary Afghans fed up with the Jihadists, the Taliban and so many years of war. One of Washington's greatest failures was its decision not to back the aging ex-monarch Zahir Shah as the only figure capable of taking the country through the initial recovery process and to encourage reconciliation. While no great king, Zahir Shah was nevertheless widely respected by most Afghans, including many who supported the Taliban. They nostalgically remembered his former rule during the early 1970s, even if somewhat fictitiously, as days of peace. He was also the only figurehead leader most Afghans would have rallied around, a key factor the Americans were unable to grasp.

Funding was slow to arrive. Vital projects, such as urgently-needed road improvements (an obvious initiative for demonstrating

change) had not even begun. Roughly three-quarters of the pledged funding was being distributed via the United Nations system, rather than through government institutions, which is what the interim Kabul administration wanted. In turn, this hampered the prospects of building local capacity to manage the whole process given that any capable Afghan, particularly those who spoke English, were snapped up by ISAF, the World, European Commission, UN agencies and private consultancy firms at high salaries with which the Afghan civil service could not compete. They also stole trained personnel from the more experienced NGOs, who had been working in Afghanistan for years. Compared to post-conflict situations elsewhere, the level of aid provided for Afghanistan (US$ 75 per person in 2002) was relatively low. Bosnia-Herzegovina received US$ 325 per person per year (1996-99), while nearly US$ 200 per capita went to East Timor (1999-2001) and Rwanda (1994).

In mid-2003, it was clear that initial donor estimates were insufficient. With its collapsed economy, shattered infrastructure and formal institutions severely undermined or non-existent, all of Afghanistan's sectors including agriculture, health, industry, tourism, administration and media needed major investment. The World Bank put the cost of reconstruction at US$ 20 billion over the next decade, while the Afghan government itself pegged the price at US$ 30 billion.

Ignoring the countryside

One particularly contentious issue was, and still is, the so-called "Kabul-Rural Divide." Despite recent efforts to spread the aid more equitably, much of it appears to be focused on the Afghan capital rather than the countryside where the bulk (70 percent) of Afghanistan's people live. Parts of the capital, notably Wazir Akbar Khan and Shahr-e-Naw where the principal international agencies and embassies had congregated since the start of the recovery process, quickly improved with the renovation of houses and offices, the stocking of shops with ample but expensive imported goods, and the re-opening of restaurants and guest lodges.

Another debilitating factor was the fact that during the 12 months since the Tokyo conference, the steering committee of the UN, the World Bank, Asia Development Bank and other donors failed to fully incorporate both local and international

NGOs in their planning approaches. This despite the fact that NGOs, particularly those who had been operating clandestinely in Afghanistan since the early days of the Soviet war, commanded the best experience. At a July 2002 meeting of the Afghan Support Group of donors in Geneva, the Norwegian chair did not even bother to invite the NGOs. Instead, Kabul witnessed the arrival of one costly international donor assessment team after another, some so short-term and out of touch that there was no way they could have honestly assessed the country's problems outside the capital. Many of these teams not only refused to coordinate with each other, prompting an extraordinary amount of duplication, but also within their own organizations. Once again, the lessons from past humanitarian and recovery operations were being thrown to the wind with only limited public oversight by independent monitoring mechanisms.

Recovery approaches began to improve by mid-2003. There was far greater coordination by the donors with the central government, the NGOs and, more importantly, the private sector. For its part, the Kabul government elaborated a clear strategy for the country's reconstruction through its National Development Framework, consisting of 12 national programmes. The World Bank, which had not dealt with Afghanistan for 20 years, established the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, a multi-donor initiative aimed at financing recurrent costs of the transitional government. Nevertheless, many of these developments remained largely limited to Kabul and a few other cities. Numerous provinces complained of seeing little or nothing of the massive amounts of pledged international aid they kept hearing about. By 2013, rural Afghans were still wondering what benefits the international community had brought them.

A further challenge to Afghanistan's recovery process was the immediate need to cope with the reintegration of two million refugees out of the some six million outside its borders. (By 2013, some 1.6 million were still living in Pakistan with permission to remain until 2015). Some seven million Afghans, many of them internally displaced, were deemed by international aid agencies to be experiencing extreme hardship with only limited resources to survive because of the drought. The situation, however, proved

equally if not more desperate for those who had gone to the cities in search of jobs in order to support large, extended families,
including those who stayed behind in the villages.

Current situation

So where does Afghanistan stand economically today? Clearly, there has been significant progress in the rebuilding of the economy since the December, 2001 Bonn Accords followed by the January, 2002 Tokyo conference on Afghanistan Recovery and Reconstruction, which brought together some 60 donor countries and 20 international organizations. Yet despite all the rhetoric and the billions of dollars spent, or misspent, on military action and recovery by the international donors, the World Bank, Asia Development Bank, UNDP and others, this represents only a dismal minimum of what could have been achieved had there been a better understanding of the country. Or more effective and imaginative approaches rather than simply throwing money at the problem or focusing on quick fixes that sounded good back in Washington, London or Brussels.

Despite exceptional on-the-ground expertise available to the international donors in the form of international and Afghan aid workers, diplomats, and journalists with years of country experience, key policymakers in the immediate post-Taliban period refused to acknowledge their warnings not to make the same mistakes of the past. Their message was simple:

- Go slow while implementing a careful, realistic and eventually sustainable reconstruction process.
- Adopt a long-term strategy (20-30 years) with an emphasis on developing rural areas where the bulk of the population live.
- Do not seek to recreate Kabul in the Western image, particularly if available resources can be better used elsewhere.
- Involve local communities and produce improvements with clear benefits for ordinary Afghans rather than privileged elites.
- Avoid quick-fix and easy window-dressing options. These achieve little or nothing other than enriching corrupt government officials, warlords or private contracting firms, even if they do make the donors look good.

Much of this basic advice was pointedly ignored. Instead, the United States, Britain and other western players went for the military option. They handed over responsibility to the Pentagon, whose planners came up with all sorts of acronyms, statistics and strategies that failed to take into account how things work in Afghanistan. Or that political reconciliation and economic development were far more effective than

armed “shock and awe” tactics.

While many Afghans welcomed US-led intervention during the early days of western occupation, this quickly soured. More suited to fighting conventional wars than guerrilla counter-insurgency, NATO forces were also being asked to become aid workers through the deployment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). While serving as a relatively effective form of on-the-ground intelligence and PR for the military, they proved an extremely costly and inappropriate form of ‘development’ in the field. Many PRTs soldiers were well-meaning and genuinely concerned, but they simply did not have the knowledge, or the time (most were deployed on six-month rotations) - to deal with serious long-term development. Building wells, health centres and schools was not enough even if some projects, such as bridges, did make a difference. Many of these projects now face collapse as the troops pullout and the funding evaporates.

The result was a new episode in Afghanistan’s long dragging war that hardly brought the country any closer to sustainability. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest nations in the world with most of its inhabitants not even on the power grid. If anything, the past decade or so has been more marked by exceptional opportunities lost than striking examples of progress. Without doubt, many more Afghans have access to basic health care and education than they did in 2001. Thousands of kilometres of road have been paved or graded, while clean water supplies have been increased both in towns and rural areas. Between seven and eight million children are now at school even though qualified teachers – and the money to pay them – as well as classrooms are severely lacking. (SEE KEATING PIECE ON DEVELOPMENT) Certain parts of Afghanistan have also witnessed impressive private development by Afghans themselves, such as businesses in and around Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif, or in the form of agricultural support services to local farmers in rural areas. Foreign companies have also invested heavily, such as the Chinese copper mine south of Kabul (SEE AYNAK COPPER MINE) or the new railway linking Hairaton with Mazar.

But the economy is now contracting with the departure of foreign troops and the non-renewal of contracts. The elimination of tens of thousands of Afghans jobs has already become a reality. At the same time, the World Bank, Asia Development Bank and others were maintaining in 2013 that the situation was actually improving. Such assertions, however, were largely based on foreign

expenditure and had little to do with real development. Much of the economy today remains disturbingly artificial, heavily reliant on international donor and military spending, drug trafficking and other forms of illegal "import-export" activity. This, in the long run, is the crux of Afghanistan's problem.

According to the World Bank in 2012, a staggering 97 percent of Afghanistan's roughly US$ 13.7 billion GDP came from international military and development aid spending. This is on top of what the United States has already spent on the war in Afghanistan alone: US$ 642 billion according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. Aid inflows, noted the World Bank, "have become a source of rents, patronage and political power." Furthermore, Transparency International, a Berlin-based corruption monitoring group, maintains that well over a billion dollars have been siphoned off by corrupt Afghans. In 2010, the Kabul Bank, which held more than a third of the country's assets, turned out to be a billion dollar fraud benefitting a small group of well-connected Afghans.

Corruption proceeds have disappeared into the pockets of privileged elites, including ministers and other senior government officials, and often with full knowledge of the donors. They have transferred huge wads of cash to Dubai, Abu Dhabi and elsewhere, reluctant to invest in their own country and thus sabotaging it in the process. President Karzai promised to do something about this, but given that his own family and cronies have been indulging in such activities, it has been hard to take him seriously. The International Monetary Fund estimates Afghanistan's current account deficit at 45 percent of GDP. Regarding the country as somewhat of a hopeless case, it has postponed the prospect of "fiscal sustainability" until after 2032. Nevertheless, the 2013 assessments note strong growth in agriculture, which represented 31.5% of the country's share, largely the result of favourable weather conditions in the northern rain-fed regions. Wheat production, which represents three-fourths of cereal production, grew by 48 percent. The mining sector, too, was beginning to show dynamic prospects. Historically never significant, mining grew from 0.6 percent of GDP in 2010 to 1.8 percent in 2012, primarily because of the start of production in the Amu Darya (Oxus River) oil fields. By the end of 2013, this was expected to more than double from 1,950 barrels a day to 4,000 barrels. The potential revenue for the government from royalties and taxes was estimated at US$250 million annually

over the next 25 years. In addition, the rehabilitation and construction of eight natural gas wells in Sherberghan had also begun. Observers also point out that once the Chinese (copper) and Indian (iron ore) mines come on stream, significantly more cash will enter the country's administrative coffers.

Sadly, such contributions are hardly enough. The World Bank's assertion that Afghanistan's service and transport industries were doing well also reflected a false if not hazardous impression. As before, such development relies heavily on funding derived from military and international aid expenditure. As for opium, production fell from the equivalent of 7 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 4 per cent in 2012 as a result of disease and poor weather in the main growing areas. While representing US$ 700 million in 2012 – down from US$ 1.4 billion in 2011 – opium earnings must still be regarded as part of the economy.

With 2014 and beyond looming menacingly overhead, the economy can be expected to contract further, particularly in urban and conflict zones. There are now deep concerns among both Afghans and the foreign community as to what will happen. At a 2012 donor conference in Tokyo, the international community was quick to note that it would not abandon the country as it had once before in the aftermath of the Soviet occupation with catastrophic consequences both for Afghanistan and the world. The United States, Germany, Japan and other major donors pledged US$ 16 in development aid through 2015. What happens beyond is another question. It is clear that international interest is dissipating. Western countries have financial crises of their own and voters are fed up with the corruption within the Afghan government and the western contracting firms, many of which have ripped off taxpayer funds through vaulting overheads, high security costs and shoddy work. The West simply wants out of Afghanistan.

Today, the worsening security situation and the ongoing power of regional warlords have remained major factors behind the slow progress in recovery across many parts of the country. (SEE SECURITY) The rise in IEDS and insurgent attacks not only against foreign and Afghan security forces, but also civilians and aid workers has had a severe impact in curbing development activities. The killing of 10 Afghan and international aid workers providing eye and dental treatment in northeastern Afghanistan in the summer of 2010 proved particularly devastating. Many aid agencies have closed down or significantly reduced their

operations. Some areas have become completely 'no-go'. While some NGOs, such as the French agricultural agency Madera, Aga Khan Development Network or the Swedish Committee to Afghanistan, still seek to work primarily in close collaboration with local communities and Afghan staff, others, notably the UN agencies, USAID and World Bank, will not venture out unless with appropriate armed security. The presence of armed guards and the growing lack of open contact with ordinary Afghans, a critical aspect of any form of development, is particularly debilitating. No civilian, whether farmer or tribal elder, is going to talk openly in the presence of soldiers or mercenaries with guns.

Exceptional potential

The tragedy is that Afghanistan has a economic potential that should not be sniffed at. Maybe not anything like the Arab Emirates or Iran, the country could develop more along the lines of a smaller version of Turkey. While the challenges remain daunting, they are not necessarily unfathomable, despite Massoud's somewhat gloomy observation quoted at the top of this piece. Both Afghanistan and the region, notably Central Asia, the Gulf and the Indian subcontinent, have far more to gain from peace and security than they do from continued war. As a crossroads between East and West, North and South, what Afghanistan has to offer is mindboggling. Not only do Afghanistan's considerable natural mineral resources estimated a three trillion dollars represent a worthwhile investment for China, India, and the West, but transit routes, such as railway lines from Iran to Pakistan via Herat or the Caspian Sea to Mazar, Kabul and the subcontinent and the Gulf, could drastically alter the entire economic outlook for the region.

War economies may indeed benefit the few, but certainly not the majority. Nevertheless, the drying up of such vast sums of foreign input may in fact help Afghanistan get back to the basics. While still modest, this is already happening. Until recently, Afghans, who are born traders, were more interested in working for the international donors than setting up their own businesses. The new realities are forcing them to think differently. Some have established highly profitable service industries, such as the creation of private schools ranging from business management and accountancy to IT skills. They are also dealing with an increasingly literate population, particularly among young people

(illiteracy still stands at 70 percent), with expanding aspirational needs. The number of mobile phones has rocketed from none in 2001 to over 18 million today with young Afghans becoming increasingly computer literate.

Furthermore, with its Mediterranean and Alpine topography, Afghanistan could emerge as a fruit and vegetable exporting nation for India, Pakistan and the Emirates. (SEE AGRICULTURE) While its legal exports in 2012, including nuts and dried fruit, handmade carpets and gemstones, barely amounted to US$ 376 million (1/17th of its imports) according to the CIA, it could generate significant income with more rationalised farming and drip-agriculture coupled with high-tech storage and processing facilities geared to a sophisticated external market. Pomegranates are among the finest in the world, while its melons, grapes, apples, pears and apricots could supply the whole of the Gulf. Opium-producing poppy cultivation currently represents the country's largest export. But it benefits primarily the traffickers, including the Taliban and other insurgents, who seem to run the business far better than the government runs the country. If farmers are provided with the right agricultural extension, including loans, access to markets, and storage, as well as prices not undermined by international aid, there is no reason why they cannot do well. Afghan farmers are good. They are also quick at responding to new needs.

Finally, too, with already strong interest among North Americans, Europeans, Japanese and Australians, a peaceful Afghanistan could revive a tourism industry, with an emphasis on eco-activities such as trekking, fishing, mountain climbing, skiing and even managed hunting with benefits for local communities. This was just beginning to emerge in the late 1970s before coming to an end with the war, but could now be part of a regional approach with Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian Republics sharing with Afghanistan joint tourism initiatives, such as hotel training and cross-border excursions. Some specialised outdoor travel agencies are already pushing such approaches, while some aid workers have introduced skiing to select parts of the Hindu Kush. But such ventures all remain hampered by the ongoing security situation.

The building of new infrastructure, such as rail links and better roads, are crucial. But these may come – as is already happening – with the development of natural gas, oil, copper, iron, gold and other resources. The Indians, Chinese and other foreign consortia

investing in Afghanistan's significant mineral wealth, are all including railroad lines like the toys inside a cereal package for transporting the ore and access roads.Other companies in the United States and Europe are expressing strong interest. Some have already sent out exploratory missions. In the long-term, these are the sectors that are most likely to produce exports and stimulate economic growth with jobs and tax revenue. For all this to happen, there have to be proper laws promoting greater transparency in order to prevent corruption and environmental degradation, plus an end to the insurgency.

The fear, of course, is that given the failure of the West's military intervention, the situation post-2014 is bound to become worse. Hence the need to come to terms with armed opposition, but also to include all other players, including young people, in any reconciliation process. Without doubt, numerous local deals will be brokered among the Taliban, village elders, government military and police as a means of creating a workable modus vivendi. But in the end, the only workable political arrangement will be a broad-based one, including elements of the Taliban and other insurgent groups, whereby everyone will find a benefit in bringing an end to fighting. This is the only real option for any serious economic development, which could, in turn, change the whole of Afghanistan. One promising factor is that even hardline Taliban are pragmatic when it comes to income-generation. They realize that by helping to stimulate better economic conditions by improving agricultural, health and other infrastructure, this can bring in both jobs and income, and thus political support.

In the end, probably the best guarantee for long-term peace and security is the sort of economic recovery that will enable ordinary Afghans to feed themselves, earn a living, send their children to school and have access to at least basic health care. Vital, too, is for the international community to remain committed to Afghanistan's continued development well beyond 2015 with 'intelligent' rather than 'quantity' aid. As a result, any new approaches will need to be pragmatic, imaginative, and implemented in the interests of ordinary Afghans.

Gems, Falcons and Cultural Artifacts

Precious and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and emeralds have long provided Afghans with an invaluable source of income, even during the height of the war with the Soviets, Afghanistan's own gemstone trade in 2013 was estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars a year on the international market, only a modest portion of which actually ends up in the pockets of local villagers. While weapons and other supplies were transported to the mujahideen across the mountains from Pakistan on the backs of mules and horses during the 1980s, the same caravans returned loaded with semi-precious stones from ancient mines in the Panjshair Valley and Badakhshan. The revenue from such exports helped finance the armed resistance of commanders such as Ahmed Shah Massoud.

Thirty-five years since the outbreak of fighting in mid-1978, the revenues produced by lapis lazuli extracted from the 6,000- year-old mines at Sar-e-Sang in the Hindu Kush the world's only source of high grade lapis are now being used to finance reconstruction efforts and personal requirements for local villagers involved in mining. Some villages in the Panjshair and neighbouring areas have been building bridges, refurbishing irrigation canals or installing small but efficient hydro-electric turbines along the edges of rivers and streams to provide electricity for nearby houses. But the revenue is also being used to launder profits from the heroin trade, as happened during the war. The deep blue lapis stones, often flecked with gold-like pyrite, are prized by American, Japanese and European jewellers as well as by Arabs in the Middle East. While local miners (who also pilfer what they find for private profit) earn barely two to three dollars per 12-hour shift, the best polished stones can sell for up to US$ 18,000 per kilo in Kabul and Peshawar.

Many lapis merchants are also involved in the trafficking of drugs but also illegal cultural heritage items, such as antique statues or ceramics with the stones used as cover. Even the Afghan Minister of Culture, Mahkdom Raheem, was accused in May, 2013 of being involved historic artifacts smuggling following a seizure of suspect goods by British police in London, an allegation he denied.During one trip to northern Afghanistan, a British journalist encountered a caravan carrying precious stones and six Siberian hawks destined for the Saudi Arabian falconry market. Even more highly-prized than the peregrine falcon is the endangered saker falcon with individual specimens fetching over US$ 100,000.

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Essential reading

- *Afghanistan Economic Update,* April 2013 (The World Bank). http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview
- *UK Government Afghanistan Progress Report,* June, 2013.https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-progress-report-june-2013
- *Human Rights Watch, World Report 2013 (Afghanistan).* http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/afghanistan
- *UNODC Opium Risk Assessment Report, 2013.* http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/ORAS_report_2013_phase12.pdf
- Asian Development Bank Afghanistan Economic Report, 2013. http://www.adb.org/countries/afghanistan/economy

Essential data

- International reserves: US$ 6.345 billion. (2012)
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP): US$ 19.669 billion. (2010)
- Real GDP Growth: 2009: 21%; 2010: 8.4%; 2011: 5.7%; 2012: 7.2%.
- GDP (per capita/current prices): US$ 614 (2007)

GDP per sector

- Agriculture: 31.6%
- Industry: 26.3%
- Services: 42.1% (2008 estimate)

Sources: World Bank, ADB, UNDP, USAID, UNICEF
Please note that all statistics are estimates and do not necessarily reflect the real on-the-ground situation.

The Environment: Saving what's left

By Edward Girardet

Afghanistan boasts one of the most spectacular and ruggedly beautiful landscapes in the world. Visitors can attest to the harsh, almost mystical beauty of this land and its luxuriously rich flora and fauna. Even during the height of the Soviet war (1979-1989) as refugees fled by foot across the high mountain passes of the Hindu Kush or rumbled in overloaded trucks and tractors through the shimmering steppes of southern Afghanistan, you could still be enthralled by a lone soaring eagle or a light-footed gazelle sprinting along a dry river bed. Today, Afghanistan still has nine species of wildcats– the snow leopard, leopard, lynx, caracal, leopard cat, jungle cat, wildcat, Pallas' cat and sand cat – as many as in sub-Saharan Africa, plus other varied wildlife such as bear, ibex, Marco Polo sheep and markhor.

Nearly three and a half decades of conflict have put all of this at risk, turning large tracts into a soulless terrain devoid of forests and wildlife. Nangrahar has lost 90 percent of its forests, while 70 percent of the trees in Kabul have disappeared. Wind-blown grasslands are degrading along with the rich wildlife that depends on an increasingly dysfunctional ecosystem for survival. The war has caused widespread damage, but much of that is superficial. The more profound and, in the long term, far more costly damage to Afghanistan is resulting from the government and the international community's failure to exercise effective resource management.

This wanton damage is exacerbated by the fact that Afghanistan is already experiencing the negative effects of climate change. Four years of devastating droughts from 1998 to 2002 wreaked havoc with the country's ecosystem and left much of the land parched. The periodic dry periods with poor rains and inadequate snowfall that followed in 2008 and 2010 caused similar damage. Fortunately, good rainfall in 2012 helped break the drought. In 2012, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) helped the Afghan government launch a US$ 6 million dollar initiative to help local communities address climate change risk.

Furthermore, key wetlands used by migrating waterfowl have been drained, causing many species to disappear. Flamingos

have not bred in Afghanistan since the late 1990s. Expanding insecurity and NATO's presence have made it difficult to impose any form of environmental protection in many areas. Damage to the land is likely to be Afghanistan's second greatest tragedy after the suffering of its own people. Environmental destruction is already contributing to air pollution, loss of habitat and vulnerability to flash floods and reduced rainfall.

When the Red Army launched deliberate security operations against civilians in rural areas, creating more than five million refugees (SEE REFUGEES), in the mid-1980s – it was already evident that the destruction of Afghanistan's ecology and natural resources, notably trees, would have a profound impact for generations to come. Obliged to avoid the main government-held roads and crossing points, refugees travelled through difficult highland regions to cross the 300-odd mountain passes that lead into Pakistan. Many brought with them cattle, camels and other livestock. The result was an abusive overgrazing of pastures. The enormous human traffic led to heavy pollution of water sources as well as the progressive destruction of woodlands. The passing masses of people chopped what they could find for fuel and shelter. The refugees, many of whom have returned since 2002, have had an equally negative impact on the environment. Many have migrated to the towns adding to the current instability that has continued to erode the rule of law and governance. The effect is to make it difficult to impose protection efforts. Environmentalists warn that if deteriorating land conditions persist, it will soon be impossible for ordinary Afghans to sustain themselves in the mountains or the plains. Poverty will spread to local communities and traditional cultural connections will collapse as more people leave rural areas for the cities. Environmental protection, they say, urgently needs to become part and parcel of overall development.

In 2003, Klaus Toepfer, then executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), warned that environmental restoration must play a "major part" in the country's reconstruction progress. Unfortunately, only limited progress has been made since then. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), established in 2005, passed its first environmental law in 2007 followed by the creation of the country's first national park (SEE Band-e-Mir) in 2009. These were commendable steps in the right direction, but they failed to deal with the genuinely horrendous problems affecting much of

the rest of the country. The more pressing problems that require immediate attention include major soil degradation, air and water pollution, deforestation, desertification and overpopulation, particularly in Kabul.

On the positive side public awareness is growing thanks to efforts to alert the public through schools and the media. Afghans seem far more conscious today of the need for environmental protection, but lacking a full fledged commitment on the part of the government, the gains remain too modest to stop the current slide towards an eventual environmental catastrophe whose effects may extend well beyond Afghanistan.

The challenge today is not only to put in place the measures needed to protect the environment, but also to counter the corruption and the short-sighted profiteering that keep badly-needed reforms from being put in place. Among these are protection of water resources and restrictions on dumping chemical waste. An immediate concern is that the current lack of transparency will encourage the Chinese working at the Aynak copper mine in northern Afghanistan to pollute at will. (SEE AYNAK COPPER MINE)

Both the Afghan government and the international aid community have given lip service to the environment, while assigning long-term considerations a low priority. The current international presence and regime can expect to be long gone by the time the bill for repairing the damage comes due. The declared departure of most NATO soldiers by the end of 2014 coupled with an already occurring drop in international aid is bound to contribute even more to an overall lack of action.

At the heart of the problem is the fact that Afghanistan's recovery process has been defined by the military rather than by civilians. In this context, immediate security considerations naturally override other problems for which the full impact may not be felt for several years. In a sense, Afghanistan's ignoring its degrading environment can be compared to a person who develops cancer, but remains in denial, insisting that there is too much going on at the moment to deal with it. When the cancer metastisizes, the patient expresses remorse, but by then it is too late.

Given that the UN considered more than 70% of Afghanistan to be a "security zone" in 2012, the promotion of even basic environmental concerns, particularly in southern and eastern areas, has been put on a back burner. The continued trafficking

of lumber in Kunar, often with the complicity of government officials, is just one example of this. As a European aid expert in Kabul noted: "From the donor point of view, the environment is not exactly one of our priority concerns, although there is no question that it should be."

Ironically, as in other conflict areas – Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan – the war has actually enabled some varieties of wildlife to recuperate, largely because people were no longer able to access the area. This is slight compensation, however, for the degradation that has endangered human health and compounded poverty throughout the rest of the country.

Afghanistan's once magnificent forests have been reduced from five to six percent in the late 1970s to barely one percent today. The Soviet's use of phosphorous bombs to start fires, the relentless search for firewood by refugees, and illicit lumbering have devastated thousands of hectares of forest since the early 1980s (SEE FORESTRY). Severe erosion and the destruction of natural habitats are the result. Enormous landslides and flash floods in Kunar and lower Nuristan wipe out both bridges and fertile farmland. This destruction continues today promulgated by insurgent groups, the Pakistanis (including military, customs and private business interests), local warlords and corrupt Afghan officials.

The relentless hunting of wildlife in formerly remote areas continues to be a by-product of the ongoing war and easy access to assault weapons. The slaughter began during the late 1970s and early 80s when the mujahideen took to the hills to launch along former caravan routes. The Taliban and other insurgents continue the killing. They move across mountainous and desert 'security zones' with little fear of interdiction apart from occasional Coalition helicopter or drone assaults. The Wakhan corridor in the far northeastern reaches of the country is one of the few areas in Afghanistan where hunting actually is controlled. Rebels are relatively unknown here and local communities are able to assert a measure of resource management. In the Wakhan hunting is generally limited to local herdsmen and farmers, and if it continues to be effectively controlled could encourage a growing industry in eco-tourism.

A 2003 UNEP post-conflict environmental study provided a first sense of the extent of the damage to Afghanistan's wildlife. More recent studies by the New York-based Wildlife Conservation

Society (WCS), the only international organization in Afghanistan focused expressly on wildlife, provides a more focused picture of the current situation and what can be done to remedy it. As the study notes, Afghanistan is positioned at a biological crossroads that is critically important to a diverse array of rare and unique species. The Siberian cranes which breed in northern Russia but winter in India and southern Iran must pass through Afghanistan as part of their migratory flyway, sheltering in major wetland areas such as the Ghazni Marshlands, also a home and migratory stopover for some 250 other species ranging from flamingos to ducks and pelicans.

Conservationists maintain that efforts to protect the environment can be an important factor contributing to the rebuilding civil society. "As much as we try to save wildlife, a great deal of our efforts are focused on building the human capacity to manage those resources," says WCS's Peter Zahler, who has worked in Afghanistan since 2002. An estimated 80 percent of Afghans live near wildlife and are equally dependent on natural resources for survival.

In 2013, the situation for most of Afghanistan's species did not look particularly promising. Cheetah, lynx, otter and long-tailed marmot are either extinct, or near extinction. Migrating Siberian cranes, whose flute-like honking used to echo across the early spring skies of Kabul, have not been seen since the mid-1980s. The fur trade (another indicator) remains strong as pelts of the more common – but also endangered – species continue to reach the city bazaars and the international market. This includes the rare snow leopard, which UNEP, WCS and other conservation groups have shown still exists in small but significant numbers in the Wakhan Corridor and other parts of northeastern Badakshan as well as Nuristan.

Despite firm rules by the foreign military, the UN and other members of the international community, soldiers, aid workers and privateers continue to indulge in the illegal smuggling of CITES-protected species as well as rare cultural artefacts. (SEE CULTURE). American and Coalition soldiers can easily bypass Afghan customs regulations by sending packages home via their own postal systems. Conservationists have been campaigning at NATO bases to in an effort to convince international personnel not to purchase protected items. Since troops often rotate every six months or less, these campaigns need to be repeated constantly.

Some species of fauna and flora have benefited from the

inaccessibility of combat zones to proliferate in their former habitats. Conservation groups such as the Swiss-based World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the local Afghan NGO, Save the Environment Afghanistan (SEA), point out that some remote areas have retained their biodiversity. The depopulation of villages, particularly in the Wakhan Corridor in the Pamir Mountains (where eco-tourism is being developed) as well as an absence of hunting, have allowed the brown bear, Marco Polo sheep and markhor (an endangered wild goat estimated at fewer than 2,500) to survive with only limited interference. A growing number of grassroots-initiatives have encouraged local conservation.

The Marco Polo sheep (known locally as nakhjana), is generally considered one of the most agile and savvy of game animals. A survey by the WCS in May 2011, which used remotely triggered cameras and other devices, indicated that roughly 1,500 of these sheep have managed to survive (compared to 4,000 in 1971). That figure is a vast improvement over the 2009 estimate of as few as 220 by the provincial agricultural department. The survival of the endangered Marco Polo sheep in the Gojal area of Pakistan and in adjoining China is closely related to its protection in the Pamir-e-Buzarg district of the Wakhan Corridor.

During the pre-war years from 1961 to 1978, the Ministry of Tourism tightly regulated hunting. Foreign hunters were allowed to shoot only one animal (each costing between $3,000 to $10,000 US). The sport brought in much-needed revenue in tax receipts and guide fees, and it promoted community interest in protecting wildlife. As the war spread and the government lost control, poachers killed the sheep for meat, while smuggling the skin and horns for sale in Pakistan. The rapid-fire Ak-47 assault rifle soon replaced vintage British single shot Enfield rifles. Today, Marco Polo sheep are protected by law, having been declared a national asset by President Hamid Karzai, with penalties of up to two years imprisonment and a 100,000 Afghani ($20,000 US) fine. Nevertheless, with only limited numbers of trained – and paid - rangers, the poaching continues, much of it perpetrated by Pakistani dealers in neighbouring Chitral.

But not is all gloom. In 2009, WCS researchers discovered for the first time the breeding area of the large-billed reed warbler in the Wakhan. Referred to by Birdlife International in 2007 as the world’s “least-known” bird species, the warbler was first discovered in Indian in 1867 before being sighted again in

Thailand in 2006. "This new knowledge of the bird indicates that the Wakhan Corridor still holds biological secrets and is critically important for future conservation efforts in Afghanistan," noted Colin Poole of WCS's Asia programme.

Local hunters and shepherds, interviewed by EFG's editors on visits to the area from 2008 to 2010, described regular sightings of bear, wolf, fox, ibex and common leopard. Similarly, wolf, bear and fox are often spotted in the Hazarajat Central Highlands. According to unconfirmed reports, Caspian tigers may continue to roam the more heavily forested mountains of eastern Afghanistan, including Paktia province, but doubts have been expressed by both environmental and agricultural experts who know the land well. "The last tiger to be shot in Afghanistan was sometime in the 1950s," insists agricultural specialist Anthony Fitzherbert, who participated in the 2003 UNEP survey. Nevertheless, as late as 2010, both Nuristani and Kunari mountain people claimed that that they had encountered traces of baber (tiger) as opposed to palang (leopard, which definitely exists). While some firmly insist that a baber was shot near Kamdesh in Nuristan during the early 1990s, more recent accounts refer to at least two sightings plus the presence of tiger scat along a high mountain trail.

The rare snow leopard remains the most symbolic of Afghanistan's endangered wildlife species. The small rise in the number of pelts (confirmed by EFG reporters) reaching Kabul and Jalalabad bazaars since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 suggests its continued existence in Afghanistan. In 2011, the WCS spotted solitary snow leopards in the Wakhan Corridor. The WCS sees this as "real hope for snow leopards in Afghanistan." The Snow Leopard Trust estimates that there may be 3,500-7,000 animals left world-wide, most of them in China. Conservationists estimate that the number of snow leopards in Afghanistan, primarily along the rugged border with Pakistan, stands at between 50 and 100. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) collars attached to snow leopards indicate that they regularly go back and forth across the border. WCS has trained some 60 rangers to monitor snow leopards along with other wildlife. Unfortunately, the hunting of this furtive animal continues in Pakistan where corrupt wildlife rangers offer foreigners the opportunity to shoot animals inside the protected areas. Local herders also hunt snow leopards to protect their sheep and goats. Another factor is the disappearance of their primary prey, notably Ibex, a type of mountain goat, and Marco Polo sheep, as a result of grazing competition from

domestic livestock.

Despite a government ban, Kabul dealers still traffic (both secretly and sometimes still openly) in wolf, wildcat, fox and snow leopard furs. One recent study reports the price for snow leopard skins at $850 to $1,400. Save the Environment Afghanistan (SAE) maintains that the supply of wildlife skins has dropped by 40 percent. The lack of government resources plus the current security situation make it difficult to enforce environmental laws to protect the animals that remain.

Despite this pessimistic outlook, awareness initiatives do appear to be convincing villagers to protect the animals as a potential tourism asset that may eventually prove profitable. Ironically, the concept of biosphere reserves (protected habitats) originated in Afghanistan. The 5,000 year-old city of Balkh boasted more than one million trees in the 17th Century. During this period, many other ancient Afghan cities made special efforts to ensure environmental protection. More recently, in 1973, Afghanistan became one of the first countries to become party to the Man and Biosphere Reserves Programme. As a result, a number of areas were declared Biosphere Reserves. However, these spheres were relegated to little more than theoretical notions after the loss of government control in the early 1980s. While Karzai regime did finally create Afghanistan's first official national park, Band-e-Amir, much needs to be done to convert at least six other key Afghan biosphere's into properly managed parks. (SEE InspireBox on Band-e-Amir)

Since 2005, WCS and other organizations have sought to develop these biospheres into a network of parks and protected areas, including conservation 'hotspots,' near the borders of Pakistan, China and Tajikistan. In turn, Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), which issued an initial list of protected species, including snow leopards, the Asiatic black bear and the Marco Polo sheep, expanded its range to cover at least 70 fauna and flora, including the large-billed reed warbler.

Essential data

- 70% of Kabul trees have disappeared since the collapse of the communist government in April, 1992.
- More than 80% of Afghanistan's water resources originate in the Hindu Kush
- 75% of Afghanistan is vulnerable to desertification
- 99% of Afghanistan's use of river water is agricultural
- 85-90% of the country's water is from surface sources

Water and the Hindu Kush

More than 80 percent of Afghanistan's water resources originate in the Hindu Kush range. The melting winter snows and glaciers during the summer feed the country's three main river basins: The Kabul, Panjshir, and Kunar (which ultimately form the mighty Indus), the Helmand and the Amu Daraya, or Oxus. All serve as key sources for irrigation, drinking and, more recently, hydroelectric power, for the towns and farmlands along their trajectories.

Agriculture, however, represents 99 percent of the country's use of water resources. The Amu Darya, Afghanistan's largest river system, holds more than 55 percent of the country's water making Balkh, Kunduz and Jowzjan its most irrigated provinces. Shared with neighbouring Tajikistan to the north, which taps into its reserves for highly wasteful cotton irrigation, the Amu Daraya could prove a source for future conflict unless a more appropriate and sustainable application of its waters is developed.

As with mountain ranges elsewhere in the world, drought and global warming have reduced the size of Afghanistan's glaciers significantly over the past few decades. The smaller glaciers have disappeared, while the major ones have shrunk considerably. Drought conditions have dried up most of the Sistan wetlands in Helmand, resulting in increased soil erosion as cover vegetation withers. During the 1970s, the wetlands attracted more than 150 different species of waterfowl. By 2012, few to none remained.

Despite UN claims in March, 2012 that 89 percent of the world's population now have access to safe drinking water and that the global Millennium Development Goal (MDG) concerning safe drinking water had been reached ahead of schedule, Afghans have not seen much in the way of improvement. The MDG sought to reduce the number of people without safe water by half. The reality is that the majority of people in Afghanistan still have no access to safe drinking water at all. Poor or even hazardous drinking water continues to pose a severe health risk. According to UNICEF, only 23 percent of households have access to drinking water (43 percent in urban areas and 18 percent in rural). In some parts, access to safe water has deteriorated significantly. The very poor, who cannot afford to dig wells, are particularly vulnerable.

Contamination by harmful bacteria, especially E. coli, which kills mainly children and elderly, remains a key issue. Industrial and domestic wastes increasingly pollute the aquifer, particularly in cities such as Kabul, as sewage runs off into the streets, gutters and canals. The Kabul River itself is an open- rubbish-strewn sewer in the middle of town. The sewage seeps into the city aquifers, combining with the contamination of surrounding

water sources by oil depots, toxic runoff from streets and the unhindered dumping of refuse into streams, rivers and irrigation canals. Over 70 percent of diseases, including a recent rise in diagnosed cases of cancer, in Kabul are linked to air pollution, unclean water and sewage. The city's water levels have not only dropped from overexploitation but wastes have been gradually poisoning drinking water supplies. According to one Japanese water survey, Kabul will run out of fresh water supplies by 2015.

There is growing concern among environmentalists that major new mining projects, such as China's Aynak Copper Mine south of Kabul or India's proposed new iron ore mine, will only pollute water supplies further. The Chinese are not exactly renowned for responding to environmental predicaments.

At the same time, recurrent droughts coupled with poor rainfall and dismal water management have severely depleted water tables. According to the Ministry of Water and Energy, about half of groundwater sources have been lost in recent years. Given that between 70-80 percent of Afghans depend on agriculture for survival, limited access to surface water - particularly in the drought-prone northern areas, which rely heavily on rain-fed production - prompts farmers to dig deeper wells or to pump groundwater for irrigation.

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Air Pollution: Dust, cars and smog

Well over 1.2 million vehicles currently circulate in the country, with 8,000 new vehicles introduced every month according to Kabul's traffic department. Most Afghan towns enjoyed good air quality before the war. Particularly since 2002, rising population, excessive coal and wood burning, and especially exhaust fumes from the surging number of trucks, buses, cars and motor-scooters have led to smog and a marked deterioration in air quality. The influx of international organizations since the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001 has steadily worsened the situation. Both the new Afghan elite and the donors love their high-consumption and polluting 4x4s. But the bulk of vehicles, notably the older ones, have absolutely no pollution controls whatsoever, plus use poor grade fuel. While some of the traffic may drop with the pullout of NATO forces coupled with a reduction in international aid, it is unlikely to make much difference. The announced intentions by the Chinese, Indians and others to build railroad tracks for mineral ore exports, but also freight, are still a long way down the line. Road transport will remain the principal form of traveling and moving goods around.

Rural communities are increasingly affected by pollution trapped in the valleys. By 2012, Kabul was beginning to resemble Jakarta or Bangkok in terms of smog. More than 60 percent of Kabulis are regularly exposed to increased levels of harmful toxins such as nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide. For the moment, there is no consistent monitoring of air quality nor effective measures to counter pollution.

Partial peace and post-Taliban recovery have brought annual influxes of tens of thousands of vehicles into the country, most of them congregating in Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad and other towns. Much of this could have been avoided had the international community listened to warnings about the need to implement basic urban planning from the very beginning. The fact that Kabul lies in a broad crater-like valley does not help air circulation. The lack of a natural gas grid means that most people use wood, coal, kerosene and oil for cooking and heating. Brick factories and public baths often burn old ties, plastic and combustible waste to run their operations more cheaply. Dust and smog during the dry season provoke what has come to be known as the "Kabul cough." Birth defects caused by pollution are on the rise.

If the international community had focused recovery efforts on small towns and rural areas rather than Kabul itself, it might have helped

prevent both migrants and returnees surging into the city in search of jobs. Instead, burgeoning slums put added pressure on the city's crumbling infrastructure and semi-non-existent sewage and sanitation systems. The development of efficient public transportation (Kabul used to have an electric trolleybus network until the collapse of the communist regime) and bike paths could have slowed down the inevitable traffic jams that accompanied reconstruction. More eco-imaginative approaches toward reducing generator-driven power, and heating and air conditioning systems might have produced less pollution.

The design of many new buildings, including those funded by the international community, are more reminiscent of Dubai or Kuwait and make no effort to reduce the need for air conditioners or to introduce more sustainable forms of power use. In other words, there was a glaring opportunity to do things right, but with each donor or aid agency out for itself by responding to their own immediate needs, there was little effective coordination or shared vision. Nor was there an effort to set examples by showing what could be achieved in the form of sustainable and more environmentally-friendly designs. Smoke from cooking and heating is the primary indoor air pollutant causing respiratory and eye disorders. Some agencies are seeking to help villagers construct larger windows as a means of improving air circulation in homes with hearth fires instead of the small openings covered with plastic that characterize traditional dwellings in poorer, more isolated areas such as the Hazarajat, with its cold winters. And despite Islam frowning on tobacco and other drugs, smoking is on the increase and is considered another of the major indoor pollutants affecting health.

Afghanistan's disappearing forests
By Edward Girardet

The destruction of Afghanistan's forests may prove to be the country's greatest environmental disaster. By 2012, as much as 90 percent of Afghanistan's tree cover had been destroyed. Up until the end of the 1970s, cedar, pine, hollyoak, spruce and other trees covered as much as five percent of Afghanistan's land surface, mainly in the mountainous eastern and northeastern zones. Back then, the area had a distinctly alpine look.

Today, satellite images show that barely 1-2 percent of these forests remain. Some conservationists insist that a more accurate figure is less than 0.5 percent. The loss is particularly significant since most of Afghanistan is semi-arid or desert terrain. Nangrahar province still had 134,000 hectares of forest in 1989, but this has now been whittled down to less than 15,000 hectares, and that happened in barely a decade. Much of the destruction has been due to uncontrolled logging, but war, fires, clearing for grazing and cutting for fuel have also decimated large tracts. Several acute droughts since the late 1990s and early 2000s have accelerated the degradation.

Conservationists warn that deforestation has now reached the point where a total loss of Afghanistan's woodlands is imminent unless decisive measures are taken to protect the little that is left. Despite the impending danger to Afghanistan's future, both the government and the international community continue to assign a low priority to preserving the country's last remaining woodlands. The excuse is that the war and other development issues take priority over protecting a few trees. The argument sounds reasonable enough given available resources, which are diminishing even further as the international community looks to 2014 and beyond, but it constitutes a dangerous mistake. The situation not only has a highly negative impact on Afghanistan, but the region as a whole, including Pakistan, the Central Asian republics, China, Iran and even India and the Gulf states.

The few remaining trees are not only vital as a source of timber for construction and fuel for local populations, but they also provide an essential barrier against erosion and desertification. As the trees disappear, landslides and flashfloods increase. Healthy forests not only help to retain and replenish water sources (in addition to climate change, the lack of forests can expect to reduce water sources severely), they also improve health by reducing dust and other forms of pollution. Rapid deforestation

Deforestation is a crucial problem with consequences that go beyond the destruction of beautiful scenery. Soil erosion, loss of crops and wildlife, droughts and floods are consequences of destructive policies or just plain anarchy. Here Afghan camels transport lumber, Photo©EdwardGirardet

has increased dust levels in Kabul and other cities. Recent surveys by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the French aid agency, Madera, and other international organizations, have shown that deforestation has resulted in a marked reduction in arable land and grazing as well as water runoff from the Hindu Kush, Safed Koh and other mountain ranges.

In 1997, a report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) estimated that the destruction of Afghanistan's forests was proceeding at the rate of 20,000 hectares a year. In 2003, a UNEP Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment noted that satellite photographs revealed a loss of over 50 percent since the 1980s. (SEE ENVIRONMENT) This was aggravated in part by increased demands for construction lumber by returning refugees. During both the mujahed (1978-1996) and Taliban (1996-2001) periods, heavy cross-border trafficking of lumber with Pakistan was common. According to UNEP, up to 200 truckloads a day crossed into Paktia and other eastern areas of Afghanistan. Most of the lumber was already cut into rectangles for easier transport. In the process, a considerable amount of wood was wasted. The main entry points for trafficking into Pakistan at the time were Terimangal and Chaman.

Even Nuristan, whose remote, inaccessible mountains were largely bypassed by the Soviet war, has experienced a 30 percent reduction of its forests, despite the fact that in contrast to the rest of the country land ownership has remained more clearly defined and largely under local control. Nuristan harbours what is perhaps the only relatively safe forest reserve in the entire country, but unless the government begins to take the problem seriously, it is questionable how long that will last. According to Madera, Nuristanis have now come to understand that if their forests disappear, they are also likely to disappear.

In Badghis, Herat and Takhar provinces, once resplendent stands of pistachio forests have been reduced by half. Trips by EFG editors in 2001 and 2003 revealed only single or sporadic copses of pistachio trees on previously wooded hillsides and mountains, a clear devastation confirmed by a UNEP assessment.

Even though President Hamid Karzai banned the felling of trees in 2006, ongoing deforestation practices coupled with corruption threaten to destroy rapidly what little remains in these foothills and mountains. Karzai's administration simply does not have the resources to enforce the law. Large-scale trafficking persists, much of it instigated by Pakistani and Afghan business interests. Corrupt government officials, including Pakistan's ISI, on both sides of the border are also involved. While the international community has focused on curbing narcotics trafficking (SEE DRUGS), it has shown less interest in the lumber wars that periodically

erupt in the northeastern regions. Despite efforts by Kunar's governor to crack down on timber-smuggling, illegal lumber was still being trafficked in 2013, with logs shipped down river and then transported by truck or by camel into neighbouring Pakistan.

Historical evidence suggests that large portions of Afghanistan, such as the now treeless mountain slopes overlooking the Panjshir Valley, were once heavily wooded. Over the millennia, the cutting of trees for building materials and fuel, such as charcoal, but also grazing by cattle and goats, had helped create the present grasslands.

Today, Afghanistan still boasts two main types of forests: broad-leaved and needle-leaved.

Broad-leaved: This consists of oak and nut trees (pistachio, walnut…) growing in highland areas from 1,300 to 2,200 metres. These trees serve as firewood, charcoal, fodder for livestock and food, and are considered vital for soil and water conservation. Old photographs and drawings from the 19th century when the British operated along the frontier regions of the Raj, notably Khyber or Waziristan, and inside Afghanistan itself, show the mountains were heavily tufted with mainly holly oaks reminiscent of the northern parts of the French Provence or the Cinque Mille region in Italy. Today, only isolated trees dot the rocky hillsides.

Needle-leaved: This includes conifers (cedar, pine, fir, juniper, spruce) in mountainous zones from 2,000 to 3,000 metres. These provide good quality wood for construction and furniture, and are highly effective for erosion control.

The impact of war and lumber trafficking

Rapid deforestation took place during the early 1980s as the government, faced with rising mujahed resistance, began to lose control over rural areas, particularly in the eastern provinces. As forestry management collapsed or local villages fled, leaving no one to watch over the trees, many areas such as Paktia were ruthlessly plundered. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the West German government began implementing a highly promising forestry management programme, but this collapsed when fighting spread and the Kabul regime could no longer assert itself.

Elsewhere, refugees, local villagers and nomadic tribesmen uproot small trees and shrubs growing in rangeland areas (70 percent of the country) for firewood, unaware that this vegetation plays a crucial role in soil and water conservation. Even in Nuristan, fallen branches and twigs that used to be left to rot on the ground are collected by locals for

firewood. As Madera points out, it is precisely this ground wood that helps protect the soil but is now being removed.

Wood is the main winter fuel in Afghanistan, but it is fast running out, forcing people to encroach more and more on fragile ecosystems. Foliage for livestock is also becoming scarce. The effect is a rapidly expanding desertification in which formerly forested areas are turning into semi-arid wastelands. Expanding soil erosion dramatically reduces the soil's ability to absorb water. Wells need to be dug deeper and karezes (irrigation tunnels) dry up or cave in. Even with good rains and snow, such as during the winter of 2004-2005 (followed by at least four dry years) or relatively good snow accumulation in the winter 2011-2012, much of the water that might replenish supplies and the underground water table, is lost due to the effects of erosion.

During the height of the Soviet war, the Red Army regularly used phosphorous bombs in their efforts to curtail the mujahideen or to terrorise local villagers. In some locations, this led to large-scale burning of forests. The passage of hundreds of thousands of refugees every year to Pakistan further denuded the woodlands. All state-controlled timber plantations were destroyed. The most poignant form of destruction however, remains the deliberate cutting by Afghans and Pakistanis of this precious resource for commercial purposes.

While the Afghan resistance blamed the Soviets, in many cases it was the Afghans themselves, together with militia groups and local warlords who turned to lumber as a lucrative source of revenue. The timber business has profited massively from the lack of any government oversight. Despite repeated denials of its involvement, Pakistan's military Interservices Intelligence organization, or ISI, also profited from the corruption. Even foreign Islamic legionnaires, such as Osama bin Laden, whose al Qaeda (the Base) militants maintained a major mountain depot at Jagi, near Terimangal, indulged in the trade. One EFG journalist remembers trekking through the thick forests of Paktia and Kunar with pristine streams during the early days of the war only to return less than a decade later to find huge areas turned into scarred, moon-like wastelands of withered stumps and rocks.

Current limitations on timber-cutting in Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (formerly Northwest Frontier Province) region has driven the lumber mafia to step up operations in Afghanistan. Smugglers use the Afghan border areas as a transit route for illegally harvested logs taken from Pakistan's Dir District and

tribal Bajaur Agency. Until the late 1990s, logs were also being transported from north-eastern Afghanistan to Kabul. From there, they were taken via Ghazni and Kandahar to the border post of Chaman and into Pakistan's Baluchistan Province. Despite their own official ban on timber smuggling, the Taliban routinely levied taxes on all traffic. For fear of undermining local support, they were reluctant, or unable, to crackdown on trade in mountainous tribal areas. The Pakistani authorities were happy to accept the fiction that all timber transports originated from Afghanistan and not the NWFP.

EFG editors visiting different parts of northeastern and northern Afghanistan between 2002-2011 reported considerable ongoing lumbering of trees in the mountains of Kunar overlooking the Pech and Kunar Rivers. Towns and villages still have heavily stocked lumber-yards. One can also detect smoke from lumber camps in the mountains with freshly cut timber and recently opened land scars clearly visible through binoculars. Similarly, a scanning of the once-heavily forested slopes of Safed Koh (including the Tora Bora area) in southern Nangrahar province now only reveals sparsely distributed scatterings of cedar or pine.

Growing insecurity has been largely attributed to the Taliban and other insurgents. However, from 2004 onwards, sporadic squabbles over timber and water rights have erupted into bitter fighting among various communities in Kunar and Nuristan. Much of this is being egged on by the Pakistani timber traders, among them ex-government ministers and military, who are largely responsible for the stripping of entire mountainsides of forest in exchange for dollars paid in cash to local residents. As in much of the countryside after so many years of war, Kabul and other urban areas have also suffered from a severe depletion of trees and other greenery. While fighting and lack of irrigation have caused the destruction of countless trees, so have fuel shortages. After food, energy represents the local population's second most important requirement, particularly during harsh periods such as the winter of 2011-12 when young children and elderly on the outskirts of the Afghan capital died from cold. Chopped stumps or withered trees and bushes are a common sight in city parks, gardens and streets. But real estate profiteering by corrupt government officials, warlords and privileged elites has further ensured the destruction of green or recreational spaces. All this has contributed to dust storms, poor health and an increasingly dry atmosphere. Kabul itself now faces a massive reforestation challenge, which the new mayor, Mohammed Nawandish, to his credit, is trying to remedy (SEE KEY PLAYERS).

The urgent need for reforestation

Environmentalists, both Afghan and international, are fully aware that unless real action is taken, the remaining forests will vanish in the next few years. Some protective measures have been introduced during the past decade, but the means for enforcing them are lacking. Given the current security problems, there is not much reason to expect the situation to improve. Nevertheless, development strategists believe that it still makes sense to introduce imaginative new initiatives coupled with public education to encourage Afghans to protect – and nurture – what little remains.

There is an urgent need to develop approaches, particularly at the community and regional level, that enable Afghans to better understand the importance of conservation coupled with more constructive moves toward reforesting devastated areas. Conservationists believe that re-forestation should be part of basic development and private investment throughout the country. Not only should Afghans feel that it is in their best interests to maintain healthy forests to prevent landslides, erosion and possibly climate change, but there is also no reason why they should not benefit from such programmes. The potential for significant revenue in the form of forest management jobs, wood products, ecotourism, fishing and wildlife, and even hunting permits is enormous. Much of the incentive for this will clearly need to come from the donor countries together with the United Nations, and various NGOs involved in agriculture or forestry rehabilitation.

Policies need to deal more realistically with Afghanistan's chronic wood deficit for building, furniture, fuel and other uses. With little effective control over trafficking, alternative interim options need to be implemented, such as the import from Russia of cheap lumber for construction. Another approach is to encourage construction methods that require less wood. A further option is to plant fast-growing trees that can be harvested on a sustainable basis and that can be used for fuel and construction. Some of this is already being undertaken by organizations such as the Aga Khan Development Network and Madera, which encourages, and in some cases, pays communities to plant saplings in and around villages as well as in the mountains. The idea is get a programme going that will produce a significant return within the next few years.

The most relevant forestry and agroforestry programmes that are likely to be easy to replicate are in neighbouring Pakistan, China and India, where climatic and topographical conditions are similar to those in Afghanistan. Aid coordinators want to see linkages with these countries to provide insights for a practical reforestation and conservation strategy that will better suit Afghanistan. The 2003 UNEP survey emphasised

the need for a creating a comprehensive agroforestry strategy as soon as possible. Specialists strongly recommend that any such approach should seek to increase profitability of Afghan tree-based industries as a means of promoting economic development and investment. They urge that programmes be aimed at social equity and that they involve both men and women. Their objective should be to contribute to the soil, water and biodiversity conservation.

Various aid programmes are now seeking to address these problems. Madera has re-established a number of plantations to replace the ones destroyed or neglected during the war. In both Nangrahar and Kunar provinces, tree seedlings have been distributed to children to plant at their schools or at home. Another nursery is providing saplings for the Darunta Watershed Management Scheme. By 2010, fledgling forests were beginning to emerge above villages along the Kunar River. In Kabul and other towns local conservation groups have been planting saplings as part of a World Food Programme initiative to re-green the city's parks and other degraded sites. The project also distributes trees for replanting in private gardens and for reforestation in the hills around the Afghan capital to check landslides and soil erosion. Herat alone has managed to plant over 40,000 trees as well as renovate its public parks. Other cities are witnessing various but still limited attempts at reforestation. Although all of this is moving in the right direction, it is still insufficient when measured against what needs to be done on a nation-wide basis.

Both agriculture and horticulture have traditionally been developed in an agroforestry landscape in Afghanistan. Poplar, walnut and mulberry trees are often planted in blocks or along edges of fields and irrigation canals where they serve as boundaries, windbreaks or for shade. Fruit and nut orchards are used for "inter-cropping" with wheat, maize or vegetables grown among the trees. Some trees can dramatically improve crop yields. Almond trees significantly help vineyards. Others can prove useful for timber, animal fodder and fuel. The cash-cropping of trees for fruit and timber, for example, could provide an alternative source of income that would help reduce the dependency of farmers on poppy cultivation.

Under the right circumstances, farmers and returnees could play a principal role in re-forestation. So, too, can the insurgents. Neutral public awareness outreach initiatives should make it clear that the Taliban and other guerrilla groups involved in lum-

ber trafficking today are undermining their own families and the future of their children in exchange for quick cash. The real difficulty in this scenario is when the Pakistanis and other outside interests who have no real links to local Afghan communities back the insurgents.

Hillsides stripped of trees contribute to soil erosion. Photo©EdwardGirardet

Various ideas have been proposed to put a stop to continued deforestation. Some of these strategies are already leading to fruition. In the Janikhil areas of Khost province, where war and illegal commercial logging have destroyed an estimated 30 percent of the trees, NGOs have managed to make local populations aware of the need to conserve their environment. German assistance has played an important role in creating tree nurseries as a source for future large-scale afforestation. Similar initiatives have been started in Nangrahar, Kunar, Nuistan, Laghman,

Paktia and other provinces

Making conservation part of development and investment
Afghans, particularly those in the countryside, still need to be convinced that maintaining sustainable forest can significantly improve their lives. The international community has made so many empty promises in the last few years that many Afghans have stopped believing that any solution is possible. Nevertheless, some aid groups are still pushing for imaginative initiatives that will make a difference. These include food and/or cash for work programmes for the planting and maintenance of new forests. These need to be implemented quickly and effectively in order to bring small but regular and much-needed revenue to subsistence villagers in the countryside.

As experienced aid specialists point out, it is crucial for communities to be fully involved so that the forests become "their" forests. Local and national media have already contributed significantly toward environmental awareness in Afghanistan, and they could help promote such initiatives with "most green" village contests involving community councils, bazaar merchants, schools, the police and, as one experienced European aid coordinator noted, why not insurgent commanders as a means of bringing them into the fold?

Involvement of the private sector is equally important. Merchants and other business sponsors could provide cash awards for the building of a new community centre or library. Similarly, widows or slum dwellers in Kabul and other cities could be enrolled (and paid) to plant trees, clean up ditches and maintain public parks and other green zones as part of a well-publicized and possibly a distinctly uniformed 'conservation' corps. This has already been achieved with success in Africa and elsewhere. Such a corps could be funded by donors, the Afghan government

and corporate sponsors along with local businesses, based in areas where the planting and cleanup is taking place. The costs of such investment over several years would be pittance compared to the billions of dollars of international aid that have been wasted since the end of 2001. According to UNEP, unless Afghanistan addresses its environmental problems urgently and effectively, it will face "a future without water, forests, wildlife or clean air."

Essential data

- Total area of Afghanistan: 652,225 square kilometres.
- During the 1970s, more than 32,000 sq. kilometres (5per cent) of total land in Afghanistan was forested. By the end of the Soviet occupation, tree cover dropped to 19,000 sq. kilometres (nearly 3.2per cent). Recent satellite photographs point to less than 1.0 per cent remaining forest cover with some estimates suggesting as little as 0.5per cent.
- More than 70per cent of Afghanistan's forests have been destroyed by illegal or unmanaged logging since 1987. In Paktia and Paktika it may now be as high as 90per cent. Other destruction is the result of war, burning, clearing, grazing or fuel purposes.
- Given the current rate of illicit lumber trafficking, apart from Nuristan where significant but gradually eroded forests remain, there is virtually no 'real' forest left in most parts of Afghanistan.
- Deforestation over the past three and a half decades has made Afghanistan more vulnerable to natural disaster and contributed to drought, desertification, salination, flashfloods, landslides, avalanches, soil erosion, health problems, pollution plus the disappearance of wildlife.

The above data compiled from UNEP, FAO and other organizations can only be considered estimates. Status of ratification by Afghanistan of international conventions and agreements as of 1 January, 2010: CbD, UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, UNCCD, ITTA, CITES, Ramsar, World Heritage Convention…

Essential agencies

UNEP, WWF, SEA, AOHREP, IUCN, WCS,

Essential reading

- UNEP Afghanistan Environment Report, 2009. Laying the Foundations for Sustainable Development. http://www.unep.org/pdf/UNEP_in_Afghanistan.pdf
- IRIN. Deforestation Marches On. http://www.irinnews.org/Report/83508/AFGHANISTAN-Deforestation-marches-on
- UNEP to help Afghanistan combat climate change, 2012.

INSPIRE:
Band-e-Amir National Park

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting

Lake Band-e-Amir

exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

Band-e-Amir (which means "Commander's Dam" in reference to Iman Ali, the first Shia Iman) is located 75 kilometers to the northwest of the remnants of the Bamiyan Buddhas destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 in central Bamiyan province. At an altitude of 3,000 meters, it is surrounded by the jutting peaks of the Hindu Kush and consists of six deep crystal-clear, blue lakes, separated by travertine natural dams with rare bird and aqua life species.
The six constituent lakes of Band-e Amir are:

- Band-e Gholaman (slaves)
- Band-e Qambar (Caliph Ali›s slave)
- Band-e Haibat (grandiose)
- Band-e Panir (cheese)
- Band-e Pudina (wild mint)
- Band-e Zulfiqar (the sword of Ali)

The biggest and deepest of the lakes is Band-e Haibat, with an estimated average depth of approximately 150 meters. The lakes were formed by water, rich in carbon dioxide, seeping through the faults and fractures. These deposited calcium in the form of travertine walls along fault lines which today hold back the lake waters. Band-e Amir was designated as a park during the 1970s, but it was only in 2009 that the Kabul government managed to formally inaugurate it. The delay was due to the fact that the preserve encompassed 13 villages

with 5,000 people. Fishermen continue to use explosives such as grenades and electrical shocks from portable fuel-powered generators to fish, and overgrazing of the surrounding fields is rampant. Much of the wildlife has been killed or driven away over the past 30 years. Deforestation has blighted the surrounding landscape. The presence of landmines, on the other hand, has made it difficult for people to roam freely. Given the low priority generally assigned to the protection of plants and animals, both the government and participating aid agencies, supported by USAID, have focused on encouraging "sustainable conservation." Chris Shank, a Canadian wildlife biologist who helped create the park, noted the importance of assisting local people in establishing land rights as a means of promoting practical environmental conservation. Conservationists such as Shank have been trying to persuade village elders, including former mujahideen, to back the conservation initiatives. There has been some cautious approval.

Since its introduction, local governance has proved a boon to stability, an approach which could be emulated nationwide. A budding eco-tourism industry with thousands of visiting Afghans and foreigners is already benefitting local communities. Facilities, however, are minimal and the presence of so many visitors without appropriate support infrastructure is a danger to the park. The government has succeeded in banning the use of motor boats, but there is no proper waste management. The lack of rubbish bins and toilets has led to unsightly pollution that is growing steadily worse. That said, there have been some improvements lately. The narrow track that leads to the lakes has been cleared of landmines. Local villagers are being trained as park rangers and that has turned into a badly needed source of jobs. Hunting and poaching has declined as a result of education and law enforcement programs. Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) is now seeking to have the region granted World Heritage Site status, which would provide additional protection and funds.

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Improving public health: Slow progress

By Emmanuel Tronc

The international community has invested heavily in Afghanistan's public health sector since the end of 2001. With the overthrow of the Taliban government, Afghanistan had its first real chance in a quarter of a century of providing basic health care to everyone in the country. It has made some progress in that direction, but as ***Emmanuel Tronc*** *of Medecins sans Frontieres International (MSF-International) points out, it is clearly not enough.*

Five years into the foreign intervention (2006), ***Tronc*** *notes, The Lancet, Britain's leading medical journal, announced that the Karzai administration was making good headway. The Lancet congratulated Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health (AMPH) on having identified the major health problems. International organizations such as the Swedish Committee,Save the Children, Unicef, Emergency and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), which briefly left the country in 2004 but returned in 2009, were working hard to improve the situation.*

By 2011, the World Bank was reporting that while average life expectancy at birth in Afghanistan was still only 43.6 years (according to the Ministry of Health's 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey the figure is 62 and 64 years for men and women respectively when based on regional averages) in other low-income countries, millions of people in rural Afghanistan had access to primary health care. Roughly 57.4per cent of the population, which was then estimated at 30 million, was within an

two-hour's walking distance of a public health facility. National health coverage rose from 9per cent in 2003 to 85per cent in 2008. The number of facilities with trained female health workers had risen from 25per cent to 85per cent.

These improvements have contributed significantly to a decline in under-5 mortality rates—a key indicator for the effectiveness of health systems– from 191 per 1,000 live births in 2006 to 161 in 2008 (The under-5 mortality rate under the Taliban had been 256 deaths per thousand, compared to a 92 per 1,000 rate for all of South Asia). While figures from the World Bank are impressive, how they are interpreted can be misleading.

Although access to health in Afghanistan has clearly improved, especially in conflict-affected zones and more remote areas of the countryside, it remains at an unacceptably low level as ***Emmanuel Tronc*** *points out:*

To work successfully in Afghanistan, it is necessary to come to terms with the country's extraordinarily diverse regional and cultural environment. Decades of devastating war and neglect have provoked factional divisions that have thoroughly undermined the country's fragile base. As a result, Afghanistan' complexity remains poorly understood and at the mercy of outside influences.

Ever since the fall of the Taliban'regime and the beginning of international intervention in the fall of 2001, outsiders have sought to impose their own models and systems that had little to do with the realities of the country. Often, it did not matter whether these programs were successful or not.

Armed with dollars, euros and preconceived notions, the international actors managed to take control. They heavily influenced the military, political, security and cultural domains as well as the social sectors, including health. Promises of significant investment in public healthcare created enormous expectations among ordinary Afghans. For the most part, this led to major disappointments.

MSF has been active in Afghanistan since 1980, when its medical teams clandestinely entered the country, then under Soviet control. Except for a five-year break from 2004 to 2009, when MSF temporarily pulled out after a government cover-up following the murder of five medical workers, MSF has been intensely involved in Afghanistan's health affairs.

Ongoing Conflict versus Access

Within months of initiating the recovery process, the international community started referring to the Afghan situation as one of post-conflict. It was with this perception, imbued with development and reconstruction ambitions, that the overwhelming majority of projects were initiated. Before even starting an analysis of the different situations in each of the country's 34 provinces, it was mandatory to talk about success and a new future for Afghanistan.

Action was politicized and humanitarianism rapidly became a propaganda tool whose value was defined primarily in terms of stabilizing the country or gaining hearts and minds. There was no shortage of funding or international presence. For the next five years, political and military decision-makers frequently used humanitarianism to mask the risks and failures of their operations. This continued with the resurgence of conflict.

At first renewed war was sporadic and it only touched a few parts of the country; today it is omnipresent and unpredictable. Nearly all of Afghanistan's provinces are affected by insurgent attacks, western military raids, security abuses, manipulation and destabilization. Armed opposition forces, initially dismissed as disorganized terrorists with divergent interests, have gained enough power to be considered crucial partners for future peace talks.

Beginning in 2008, it became increasingly difficult for the western powers to hide the realities of the war or the failure of the various strategies concocted in Washington, London and Brussels. Today, the facts are undeniable, even if still only partially acknowledged. Every year, incidents involving ordinary Afghans and civil society actors increase significantly (by 75per cent in 2010 and 2011). However, only those civilians who are immediately killed in these attacks (2,777 in 2010– a rise over 15per cent from 2009) are collated in these figures. Those who die later from the after effects of the attacks are not counted.

Furthermore, the increase in political assassinations has had a serious impact on both administrative and healthcare systems. Afghans are deeply worried. Their resentment toward coalition troops and the insurgents is also growing. Overall, the conflict has severe political and social consequences for daily life.

According to Barry S. Levy and Victor W. Sidel, commenting on adverse health consequences of the US Government responses

to the 2001 terrorist attacks, the health condition of internally displaced Afghans between 2000 and 2004 was extremely worrying, with a high prevalence of communicable diseases (leishmaniasis and malaria, hepatitis B and C, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections). As of 2010, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees, still had little or no access to essential health services, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in a December 2010 Humanitarian Update.

It is increasingly hard for Afghan civilians to live a normal life, particularly those in rural conflict areas who want to consult a doctor, visit a hospital, have a baby, undergo surgery, respond to a referral, or receive long-term treatment or re-education. All such 'normal' or basic activities have become increasingly complicated, risky, and at times impossible because of the security situation.

Not only are conflict zones affected, but peripheral areas and in some cases entire regions as well. Roads are dangerous because of landmines and ambushes that make it dangerous for medical personnel to travel. Aid workers are increasingly targeted (in the summer of 2010, ten foreign and Afghan health volunteers were murdered, execution style, as they were returning from two weeks of eye and dental clinics in Northeastern Nuristan's remote villages). For many local civilians, the risk involved in going to a health clinic is simply too great, unless the need is extreme. Villagers also fear reprisals against their families if they try to send patients to Kabul or other major towns. To avoid such fear the perception of hospitals and health centres as a place where all parties respect neutrality is crucial (no weapons or military searches allowed). It is the only way for medical teams to provide the care needed.

In certain provinces and districts, civilians have far less access to basic health care than they did a short while ago. In southwestern Afghanistan, for example, apart from immediate treatment for war wounded, no health care system functions at all. In numerous other parts, access to basic health care is feeble at best. The hospital of Boost in Lashkargar in Helmand province registered only a single referral during the first three months of 2011 partly because of the poor quality of the service provided by the hospital. War injured are the only patients at the hospital run by the Italian NGO, Emergency.

Over the past few years, numerous NGOs have preferred to

avoid rural areas and to support existing Kabul-based facilities, which treated 12,000 civilian patients, compared to a total of 500 patients treated in the same time period elsewhere in the country. Rural zones are far more hazardous than the cities, given the dangers associated with travel. Health centres lack medical supplies and qualified personnel, effectively creating "sanitary deserts." The term refers to regions in which little or no modern medicine is available. Traditional folk medicine, known as *Yunami* still persists in many parts of the country, and charlatan doctors are wide spread. For the patient, this often creates the illusion of being treatment, when, in fact, there is none.

The security situation is having an important negative impact on the towns, where frequent attacks result in reduced referrals. Yet despite the fact that the current health care system is clearly failing in many ways, it is still incorporated in ISAF's 'counter-insurgency' or 'stabilization' strategies, where the improvement of overall health conditions is identified as a key factor in promoting more effective governance.

Virtual Models

In early 2002, Afghanistan was often described as a poor country with completely dilapidated medical and sanitary infrastructures. Eight years later, in 2008, the World Bank, one of three major health sector donors, declared that 85per cent of the Afghan population had access to basic health care facilities, known as a Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS). The number of health centres in the provinces had tripled. These claims were based solely on funding allocations in the Afghan budget, stipulated by signed contracts with the AMPH. They were not based on how the health structures actually functioned.

The BPHS and the Essential Package for Hospital Services (EPHS) were both developed with the help of international experts. They are technically well thought out and extremely precise. They would be perfect in any country, which was stable and had the kind of governance needed to establish this kind of infrastructure. In other words, they were perfect for countries facing a post-conflict rather than a conflict situation. Afghanistan clearly did not qualify. After well over three decades of war, instability, human drama, power struggles, and the absence of law and order the conflict was increasing, not diminishing. The contrasts between the operating environment envisioned in a virtual or

imaginary abstract model and the reality on the ground in a full-blown insurgency are staggering. In the end, it does not really matter whether these zones are directly involved in the conflict or not. The resources are simply not there.

In short, there is an enormous gap between what exists on paper and what is actually taking place on the ground. There is a patent lack of functioning clinics and very few referral facilities. The situation is further complicated by a lack of qualified medical personnel, and in particular female health workers.

After more than a decade devoted to recovery, there has been little noticeable change in overall health care. Afghanistan's normal situation today results in an average of one in seven Afghan women dying in childbirth. The real vaccination coverage in the provinces against numerous endemic diseases such as vaccinations against measles for children under less than a year old, is estimated to be less than 70per cent . Contraception is rare, while chronic or specific pathological illnesses such as AIDS barely receive any treatment at all. Afghanistan is one of three endemic countries for Polio (with Pakistan and Nigeria). Today, Afghanistan ranks first in mortality from non-communicable diseases (inclusive of injuries). Life expectancy is one of the lowest in the world. Mortality and morbidity rates have certainly diminished in certain areas over the past few years, but significant data are still missing to affirm the exact efficiency of these models. Finally, UNICEF estimates that around 1.2 million children younger than 5 years and 550,000 pregnant or lactating mothers are at high risk of severe malnutrition in Afghanistan.

In addition, while the gap in the quality of health care is widening between rural and urban areas, there is also a growing quality gap between Kabul and the rest of the country. Few reliable data or contextual analyses of the medical situation exist for the country as a whole. There is a question as to whether data are being deliberately concealed or are simply not available. Despite the Disease Early Warning System (DEWS), established in 2006 identifying and reporting the epidemics throughout almost all the country, existing alert systems for the monitoring of potentially explosive epidemic diseases remain limited. Response mechanisms for potential sanitary emergencies do not match the government's numerous claims of logistical, information, management and resource capacities.

The AMPH may well develop a policy of national health with a detailed strategy, notably the Afghanistan National Health Policy

of 2005-2009 (Afghanistan National Development Strategy), supported by various coordination committees coupled with elaborate analyses of how to function (Working Principles of the Ministry of Public Health) that seek to standardize what is available. While such mechanisms can help basic prevention, immunization and health care methods, they constantly come up against the constraints imposed by the overall security situation and the lack of public access in numerous provinces. Despite the claims that hundreds of health care centres exist, there is no guarantee that any of these are capable of responding to the actual needs of Afghans.

The idea that better health for all Afghans will contribute toward the economic and social development of the country is fine as an objective, but it is undermined by the fact that without proper recovery such improvements cannot happen. Basic development can only be implemented with appropriate stability and good governance.

Ironically, the dysfunction of the Afghan health system does not inhibit those facilities seeking to provide external consultations and primary care privately. Many hospitals are being built, rebuilt or renovated according to western speciality models. Admissions policies and capabilities are not for everyone, and especially not for the poor and most vulnerable.

Leaving aside chronic pathologies (geriatrics, cancer, diabetes…), Afghanistan's health care system simply does not deal appropriately with its stated priorities. Equipment remains in short supply or is inappropriate, or suffers from a lack of availability of spare parts (from too many different countries). Existing facilities have coordination difficulties when dealing with blood banks, central pharmacies, radiology, laboratories, orthopaedics, psychiatry, dentistry or even medical logistics, such as ambulances or cold storage. To be treated properly in Afghanistan costs a lot of money, especially when measured against the Afghan standard of living.

Patients abandoned to private health care

Claims that the country's health system has been designed to benefit the largest number of Afghans, the poorest and the least advantaged fall into the category of pure myth. Today, an estimated 70per cent of medical structures are private and demand payment up front. Even when a hospital is free, getting admitted is complicated. In addition, there are too few to meet Afghani-

stan's real public health needs. Free consultation services are limited – or do not exist at all – in many provinces. The government is finding it exceptionally difficult to assure free health care and the disparities between rich and poor have risen drastically in recent years. In addition hospitals are not trusted by the population. As a result private clinics are the main option for medical treatment.

With income in rural areas averaging less than US$100 a month, and the average income in Kabul and other cities at barely US$500, it is difficult to imagine how the majority of Afghans can afford an operation. An appendectomy costs roughly $600 US, a caesarean can cost from US$40 to US$160 depending to areas, an abdominal hysterectomy around US$1000. Even childbirth, without complications, can cost more than US$200. Add to that the cost of transport, the different medicines that can only be purchased privately, and the omnipresent need for bakshish, or bribes, and it becomes clear that health care requires making hard decisions in the family. It usually means abandoning food, education or fuel, or going into debt so that the family member can survive. Loan sharks and usurious private credit facilities are widely used to pay for health care. In turn, such customs favour select politicians and business elites or help feed corruption.

The current security situation feeds the process. In Helmand province, for example, as shown by one recent MSF report, 59per cent of patients begin by seeking assistance from a private doctor or clinic. Even if Helmand boasts a higher than average revenue per family, largely because of drug trafficking, private care is often chosen by default. Other forms of public health are either too limited or do not exist. Military structures, notably the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), offer some medical treatment, but this is primarily care for war injuries. These facilities do not provide patients with the post-operatory or long-term care that is often needed.

There are no legal guidelines for how private health practitioners are supposed to work. Any doctor can do what he likes. Medical cabinets and private clinics with 50, 75 or 100 beds operate in parallel with official public hospitals. A doctor can direct a patient toward his own private facilities rather than recommend a cheaper or free public institution. Or he can demand the sort of (costly) care that would benefits his own practise. He can set his own fees or prescribe drugs from pharmacies linked to his own cabinet or clinic. The average salary of a public service doctor is

less than $1,000 US per month in contrast to the $3,000-4,000 US pulled in by a private practitioner. The end result is that Afghanistan's medical reality remains largely maverick and for the most part escapes the analyses or controls of the official public health sector.

The reality today is that the current public health system is simply not viable if compared to the private system. Provincial hospitals for the most part are not capable of functioning properly or sustainably. In Lashkargah in Helmand Province, MSF was able to establish that enabling the main provincial hospital (Boost Hospital) to provide free medication to its patients cost the private sector more than US$500,000 a year. However, the hospital is only able to provide ordinary Afghans with free health care because of the presence and funding from international organizations. Unfortunately, even humanitarian aid has its limits. Medical organizations capable of assuming responsibility, both financially and technically, for such projects are rare and often completely absent in high conflict areas. Local NGOs capable of operating in such zones often lack the experience and internal governance to ensure the smooth running of secondary or even tertiary clinics.

A key element that is emerging from the reality of a largely private health care system is that the doctor-patient relationship is condemned to become one of doctor and client. This raises questions about the place of ethical medicine and even the notion of health in a country, which desperately needs greater solidarity and social justice to move ahead. It clearly has implications for the role of the international community concerning the quality and development of public health.

The Notion of Quality Health Care

The public health models propagated by the international community have tended to privilege quantitative access rather than quality care and access for all. The existence of a room, health care personnel, some equipment and medical supplies may be all that is needed to serve several thousand Afghans. But is this enough? Should not the quality of health care be a priority for both the international community and the government, particularly given the billions of dollars that have been allocated toward Afghanistan's recovery over the past 12 years?

After nearly three and a half decades of conflict, and given

the limited availability of medical schools and training institutes, the number of Afghan doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians and pharmacists is exceedingly limited. Few women have access to universities. The courses now offered are often incoherent and lack consistency. Oversight is feeble. False diplomas abound and can be easily obtained across the Pakistani border. Scores of health NGOs and medical centres have been established by Afghans, despite the fact the international aid community's awareness that they lack qualifications: many had worked previously for international organizations as nurses, health workers, or even compound guards. Today, they pass themselves off as qualified doctors or health specialists.

The absence of doctors in conflict zones is largely attributed to lack of training (especially female staff) and economical factors. Overriding all of that is the universal truth in all conflict zones: when insecurity arrives, the people with the means to do so (money) tend to leave. Doctors are usually the first to leave the conflict zones, and Afghanistan is no exception. Kabul and some of the provincial capitals are full of doctors. Outside, there are almost none. In Khost we counted a total of four doctors for the whole (500.000 population) province. So in spite of training programmes and financial incentives (double salaries or more for female doctors) this did not change: they refuse to leave Kabul.

Quality health workers are few and far between, particularly in or conflict-affected zones. (Even doctors or nurses willing to assume the risks are often unable to work in rural areas because they need to earn good salaries to support their extended families. As a result, many are forced to take jobs as interpreters or aid coordinators with international organizations simply to earn a larger salary. To make matters worse, there are virtually no effective training centres in conflict zones. The foreign military claim to provide training for Afghans, but their objective is often motivated more by strategic objectives than genuinely aimed at improving the overall quality of health care. This cooption of the health sector is dangerous, and over the long term it threatens the lives of patients.

Afghanistan suffers from severe problems of competence, the distribution of capable personnel, public outreach to the local population with regard to the form of health care available, and poorly managed infrastructure. To run a hospital is a complex undertaking that requires multi-disciplinary training, particularly with regard to the coordination of health teams, management,

hygiene and admission protocols. The government has acknowledged that the quality of health care as an issue. For the moment, however, the country does not engage in such specialized training. Such realities should not distract or obscure the numerous individual initiatives that have been developed in recent years at the local level, particularly by qualified former Afghan employees of international humanitarian agencies. The quality of such actions depends heavily on medical ethics and the realities imposed by mercenary medical practises.

The overbearing influence of a non-regulated private health system does not facilitate the implementation of quality care and sanitary conditions. Nor does it encourage the development of community health care given the lack of personnel and other resources. Without doubt, such private approaches are useful in the more remote areas, but they do not constitute in themselves the provision of quality and efficient public health care.

The sale of uncontrolled medication on the open market is another cause for concern. No system for quality control or regulation exists. Samples are only tested on an occasional basis and in a country with porous frontiers it is easy to import medicine. There are fears—often justified– that Afghanistan is being flooded with ineffective and even dangerous drugs.

Few laboratories exist in-country that can seriously track and diagnose pharmaceutical products. In a recent incident, a six-year old girl died from poisoned cough syrup bought in a local market. In parallel, an ICRC study in Kandahar reported the majority of antibiotics encountering over 80per cent resistance, reflecting a chronic over-medication. Without appropriate protocols, there is a serious question over whether international aid agencies and the health sector should purchase drugs that cannot be controlled locally. Some humanitarian organizations have made this choice, but at what risk?

The challenge for Afghanistan's public health sector in 2013 and beyond is to develop a workable system in a highly precarious and unstable environment that is characterized by rampant predatory practices and flagrant inequalities. The worsening security situation, coupled with political approaches that are often inappropriate, is making it even more difficult to develop an effective public health system accessible to all. Another factor that has contributed to the damage of infrastructures (food supply, availability of safe drinking water, poor sanitation status) has been government

corruption: in 2012, Afghanistan's global corruption ranking was 174 of 176 nations. Other hindering realities include insufficient funding and cultural, geographic and social barriers. The dysfunctional system means that numerous Afghan men, women, children, war injured and others simply do not have access to serious, egalitarian and effective health care. The responsibility for this lies with all concerned, the international community, the Afghan government, and the local and regional entities.

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Essential data:

- Estimated population: 25-35 million
- GNI per capita: $330, (WHO estimate: $1,060)
- Under-five world mortality rank: 11
- Under-five mortality rate (1990): 209 deaths/1000 live births
- Under-five mortality rate (2010): 149 deaths/1,000 live births
- (WHO probability estimate: 101 per 1,000)
- Infant mortality rate (1990): 140
- Infant mortality rate (2010): 103
- Birth rate: 37.83 births/1,000 population
- Death rate: 17.39/1,000 population
- Life expectancy-Total population: 45.02 years
- Male: 44.79 years
- Female: 45.25 years

- Every 30 minutes an Afghan woman dies during childbirth
- Overall population with access to improved drinking water: 48 per cent
- Urban population with access to improved drinking water: 78 per cent
- Rural population with access to improved drinking water: 39 per cent
- Overall population with improved sanitation: 37 per cent
- HIV/AIDS (no data available)
- Total expenditure on health per capita (2010): $44
- Total expenditure on health: 7.6per cent

Immunization of one-year-olds against:

- TB: 68per cent
- DPT: 86per cent
- Polio: 66per cent
- Measles: 62per cent
- Hepatitis B: 66per cent
- Hib: 66per cent
- Tetanus (newborns): 79per cent

- Percentage of households consuming iodized salt: 26per cent

Sources: Unicef, WHO, Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), MSF, IRIN, Global Health Observatory

Essential reading:

- *USAID Health in Afghanistan*, December, 2012. http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/programs/health#Tab=Description

INSPIRE: Alberto Cairo and the ICRC's orthopedic centres

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been operating in Kabul since 1987, when Afghanistan was still under Red Army occupation. Up till then, the Geneva-based organization had been working in neighbouring Pakistan to help victims of war, including prisoners held both by the Soviets and the Afghan resistance. Today, the ICRC's role in Afghanistan is little different. It's operational focus continues to dwell on the monitoring of the way belligerents on all sides conduct their war, whether the Taliban, NATO, the Afghan security forces and other players, and to prevent violations of international humanitarian law.

But ICRC also seeks to assists civilians affected by the country's ongoing security conditions. This includes helping the injured and disabled, supporting basic hospital care and improving water and sanitation services against a backdrop of suicide bombings and the indiscriminate laying of IEDs by the insurgents or countermeasures led by NATO military forces with night raids, air strikes and field operations. The expansion of the war since 2004 to previously quiet areas has only made matters worse for ordinary civilians.

Still widely respected by most parties, including the bulk of the Taliban, the ICRC has been obliged to adapt itself accordingly to a highly complex situation in which humanitarian access remains crucial. The brutal torture and murder of a Scottish ICRC delegate in neighbouring Pakistan in April, 2012, however, suggests that even for a humanitarian organization as renowned as the ICRC, it is becoming increasingly to difficult to operate in certain zones. While Pakistani Taliban were immediately blamed for the killing of Khalil Rasjed Dale, a mild-talking, dedicated man who had converted to Islam, some believe that elements of Pakistan's own military Interservices Intelligence Organization

(ISI) was responsible because of the ICRC's ongoing role as an outside witness – and embarrassment for the Islamabad government.

One area where the ICRC has excelled with its helping of war-affected populations is its limb-fitting and rehabilitation activities. The ICRC now runs seven prosthetic and orthopaedic centres in Afghanistan, notably Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Gulbahar, Faizabad, Jalalabad and Lashkar Gar. The story of orthopaedic specialist Alberto Cairo from Turin, Italy, who now heads the ICRC rehabilitation programme, explains why such centres need to remain a priority, and why they can provide victims with new hope and dignity.

Since the opening of the first such centre in the Afghan capital at the end of the 1980s, Cairo has helped some 100,000 landmine and other war victims who have lost limbs or been otherwise injured learn to find the strength not only to walk but also to hope again. In a country where the disabled are generally given pity, but not rights, Cario found a way through micro-loans, positive discrimination schemes and home schooling to give tens of thousands of handicapped Afghans a job – and a sense of dignity. New York Times correspondent John Burns wrote: "Afghans of all ethnic and political stripes, including the Taliban, seem likely to count Alberto Cairo who left the country better than when he found it."

"I have been working in Afghanistan for 21 years," recounts Cairo, who first arrived in Afghanistan in 1990 not long after the Soviet withdrawal. "My job is to make arms and legs. But we do more than that. We provide patients with physical rehabilitation followed by social rehabilitation. This may sound like a very logical plan, but it was not always like this. It took many years to develop what it is today."

Cairo's principal responsibility at that time was to work at the ICRC war hospital in Kabul dealing with all kinds of patients, including the running of an orthopaedic centre. "I found myself in a very strange situation," he says. "There was so much to learn. " But as soon as fighting broke out in the Afghan capital with the different mujahed groups vying for control, the orthopaedic centre was closed. It was not considered a priority. Cairo found himself assigned to helping

internally displaced people.

One day, during the height of the Battle of Kabul when as many as one thousand rockets rained on the city, he was heading home in a white ICRC vehicle. A bomb fell nearby. Only one figure remained in the road, a man in a wheelchair pushed by a small boy, desperately trying to get away. “I am not a brave person but I could not leave him,” recalls Cairo. The man had no legs and only one arm. The reason why he was in the street was that he had to beg in order to survive.
When Cairo asked Mahmud, the man in the wheelchair, why he had no artificial leg, the Afghan explained that the ICRC centre was closed. Cairo told Mahmud to come round anyway the next day, but then worried that there would be no one there to help the man if he came. Next morning, Cairo stopped by the Orthopedic Centre to find 15-20 people waiting, including Mahmud and his son Rafik. There were even several staff members. “The gatekeeper told me that people were coming every day to see if the centre was open.” Against ICRC regulations, and at the behest of his Afghan assistants, Cairo decided to partially re-open the centre if only to start doing some repairs of artificial limbs and to help patients such as Mahmud, who needed physiotherapy before he could be fitted with new legs.

The centre quickly developed back into a full-time operation. Mahmud came every day with Rafik, often crossing the frontline with the wheelchair, in order to exercise the stumps of his legs with the physiotherapists to prepare them for fitting. “Finally, the great day arrived. Mahmud was going to be discharged with his new legs,” recalls Cairo. “It was April, a time when Kabul is beautiful with roses and flowers. But firing broke out nearby and everybody was running. Fifty meters can be a long stretch to run when you’re exposed. Then Rafik told his father: You can run faster than me. Of course, I can, Mahmud replied. You can now go to school. You don’t have to push my wheelchair. I watched them push an empty wheelchair. Then I realised this had to remain a priority. Dignity is important. We never closed the centre again.”
A year later, Cairo saw Mahmud again. The Afghan looked in good shape, but a bit thinner. He also wanted to tell the ICRC delegate something. He was also clearly embarrassed. Mahmud explained that Cairo had helped him walk again, but

not to stop him being a beggar. “My children are growing, the Afghan explained. I don’t want them to be teased at school. I ask for a job, not money,” he told Cairo.

Cairo paused and then added. “I shall never forget this for the rest of my life. Mahmud said: ‘I am a scrap of a man but if you help me I will do anything.’ “ The Italian ICRC delegate wondered how he could help him other than to offer some alms. What job could he do? It was then that Cairo’s assistant said: “There’s a vacancy in the workshop. We need someone to help increase production. Mahmud can do it. We can modify the workbench, maybe create a special tool with an electric screwdriver?”

Cairo admonished his assistant for being cruel by making empty promises, particularly given that Mahmud would fail. One week later, Mahmud was the fastest in the production line. “I remember Mahmud sitting beside his workbench” says Cairo. “He was smiling. He was tall. He had regained his full dignity thanks to that job. So we started a new policy of employing as many disabled as possible, a sort of positive discrimination.”

“ You know what?” muses Cairo. “It’s good for everybody including the newcomers. You should see their faces when they realise that they’re being helped by people like themselves, whose empathy helps turn their predicament into hope. They learn much faster. People like Mahmud are agents of change. Then you can’t stop. So you do vocational training or home educational training for those who can’t go to school.”

Looking back, Cairo realises that there is always a better way of doing things. “I have learned a lot. They are my teachers. This way of thinking needs to implemented in all countries. It is possible and not difficult. All we have to do is listen to the people we have to assist. This is my big wish. The changes have not stopped. We have started a new basketball programme for the handicapped. Now you should see me. I never miss a single training session. I shout like a true Italian. What is the next change? I don’t know, but it will come from what people need and want.” *--EG*

FOR MORE ON ALBERTO CAIRO AND THE ICRC, SEE: http://www.ted.com/talks/alberto_cairo_there_are_no_scraps_of_men.html

Struggle for Dignity:
Why human rights count

By Charles Norchi

During a recent visit to Afghanistan, this writer listened to Afghans speak about their collective future with alarm. They were worried about the consequences to human rights of the withdrawal of the multinational International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan (ISAF), which is scheduled to stand down at the end of 2014. As combat operations cease, the allocation of international resources will diminish and Afghanistan will embark on a ten year transitional period of greatly reduced international support. By 2024 Afghanistan will have presumably transitioned to full independence. But what sort of independence and who will pay the price? The State

will, at best, be wobbly and still capable of disrupting the public order of the region and the world community. Whether the legal system, the security apparatus, the formal and informal political mechanisms will protect human rights - remains an open question.

The present human rights picture is grim. For too many, life in Afghanistan is still a story of deprivation, misery and violence. The country ranks at the bottom of international development indicators, while its people rank near the top of populations that have suffered torture, executions, displacement, bombing and oppression. When the Taliban regime fell, there was hope that Afghanistan's human rights history had entered a new chapter. Subsequent United Nations-brokered talks on 5 December 2001 resulted in the Bonn Agreement, which acknowledged "the right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice." The
Agreement was intended as a road map to peace, security, reconstruction and the protection of human rights. Dr Komal Hossain, a UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan declared in 2003 to the UN Human Rights Commission: "The tragic events of 11 September 2001 in an extraordinary way set in motion events presenting once again an opportunity for change." But the road to better human rights has proven bumpy. With post-2014 Afghanistan imminent, what is the human rights balance sheet?

Since the 2001 Bonn Process, there are structures and supporting mechanisms which, if properly functioning, could ensure a modicum of human rights protection and a post-2014 safety-net for the most vulnerable. There is a constitution, a judiciary including courts, a Bar Association, a Human Rights Commission and an evolving civil society. Has all this improved the daily lives of the people? Despite these structures there are wide-spread abuses and deprivations of human dignity. As 2014 looms, the human rights balance sheet is troubling.

Civilians continue to be victims of the ongoing armed conflict. This is an upward trend as reported by the United Nations Human Rights Council, governments, Human Rights Watch and other advocacy groups. Civilians are targeted, abducted and executed by anti-government elements (AGE). They fall prey to suicide bombings and are victims of sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IED). There has been a decrease in civilian protection across the country while anti-government elements increasingly resort to unlawful means of conducting war against civilians in

violation of humanitarian law and fundamental human rights.

Violence and discrimination against women and girls – a key indicator of a country's human rights record-- continues. The Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women has been in effect since 2009 but only by Presidential Decree and it is largely unenforced. In May 2013 conservative lawmakers blocked legislation introduced in the National Assembly designed to strengthen women's freedoms. They contended that the draft violated Islamic principles and encouraged disobedience. Women disproportionately suffer widespread incidents of violence and fundamental discrimination. This is especially true where customary law and practices trump codified constitutional and criminal law. Religious precepts may be harshly interpreted. Too often the stigma of sexual violence falls upon the victim rather than the perpetrator. There are honor killings, girls are offered in marriage to settle disputes and recourse to the courts is often unavailable. These troubling trends and findings were described in the OHCHR/UNAMA report, "Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women in Afghanistan" (2010). Twelve years after the ouster of the Taliban regime, gains in the achievement of women's rights remain tenuous.

The troubling legacy of past violence

Impunity is an unresolved human rights problem. One of Afghanistan's great human rights challenges is coming to terms with its past. Mass graves dot the countryside. The long shadow of impunity for massacres and past human rights violations falls across the new state. More than two decades of conflict and chaos has left a legacy of massacres, rapes, abductions of women and children and destruction of property with perpetrators still at large. The Afghan government has allowed well-known warlords, corrupt politicians, questionable businessmen and human rights abusers to operate. This impunity is a critical impediment to accountable governance, a responsive legal system, human rights and popular trust of political elites and in the new state.

A Law on Public Amnesty and National Stability was gazetted in 2009. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and civil society groups called for its repeal because the law facilitated official impunity for past abuses and crimes. The subsequent National Consultative Peace Jirgah held in June 2010 produced a sixteen article resolution and reconciliation road map that neglected to even mention accountability. The Afghan

Peace and Reintegration Programme and its implementing body, the High Peace Council, can enable combatants to leave the field of battle without fear of arrest or prosecution. The policy is to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate but the incentives include political amnesty and grievance resolution amounting to impunity.

A system of fair trials wherein detainees and defendants are afforded due process of law is an essential key to fundamental guarantees of human rights. However, incidents of arbitrary detention and uncertain trial procedures are common. The United Nations Human Rights Council reported that arbitrary detention continues to be widespread. At the root of the problem are inadequate criminal justice and penal management systems. There are reports of individuals who have served sentences, who have not been formally charged and remain in detention. Others have been found innocent, have had convictions overturned and remain detained. Demand for detention space has outstripped the capacity of the existing facilities. Interrogations are conducted without the assistance of defense counsel. This is a problem of capacity. There are not enough qualified lawyers. And lawyers and court workers are at high risk. On June 11 a Taliban suicide car bombing targeted Afghan Supreme Court employees killing 17 people.

Under the handover agreement by which the US government transferred the Bagram detention facility to the Afghan government, a key and secret provision required the establishment of an administrative detention arrangement by which conflict detainees could be held without charge. ISAF counterinsurgency policies prescribes a 96 hour detention period for persons apprehended in the conduct of military operations after which they are released or transferred to Afghan authorities. National caveats to the Standard Operating Procedure have been introduced by some ISAF contributing governments and this has prolonged certain detentions, delayed due process and oversight by the Afghan judiciary. A critical human rights concern is the receiving agency, the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NSD), which operates without a transparent legal framework. The operational procedures regulating NSD arrest and attention are classified and unavailable to the public, to defense counsel and detainees. The number of prisoners in government and non-government facilities, and where they are detained and under what conditions, is unclear. A fully implemented and transparent database maintained for all prisoners is urgently needed.

Transition towards an uncertain future

As the international community withdraws, the population must rely on internal Afghan institutions for human rights protection, most of which were designed and implemented by the very international actors now heading for the door. Securing human rights will turn on the security apparatus that the international community leaves behind, on the Constitution, a minimal capacity legal system and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. (AIHRC).

A celebrated high point of post-Taliban Afghanistan is the Constitution. Following multiple drafts and times acrimonious debate, the 502 delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga approved the new Constitution of Afghanistan on 4 January 2004. The outcome was a text which, if applied, might have provided the new beginning that Afghans sorely needed. The Constitution provides for a presidential system with a directly elected president, a bicameral national assembly, and an independent judiciary. It creates a far more centralized political order than is consonant with the decentralized political reality that has always been Afghanistan. A problem is that the centralized apparatus it has created is subject to the controlling group of the moment, whether secular-oriented or religio-power elites.

The text contains many provisions on fundamental rights. The Preamble invokes the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It calls for an "order based on the peoples' will and democracy." The preamble stipulates the "creation of a civil society free of oppression, atrocity, discrimination and violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights and attaining peoples' ensuring freedoms and fundamental rights." These are high human rights goals and aspirations.

The human rights goals set forth in the preamble are reflected in the operational body of the document. Article Six of Chapter One declares "The State shall be obligated to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, preservation of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy attainment of national unity as well equality between all peoples and tribes." Chapter Two enumerates Fundamental Rights in detail. Article Twenty-Two provides, "Any kind of Discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman,

have equal rights and duties before the law." The Constitutional text protects the rights of the accused, forbids torture, guarantees freedom expression and access to mass media, freedom of association and of movement, forbids forced labor, and guarantees rights and liberties of foreign residents. Many of these provisions are similar to those found in Western Constitutions because the document has foreign fingerprints. An exception is Article Three of Chapter One, which stipulates that "No law shall contravene

the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan." Depending upon who wields power post 2014, this provision could be a dangerous instrument. There are tensions between the secular and the sacred throughout the document that reflect the same tensions of the drafting sessions, the Constitutional Loya Jirga and Afghan society past and present.

The Bonn Agreement mandated that:"The Interim

Administration shall, with the assistance of the United Nations, establish an Independent Human Rights Commission whose responsibilities will include human rights monitoring, investigation of violations of human rights and the development of domestic human rights institutions." The Commission is enshrined in the Constitution in Article Fifty-Eight of Chapter Two which provides, "To monitor respect for human rights in Afghanistan as well as to foster and protect it, the state shall establish the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan. Every individual shall complain to this Commission about the violation of personal human rights and assist in defense of their rights."

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has received strong support from the international human rights community including the UN, governments and NGOs. Its first chair was Dr. Sima Samar, who had been the Minister of Women's Affairs in the Afghan Interim Administration. The AIHRC has evolved slowly. But it's critical role in promoting and potentially ensuring human rights post-2014 cannot be overstated. The Commission has established regional offices, receives human rights complaints and undertakes important investigations. In swathes of the country where warlords and religio-power elites exercise control, the Commissioners' work has been impeded. There have been many incidents of people being hampered in their efforts to convey human rights information to the Commission.

The Commission received an apparent boost from a June 2002 Presidential Decree which endowed it with important transitional justice powers to address past abuses, including the capacity to document crimes against humanity that have been committed in Afghanistan over the past quarter century. During the following years the Commissioners, with international technical assistance, assiduously investigated and documented war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan since the communist era and produced a critical 1,000 page report in 2011 that was blocked. Allegedly President Karzai prevented it release, despite his 2002 Presidential Decree. To ensure the independence of the AIHRC, a permanent and dedicated independent State budgetary mechanism should be implemented. This is a core principle for the functioning of national human rights institutions pursuant to the 1993 National Human Rights Commission Paris Principles endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

The Constitution of Afghanistan and the AIHRC merit ongoing strong international support. The Constitutional text that

the international community leaves behind will continue to evolve in a context. The constitutional challenges will be application and interpretation. How the text is interpreted and whether and how it is applied, will depend upon who is in charge. The Afghan context will shape the text of the Constitution of Afghanistan. Will the Constitution be applied and interpreted by secular-oriented judges or by religio-power elites? This is the question that Afghans will confront post-2014. The end game is not only the cessation of hostilities. The end game is also control of the Afghan Constitutional order.

Afghanistan's first Constitution was promulgated by King Amanullah in 1923. He established new courts, introduced secular legal codes and reformed traditional customs. It did not go well. By 1928 Amanullah faced tribal uprisings and long fled to India. Thereafter a fundamentalist Tajik bandit proclaiming himself Habibullah II of Afghanistan occupied Kabul. Thus began a trend in the country's constitutive processes: a clash between the urban centre's exercise of power, based on narrow secular authority, and the power bases of religion and custom wielded by elites in the rest of the country. These tensions have affected Afghan constitutions and laws from the time of Amanullah to the present.

When this writer spoke with Afghans on a recent trip, they worried of a future in which a Taliban-influenced regime would again crack the whip in the name of Allah. They recalled that Afghanistan was a captive nation. They remembered the nightmare in which women were banned from the work force, families headed by war widows had no means of support other than begging. Girls' schools and colleges were shut. Music, television and flying kites were among banned activities. The soccer stadium was used for weekly lashings and executions. For most Afghans, especially women, human dignity took a holiday. In 2003 Human Rights Watch issued a report entitled "Killing you is a very easy thing for us."

Afghanistan has never had a human rights culture. Protection of individual and collective dignity was traditionally achieved through customary and/or Islamic practices. Secular legal codes protected some fundamental freedoms in certain urban areas at certain times, but provincial elites largely rejected the authority of those laws. The new Afghanistan faces the formidable challenge of weaving customary practices, conflicting religious interpretations and secular laws including a new Constitution

that meets international legal obligations into a functioning human rights culture. The post-2014 human rights drivers will be security, capacity building, impunity and corruption, application of law codes versus custom, support of vulnerable groups, and the engagement of the international community.

Security nationwide will remain the number one human rights problem. To maintain stability post-2014, the international community must leave a modicum of security measures intended to protect the human rights of the most vulnerable including women and girls. The culture of impunity must be reversed. A national accountability policy must be formulated and it must be reflected in the new constitutive order. This will be delicate so long as perpetrators of past offences remain in positions of authority. The argument has revolved around whether justice for the living should be sacrificed for justice for the dead. But in a robust human rights system neither would be sacrificed.

The surest path to securing human rights in Afghanistan is a decentralized State characterized by responsive regional and local governance where local communities have a voice, where the power of warlords and renegade commanders are eclipsed and corruption is curbed. There will be a steady reduction of foreign aid, yet targeted and transparent international assistance will be needed beyond 2014. Afghans and concerned international actors will resort to "the art of the possible" in an environment of dwindling resources. The top-down governance approach imported by the international community beginning with the 2001 Bonn Process will fade. Extending central control over provinces and districts is not working and it never has. Fulfilling human rights will require local solutions. For example where the central judicial system does not work, resort to local courts. Local communities must have a meaningful voice in their own affairs. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) by which local communities make inclusive decisions about their own development enhances human agency and thus yields positive human rights outcomes. The capacity of State administration must be strengthened in the provinces and it must be responsive to local needs.

Targeted human rights assistance through international aid and technical support must continue post-2014. The AIHRC will require support at the national and regional levels to ensure that rural populations have guaranteed access to its provincial and community complaint mechanisms. International assistance must support the participation of women in the

political process. There must be clear avenues available for participation. And women should be assured participation in any peace and reconciliation process in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security."

Afghanistan is party to the major international human rights treaties and it has reconfirmed its commitment to

those obligations. But it will require assistance to abide by international human rights legal obligations. Under a Presidential Decree the AIHRC has responsibility to ensure that national laws are consistent with international human rights obligations and to advise on Afghanistan's monitoring of human rights treaty obligations. The Ministry of Justice recently launched a Human Rights Support Unit that will assume responsibility for strengthening the government's capacity to fulfil its international human rights obligations in conformity with the Constitution of Afghanistan. These initiatives are a route to promoting and applying human rights norms and laws within the country and could render available international human rights mechanisms for the protection of the most vulnerable. Post-2014 Afghanistan must be inextricably bound within the international human rights system.

Afghans want the world community to take their human rights seriously. As governmental assistance dissipates, they will look increasingly to international civil society- to NGOs, voluntary organizations and universities. Afghan advocacy and human rights groups are increasingly vocal and will be greatly

dependent on their international counterparts. Because there are not enough qualified lawyers and judges, capacity building is desperately needed for law schools, the Judiciary and the Bar Association. And more women must be trained in the law and be able to work as lawyers, advocates and judges. As a Human Rights Counsel report pointedly noted: "Given the lack of a legal framework that complies with the obligations of Afghanistan under international human rights and humanitarian legal standards and national applicable law, the need for reform is urgent."

Afghanistan's achievement of legitimate independent statehood will turn on the capacity to guarantee fundamental human rights. That will depend on the end game as Afghanistan transitions to independence. As Afghans, and the international community, consider who will control the post-2014 Constitutional order and the direction of fundamental rights, many will recall the 11 June 2013 suicide car bomb on the Supreme Court. The Taliban said they targeted the Supreme Court because it was committing "cruelty against Afghans, enabling corruption, imprisoning religious scholars and giving free reign to the infidels." It was a direct attack on human rights, the legal system and the Constitutional order.

The long-suffering people of Afghanistan have become tragically accustomed to human rights deprivations at multiple levels. When this writer was last in Afghanistan and surveyed the human rights scene, he had that sinking feeling of, "plus que ca change, plus que c'est la meme chose," [the more things change, the more they remain the same]. Afghanistan was still an unstable system of minimum order incapable of guaranteeing basic human rights. The Constitution and legal codes were more mythical than operational. Effective law still operated at the informal and micro-levels. The population's expectations outpaced the capacity of the embryonic Afghan State to deliver services and to respond to unfolding security incidents. Power was still diffused away from the formal apparatus of the State and hence was often harshly applied to the most vulnerable. People still lived with the personal insecurity that they have long experienced. And now their gazes are fixed on 2014 --with a heightened expectation of violence. As the great baseball philosopher, Yogi Berra, once remarked: "it's déjà vue all over again."

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INSPIRE: Rebuilding Afghanistan, One Book at a Time – The Nancy Dupree Initiative

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

While the past decade of international recovery has helped send over seven million Afghan children back to school, what is often forgotten is that this is not good enough. Ordinary Afghans, whether they can read or not (an estimated 70% are illiterate), need books. Not only does Afghanistan have a strong story-telling tradition and thirst for poetry, but people have an intense curiousity to know what is going on around them - and in the world. Part of this desire to be informed is satisfied by radio, television, text messages or the internet, but the real knowledge about their country's history, heritage and culture needs to come from books. And yet, despite the proven importance of credible information as an effective means for promoting peace and community involvement, Afghanistan suffers from an acute shortage of reliable reading material.

Both primary and secondary school children are forced to share books, if they are available. Visitors are often besieged by pupils clamouring for the most basic of reading material – magazines, newspapers, books, comics, NGO reports, instruction manuals…anything. The same goes for adults who are educated but have nothing to read either because they cannot afford it or because there are no books. One makeshift library in the Hazarajat in the early 2000s had a total of 300 books ranging from Karl Marx flyers and a paperback on cooking for bachelors to UNICEF annual reports. And yet it boasted a steady sign-out with an almost 100% return rate among local villagers, some of whom lived two day's trek away and were not even literate. They relied on someone in the family or village to know how to read, and thus share the knowledge with everyone around them. Afghan Women and men, students and policy makers urgently need resources to acquire the necessary knowledge to participate in their country's fledgling democracy. And this means reading.

One organization which has sought to remedy this deplorable situation is the Louis and Nancy Dupree Foundation for the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU). One of its projects, the ACKU Box

Library Extension (ABLE) initiative helps make books and documents available to other parts of the country. It currently reaches 28 out of 34 provinces through more than 196 boxed lending libraries, providing some 137,750 books to provincial communities and high schools. ABLE also commissions the production of books for new literates, and has published more than 205 titles to date. The foundation seeks funds, books and other forms of support to make books as widely available as possible throughout Afghanistan. In 2010, the American Library Association awarded ABLE the Presidential Citation for International Innovations for its work.

Both Louis (who died in 1989) and Nancy Dupree have been known widely as among the most dedicated foreigners to have committed their lives and work to Afghanistan. Created by Nancy Hatch Dupree, the ACKU is a steadily growing resource center that houses an impressive collection of historical and current documents. In many ways, its collection fills as important a role to Afghanistan as the Library of Congress's collection does to the United States.

The comprehensive and singular collection encompasses documents from the 1970s through the time of the Soviet invasion, the rule of the mujahideen, the Taliban era and the present day. The Duprees began formally collecting documents in Peshawar, Pakistan for safekeeping in 1989 with the support of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), and continued amassing documents until July 2006 when the collection was shifted to Afghanistan. Now registered as an independent NGO, ACKU is housed on the campus of Kabul University. The documents are being digitized so that they may be shared with provincial universities and libraries.

The Centre is a national treasure and it has an important role in rebuilding the social, economic, political and cultural fabric of Afghanistan. The collection contains nearly 58,000 documents on Afghanistan, including works in Dari, Pashto and various western languages. In addition, ACKU's holdings include an archival section of rare mujahed and Taliban press publications and development reports from before the outbreak of war in the summer of 1978. There is also an audio-visual collection with archives on NGO activities among refugee populations and anthropological documentary film from inside Afghanistan, historic events and 2,000 BBC radio programmes on development themes.

Visitors to ACKU may access more than 500 maps and the photo catalogue of historical sites, monuments, archaeological sites and artifacts, landscapes and personalities. In 2011, the international aid agency, CARE, helped construct a new building for ACKU on the Kabul University campus. ACKU administers a reading room with internet and

database access, which also enables young Afghans to interact with other students around the world.

Contact: http://dupreefoundation.org/

The new ACKU Center

Language & Poetry

By Whitney Azoy

Afghanistan’s two main languages are Dari (Afghan Persian/ Farsi) and Pashto, both belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family. Dari literally means “language of the court” and was the court language in Moghul India. Both languages use the Arabic script, written horizontally from right to left, but they are no more mutually intelligible than English is to German. Pashto is itself often divided into the softer ‘Pushtu’ of the Kandahar area, and the harder ‘Pukhtu’ of the North West Frontier Province.

The late American writer and archaeologist Louis Dupree makes the point that Afghanistan has a literate culture, but is a non-literate society: “Most literate or non-literate Afghans, whether Persian-, Pashto-, or Turkic-speakers, consider themselves poets. Poetry, essentially a spoken, not a written, art, generally gives non-literates the same opportunities for expression in a society as literates. Afghanistan, it follows, is fundamentally a nation of poets.” (Afghanistan, 1973)

Poetry in Afghanistan flowered from the 9th to the 17th Centuries, climaxing in the cultural oasis that was the court of Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th Century. At least 900 scholars and 400 poets lived in his court. The greatest was Firdausi, whose Shah-Namah, Book of the

Kings of Persia contains 60,000 couplets. Abdullah Ansari, the Pir of Herat (1005-1088 AD), was a Sufi leader who composed poetry to express his journey from orthodox religion to mysticism. Perhaps the greatest of the Pashto poets are the 17th Century Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1690) and Rahman Baba. Khushal is the epitome of the Pushtun warrior-poet, the ideal Afghan character-type, who revelled as much in the beauty of man and nature as he did in waging war on neighbouring Moghuls and hostile Pushtuns. Rahman Baba, a contemporary of Khushal, was inspired by Sufism to emphasize religious mysticism more than war. One of Afghanistan's greatest 20th Century poets was Khalilullah Khalili (SEE BOX).
The following is a selection of Afghan poetry, both Persian and Pushtun:

"A solitary orphan pain-ridden and voiceless
Suddenly, somehow, cries from the heart of the desert.
If someday you want to reach an oasis,
Don't let the candle of hope slip from your palm."
---Khalilullah Khalili (1908-1987)

"The Lasses of the Adam Khel,

As every lover knows,
Are delicately coloured like
The petals of a rose;
My Love a snowy partridge is,
Who chooses winter time
To seek among the stony fells
A cloak of silver rime.
My Love, my Bird, remember that
A hawk, when he grows old,
Becomes more subtle in the chase,
His stoop becomes more bold:
Surrender then to me, for though
I seem no longer young,
The fervour of my love will taste
Like honey on your tongue."
---Khushal Khan Khattak, 17th Century
(trans. Bowen)

"From among all the good and bad things of the world,
Daqiqi has chosen four:
Ruby-red lips, the wail of the flute,
Blood-coloured wine, and the Zoroastrian religion."
---Daqiqi of Balkh, 10th Century
(trans. S. Shpoon)

"If leadership rests inside the lion's jaw,
So be it. Go, snatch it from his jaw.
Your lot shall be greatness, prestige, honour and glory.
If all fails, face death like a man."
--Hanzala of Badghis, 9th Century AD
(trans. S. Shpoon)

"My beauty, I cannot exchange you for the cash

of my life.
You are priceless. I will not sell you so cheap.
I hold your skirt with both my hands.
I may loosen my hold on my life,
but not my hold on your skirt."
---Mahmud Warraq, 9th Century
(trans. S. Shpoon)

"Your face is a rose and your eyes are candles:
Faith! I am lost. Should I become a butterfly or a moth?"
"My beloved returned unsuccessful from battle;
I regret the kiss I gave him last night."
"If you don't wield a sword, what else will you do?
You, who have suckled at the breast of an Afghan mother!"
--Traditional 'landay' or Pashto couplets

A Pathan Warrior's Farewell
"Beloved, on a parchment white
With my heart's blood to thee I write;
My pen a dagger, sharp and clean,
Inlaid with golden damascene,
Which I have used, and not in vain,
To keep my honour free from stain.
Now, when our house its mourning wears,
Do not thyself give way to tears:
Instruct our eldest son that I
Was ever anxious thus to die,
For when Death comes the brave are free
So in thy dreams remember me."
---Anonymous

The Landays Phenomenon

Landays are very short traditional poems recounted by Afghan women among themselves. The format is usually two lines with 22 syllables. The poems are often extremely frank about a woman's plight in life, including sex. Poetry Magazine, a publication of the Poetry Foundation, recently dedicated an entire issue to the form, based on reporting by Eliza Griswold, who frequently writes for the New Yorker, and the work of Irish photographer, Seamus Murphy. Griswold explained that she thought that the form might die out, given the pressures of modern life, but in fact it perfectly suits two of the more popular new forms of communication, Twitter and SMS over mobile phones. Some examples of the poems are:

You sold me to an old man, father.
May God destroy your home, I was your daughter.

Making love to an old man
is like fucking a shriveled cornstalk blackened by mold.

When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers.
When brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.

Unlucky you who didn't come last night,
I took the bed's hard wood post for a man.

Embrace me in a suicide vest
but don't say I won't give you a kiss.

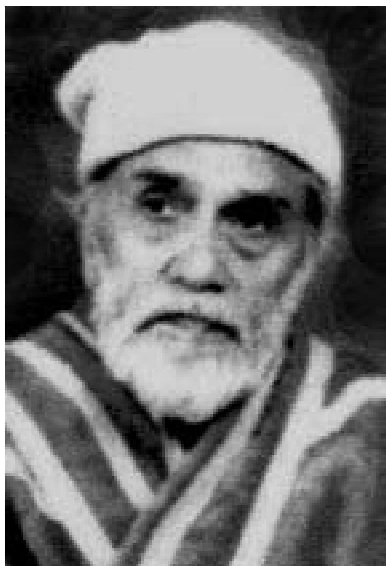
The special issue of Poetry Magazine was available online at:

http://www.poetryfoundation.org/media/landays.html

--WTD

Khalilullah Khalili (1908-1987)

Afghanistan's greatest 20th century poet was born in Kabul during the reign of Habibullah. Khalili's extraordinary life epitomizes the Afghan proverbial observation that great pressure can occasionally transform bits of coal into diamonds. The process is far from automatic. It depends on how the bits of coal react to grinding pressure. Most bits – like most people – respond negatively or passively and remain undeveloped. Only the rare pieces are transformed.



At first Khalili's life entailed little pressure. His family roots were Saafi Pushtun, but his parents formed part of the capital city's Persian-speaking establishment. His father was Habibullah's finance minister and closest advisor.

Until age 11, young Khalil enjoyed a privileged childhood: fine houses, vineyards, and one of Afghanistan's three automobiles. The boy showed special gifts in Persian classical poetry and mathematics.

Then disaster struck twice: His mother died in 1915 and his father was executed – by the new king, Amanullah – in 1919. Young Khalili was suddenly orphaned without family or possessions. And Amanullah, otherwise a champion of education, banned the boy from ever attending school.

Khalili, 11 and penniless, was now responsible for himself and three younger siblings. With no roof in Kabul they walked north at night across the Shomali Plain. Local people, aware the king's wrath, feared to help these orphans openly. A period of enormous pressure had begun.

Interestingly – so the story goes – Khalili never cursed the king. Rather he gave thanks to God that he and his siblings were spared. Here his character was revealed: What happens in life is less important than how one reacts to it. Khalili found odd jobs by day and studied secretly late at night with sympathetic elders. He made use of whatever scant resources, even collecting scraps of discarded writing from the ground and imagining the text as a whole. Imagination was to become his genius.

Regime change provided opportunities in 1929. Khalili's maternal uncle was made governor of Herat and took Khalili, then 21, with him. Khalili loved this intellectual city. Hobnobbing with artists, writers, and sufi sheikhs, he came into his own. "It was there that I became a poet," he said. Indeed he became locally known as Malik-u-shuaraa, the King of Poets.

Yet the grinding continued. Khalili was alternately debased (prison in the 1940s) and exalted (minister, then ambassador in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s). The Soviet invasion of 1979 made him an exile. His 1987 funeral in Pakistan was attended by 10,000 displaced Afghans.

His works include three large volumes of poetry, numerous short stories, and 35 books of history, biography, and literary criticism. From Balkh to Konya, his work on 13th century mystic poet Jalalludin Rumi, is prized everywhere in the Persian-speaking world. A model of tolerance, moderation, and national unity, Khalili is remembered as Afghanistan's greatest writer of the last hundred years. A selection of his work – An Assembly of Moths – was translated into English in 2003. A sample quatrain:

A solitary orphan -- pain-ridden and voiceless --
Suddenly, somehow, cries from the heart of the desert.
If someday you want to reach an oasis,
Don't let the candle of hope slip from your palm.

--*WA*

Foreign Media: A lack of balance
By Jean MacKenzie

For those trying to get a sense of what is actually happening in Afghanistan, the international media has been an uneven resource. This is due, not only to the great complexity of the situation, but also to the vagaries of public appetite for news of an increasingly unpopular war coupled with the tendency to focus more on the Coalition military side than what is actually happening on the ground with ordinary Afghans. Covering the war can expect to grow even more acute with the scheduled withdrawal of most western troops by the end of 2014.

Afghanistan has been alternately flooded with the international media and all but abandoned. Following the initial euphoria of 2001-2002, the country was ignored except for major events such as presidential elections and visits by top-level dignitaries. The war bogged down, the news was unremittingly gloomy, and editors lost enthusiasm as media consumers turned to more congenial subjects.

The same thing happened during the 1980s and 1990s. In the wake of massive interest spurred by the Soviet Red Army invasion of Afghanistan in December, 1979, most international media had dropped the story by early summer of 1980. From then onwards, apart from bouts of "international interest," such as the official push of American aid for the mujahideen, or "Freedom Fighters" as President Reagan called them, the bulk of international reporting was based on "me on the frontier" pieces by visiting journalists. Or the occasional "quickie" trip across the border into Afghanistan, where the focus was more on blistered feet than anything else. Those visiting Peshawar focused primarily on the plight of the over three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and less on what was happening "inside."

Most coverage of the Soviet war was conducted by a small group of mainly western reporters, who trekked clandestinely into Afghanistan with different mujahed groups. Yet there were never more than twenty photographers, camermen and reporters operating inside at any one time. A few mainly French journalists managed to get in on the communist side, while foreign correspondents based in Moscow or eastern Europe provided additional background coverage. Some journalists, whether based in Peshawar or back in Paris or London, also regularly

interviewed international humanitarian groups, such as Aide Medicale Internationale, Medecins sans Frontieres, AfghanAid and the Bureau International Afghanistan (now Madera) in an effort to gain insights from the experiences of aid workers working with war-affected civilian populations inside the country.

By the time the Soviets left, public interest in Afghanistan had waned. The Americans dropped their support and literally abandoned the country after having spent nearly a decade backing mainly Islamic extremists, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, in their struggle against the Red Army. A few foreign correspondents remained based in the Afghan capital during the height of the "Battle for Kabul" of the early 1990s followed by irregular visits to the city by other journalists. During the Talib period leading up to the events of 9/11, most coverage was based on a small clutch of journalists representing the BBC, VOA, Reuters, AP, AFP and others. Occasionally, there would be high profile media road shows, such as the visit of the European Union's Emma Bonino to highlight the plight of Afghan women. It was only when the US and British invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, that western journalists scrambled in their hundreds to cover the story with live satellite feeds, military "embeds" and sorties with the United Front forces.

Over the past decade, Afghanistan has gone from "The Good War" to "The Forgotten War" to "The Unwinnable War," and now, with the endgame approaching to "Victory in the Making." Many mainstream media are reluctant to describe the war as a disaster with American, British and other troops having died for nothing. The various narratives have been supplied and supported by the international media, all too often in partnership with the U.S. government or with the military.

There are easily understandable reasons for this: as security in Afghanistan began to deteriorate in 2005, foreign correspondents became more and more reliant on "embeds" for coverage of the war. Once a journalist has been placed with a military unit, has marched, eaten, and slept with the soldiers, it is very difficult to present an accurate picture of the conflict from any other perspective. Foreign journalists are all too often cut off from the local population, or, worse, seen by them as representing the foreign occupation.

The military, especially the U.S. forces, have been adept at courting the international media, and the picture that has

penetrated the consciousness of news consumers throughout the world has frequently been a product of Pentagon spin doctors. Much of this reporting has provided a wholly inaccurate assessment of what is really happening on the ground.

The New York Times, for example, has told us over the years, that the Taliban have been "routed" from southern Afghanistan http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/asia/21kandahar.html, that night raids are the single most effective tool of the counterinsurgency http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html?pagewanted=all , that militias such as the Afghan Local Police are helping with the transition http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/22/world/asia/22militias.html?pagewanted=all, and that Afghanistan was sitting on enormous mineral wealth, a story that was presented as sensational new information, although it was based on research several decades old http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html. It was all the more curious that reports of Afghanistan's natural resources were released by the Pentagon.

All of these stories were controversial, but the New York Times, America's "newspaper of record," presented little of the opposing viewpoints in its coverage. The same thing was happening with much of the British press, which sought to present highly admirable stories of "our boys and girls at the front." Instead, what the reader absorbed was much closer to the official position than to anything resembling the Afghan reality. One often wondered which country these journalists were reporting from.

There has, of course, been some stellar reporting in the international media. It is no accident that the Kabul Bank scandal was broken in the Washington Post rather than by TOLO news or another top Afghan establishment. Reporter Andrew Higgins traveled to Dubai, Moscow and other venues to gather the facts, as well as using his formidable skills to corral the important figures in Afghanistan. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/21/AR2010022104317.html Jerome Starkey, of the London Times, uncovered killings by foreign troops that were being covered up; he forced a confession and an apology from the U.S. forces.

Journalist Stephen Grey's relentless reporting on coalition night raids, much of which is included in his book, ***Operation Snakebite,*** and his documentary for Frontline, ***Kill/Capture*** (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kill-capture/),have

brought transparency to a controversial strategy.

Another *le*ading American newspaper, The Christian Science Monitor, also provided consistent and often highly insightful coverage, particularly of what was happening in the countryside, where nearly 80% of the population live.

But those stories have been few and far between. Now the western war is unquestionably in its final phase as the foreign armies seek exit strategies for 2014, while pretending that all is on track with the Afghan security forces. News organizations, which have been downsizing foreign quality reporting as they seek to reduce costs, are beginning to turn to the more dramatic stories in the Middle East. The Arab Spring eclipsed Afghanistan as a major news focus, and those outlets still in Afghanistan are cutting back. The story has become one of "broken Taliban momentum," or "fragile but reversible" progress. The military, intent on withdrawing but reluctant to admit defeat, present victory as a *fait accompli*, and the media all too rarely contradict them. In many cases, foreign journalists, who no longer travel on their own, are losing touch with the country just as the western missions barricaded behind their high-walled compounds.

Most old Afghan hands in both the media and the world of think-tanks are convinced that the future is dark, with civil war all but inescapable. The mood among international correspondents who know the country is far from victorious. The danger is that when the Afghanistan war reaches its chaos-plagued finale, there will be no one left in the country to document it.

***Jean MacKenzie** has reported from Afghanistan for the Global Post and the Institute for War Peace Reporting*

INSPIRE:
The Afghan Media Resource Center
By Nick B. Mills

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

Born in secrecy, raised in controversy, surrounded by constant danger, the Afghan Media Resource Center was lucky to survive its birth and adolescence. Now a quarter-century old, its unique archive of video footage, audio tapes and photographs has been targeted, not by warlords, terrorists or Taliban but by the United States Library of Congress. The AMRC's collection is being digitized to the Library's high standards and a digital copy will be held in perpetuity for historians, researchers, journalists and others who want to see (and hear) what Afghanistan was like during the last years of the Soviet occupation and the tumultuous period that followed.

The notion of creating an Afghan news agency was hatched, I have been told, as a clandestine "white op" – a propaganda mill masquerading as a news service. But the idea came out of hiding, and moved through the U.S. Congress as an appropriation to train Afghan journalists and establish a news agency. Boston University was one of several institutions – the University of Nebraska was another – bidding for the training phase.

The project was divisive at B.U. for several reasons, one of which was that the project director was Prof. Joachim Maitre, a former East German citizen who became an ardent Cold Warrior, loved to surround himself with myth and mystery, and was a lightning rod for controversy.

The larger controversy concerned the funding body: The U.S. Information Agency, which in effect was the U.S. government's overseas public relations/propaganda service. I was hired to be field director of the project, and in our contract negotiations with the USIA representative, I made it clear that if we were awarded the grant, the USIA would have no control over whom we trained, what we taught them, how we assigned them, et cetera. The USIA readily agreed to let us handle the hot potato as we saw fit.

In 1987 filmmaker Stephen Olsson joined AMRC and would replace me as senior adviser, and we hired Haji Saed Daud as AMRC director, a position he still holds. We trained nearly a hundred young and not-so-young Afghans in Western journalism. They were from all seven of the major resistance groups then based in Peshawar.

Some of the trainees had journalism experience in pre-Soviet Kabul; some had also participated in prior journalism training projects in France and Germany (among those trained in France: the young Hamid Karzai, who did not train with us but provided trainees from his party). There were two significant differences between our program and the previous efforts: one, our training was conducted in Peshawar, not in France or Germany; two, when the training was done we gave the trainees a place to work – the Afghan Media Resource Center. Why not the "Afghan News Agency"? Because through many meetings and gallons of tea with Pakistani officials I came to realize they would never approve, even tacitly, the presence on their soil of a bona fide news agency operated by Afghans; by another name it was tolerated.

Because of the pan-Afghan nature of the AMRC, we were able to send teams of journalists into all areas of Afghanistan. They brought out video footage and photographs unobtainable by Western reporters, and it was properly captioned and ready for distribution. The proof of the pudding: our photos were distributed worldwide by the respected agency Sigma, of Paris; we sold video footage to news services around the world.

Twenty-five years on, Haji Daud was able to secure a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development to digitize the AMRC archive; the interest of the Library of Congress was instrumental in obtaining the funding. In 2011 Stephen Olsson and I spent a week with the Library's experts, learning the tools and techniques of archival digitization, and in May of 2012 we went to Kabul to transfer the skills to the AMRC staff. As we began the long, tedious process of digitizing Stephen and I looked with new eyes at the material that we had trained the Afghans to produce and saw that it was not only good, but astonishing in its depth, breadth, content and quality. Here was a lengthy on-camera interview with Jalaluddin Haqqani, who was then being supported by the U.S.; here were photos of mujaheddin firing Stinger missiles at Soviet helicopters. The AMRC had outlived its detractors, outperformed expectations, and was enroute to archival Valhalla, the U.S. Library of Congress.

Learning the details of media communications. Photo courtesy ISAF

Mineral Resources:
Ore, Ore better than War, War

By Edward Girardet

Even before Alexander the Great, it was known that Afghanistan had exceptional mineral resources. The first western mineral survey of Afghanistan was performed in 1841 by a British officer, Capt. Henry Drummond, of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry. Drummond claimed to have found "abundant green stains" of copper, some of which rivaled the deposits of Chile, and iron ore that "might no doubt be obtained equal to the Swedish." Various Polish and other European geologists made surveys during the 1930s, providing detailed knowledge of the country's reserves and its exceptional potential. Prior to the Red Army invasion in December 1979, the Soviets also dispatched geologists to investigate the exploitation of oil, natural gas and other mineral resources.

In June, 2010, just as many Americans were beginning to question the continued US occupation, the Pentagon announced that its aerial surveys had shown a far greater amount of mineral riches than previously estimated, nearly US$ 1 trillion worth of deposits including iron, copper, gold, semi-precious gems, and industrial metals such as lithium. The head of the U.S. military's Central Command maintained that this latest research revealed "stunning potential" for the development of Afghanistan's mineral industry.

The timing of the study's release led some pundits to question whether the Defense Department wasn't trying to substitute "ore-ore" for "war-war," but the U.S. report was soon followed by Afghan government claims that the deposits might actually be even greater, amounting to US$ 3 trillion. A Ministry of Mines and Industries official maintained that the exploitation of these mineral fields would have a "significant effect on the economy of Afghanistan and its people."

As Kabul saw it, Afghanistan might become one of the "most important" mining countries in the world. While these claims might seem extreme, and even qualify as figments of an overheated imagination, a New York Times report cited a classified Pentagon memo stating that Afghanistan could become the "Saudi Arabia of lithium," an essential ingredient in the batteries that go into laptop computers as

well as electric vehicles. A U.S. Geological Survey in 2007 concluded that copper and iron ore had "the most potential for extraction in Afghanistan." It further suggested significant amounts of known and potential undiscovered reserves of barite, chromium, cobalt, emeralds, lapis lazuli, magnesium, marble, mica, rubies, salt, silver, sulphur and talc, salt, mica, marble, ruby, emerald and lapis lazuli. Finally, it noted that deposits of asbestos, mercury, lead, zinc, fluorspar, bauxite, beryllium, and lithium are also known to be present.

Afghanistan is said to have over 90 relatively accessible sites containing valuable deposits of important minerals. These include copper, coal, iron, lithium, gold, barite and lapis lazuli as well as significant oil and natural gas fields. Despite the worsening security situation, foreign investors appear increasingly willing to take a chance on investing in Afghanistan. These include J.P. Morgan, the New York-based investment firm, which launched its first operations in Afghanistan in 2010 with the development of a gold mine in Laghman Province. Reports issued by the US Geological Survey in September, 2011, describe Afghanistan's gold, iron, copper and other reserves as "world class resources." The reports suggest that the resources could provide the Afghan government with the funds that it needed to reshape the country's war-torn landscape. While sizeable mineral deposits might make Afghanistan a major player at some point in the future, the reserves that have definitely been proven to exist so far are not enough to have a major impact on the global economy. But experts do agree that they could provide the basis for a more secure financial foundation for the country. The main obstacle to accomplishing that is the country's current lack of security. For the foreseeable future, Afghanistan is likely to continue to be perceived as a "high-risk" venture.

China's Aynak Copper Mine: mixing savvy commerce with long-term strategy

The China financed Aynak Copper Mine project (US$ 3.4 billion) is the biggest foreign investment project in Afghanistan so far.

China has stayed clear of military involvement in Afghanistan, but it has gone on to make a number of shrewd commercial investments. As one caustic US embassy official noted, "we spend billions of dollars on security needs in Afghanistan, while the Chinese go in and get the

business." The Aynak project is intended to exploit one of the world's richest copper reserves. The ore it produces is unusually rich in high-grade copper which means that in theory the mine could turn out to be unusually profitable. By 2012, the project was believed to be worth $4.3 billion thanks to additional infrastructure pledges.

Both the Afghans themselves and the international development specialists are concerned about the risks of potentially massive environmental degradation from open pit mining. The project, which was scheduled for completion in 2013, has been temporarily delayed by an archaeological find at the spot where the strip mining was supposed to begin. The Chinese have admitted to encountering some "technical problems," but insist that these will prove "insignificant" by the time the project is due to be inaugurated.

That said, some Chinese investors have expressed doubts about the viability of spending heavily on an operation in a province that is considered highly dangerous, especially now that international forces will withdraw. There have been some attempts to renegotiate the original terms of the agreement.

Whether the copper mining project goes ahead or not, China's exploitation of Afghanistan's mineral resources so far appears to be a repeat of its highly criticized business practices in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. Deals, sweetened with kickbacks and other incentives, are made with little or no transparency, and tend to benefit government agencies, or more to the point, the officials that run them, while leaving the public to fend for itself. The Chinese are particularly interested in exploiting mineral, energy and food resources, and at least until now they seem not to be overly worried about the controversies created by the forced removal of local inhabitants, pollution of rivers or destruction of natural habitats.

In 2007, two Chinese state-owned conglomerates, China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Company (JCC) outbid competitors from Europe, Canada, the United States, Russia and Kazakhstan by offering $1 billion more than the others for rights to the mine. The deal, which is both a commercial and a long-term strategic coup, authorizes the Chinese companies to mine deposits near the village of Aynak in Loghar Province some 30 kilometres southeast of Kabul.

Over the next 25 years, the Chinese are expected to extract more than 11 million tonnes of copper, roughly equivalent to a third of China's known copper reserves. In a single stroke, China became Afghanistan's most powerful business partner and its largest potential source of tax revenue. China has carried off similar coups elsewhere, particularly in Iraq,

where it is now extracting more petroleum than American companies.

Copper artifacts found near Aynak pre-date Alexander the Great's sweep through Afghanistan 2,300 years ago. During the 1930s, Polish, French and other European geologists assessed the site with an eye to commercial exploitation. There was already considerable interest in Afghanistan's unusually rich resources in oil, natural gas, copper, iron and coal. After they invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Soviets also tried to evaluate Afghanistan's mineral resources, but never got around to commercial exploitation other than natural gas in the north. Resistance from the mujahideen made the Loghar region too dangerous. Ironically, when Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan after the rise of the Taliban, he used Aynak as a training base.

The second big mineral project to be auctioned off was the Hajigak iron ore concession with reserves estimated at 60 billion tons. A series of rugged mountain ridges100 kilometers west of Kabul, Hajigak potentially represents the largest mining project in Afghanistan so far. The finalists in the bidding were Indian and Chinese companies, including MCC. Nevertheless, in November, 2011, President Hamid Karzai's government offered India a new strategic role in Afghanistan by awarding the Hajigak rights to seven Indian state-run and private companies, plus one Canadian, Kilo Goldmines Ltd. (KGL). The Indian investment group, which in effect will be part of the country's multi-billion dollar aid programme to Afghanistan, makes it – along with China – one of Kabul's biggest foreign investors, a move that has severely upset Pakistan. The increased involvement of India (Islamabad's key rival), which has invested over one billion dollars in aid since 2002 includes a vow to expand its military support role once the bulk of US troops pull out in 2014. This may persuade Pakistan to undermine Afghanistan further – as it has done in the past - or to get its act together by coming up with more constructive long-term investment for its crucial neighbour.

As part of the MCC copper venture – and to appease the international community and Afghans- the Chinese have promised thousands of local jobs as well as investments worth hundreds of millions of dollars in associated infrastructure projects. A major project is a 400-megawatt power generation plant that will serve both Kabul and the Aynak copper mine. The Chinese have hired Afghan contractors to build security fences, workers' barracks and access roads. Security will be provided by some 1,500 armed Afghans with the Chinese footing the bill. MCC will also construct a smelter to refine the copper ore and will build a railroad link to transport coal to the generators and

copper to China. The Chinese have undertaken a further commitment to build a railway that will link Central Asia to the Pakistani port city of Karachi (which also serves as Afghanistan's free port). The railway may be extended to Gwadar, a port in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, which the Chinese are planning to expand. According to the contract, MCC will build roads, schools, clinics, and even mosques. As part of the Hajigak iron project, India has also proposed to build a power plant and a railroad. The latter option is to construct a rail link for exporting the ore to the Iranian port of Chabahar.

Unlike the Americans, who still go into villages accompanied by uniformed soldiers or armed mercenaries, the Chinese seem to have learned from the mistakes of others. They wear civilian clothes and spend a good deal of time drinking tea with locals. The Chinese clearly want to win over the Afghans, and that includes the Taliban and other insurgents. Some EFG sources maintain that the Chinese have made payments to guerrillas through the ISI and other Pakistani intermediaries. A precedent was set by the Unocal and Bridas oil companies when they tried to negotiate access rights for natural gas pipelines in the 1990s, and found the most profitable approach was to negotiate with all sides. (The project never came to fruition despite the involvement as Unocal consultants at the time, Hamid Karzai and former US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalizad).

While the Chinese ventures promise to benefit local communities, these may not all result in jobs for Afghan. The Chinese like to rely on their own workers to do both menial and high level work. Engineers, cooks and drivers tend to be Chinese, exported for the duration of the project. The murder of 11 Chinese workers on a Chinese construction project in Kunduz in 2004 was officially blamed on insurgents, but it is generally believed that the killings were carried out by local inhabitants, angry at not being offered employment. MCC insists that its Aynak project will be different and that once it has trained Afghan operational teams, only the core administrative staff will be Chinese. The Chinese embassy also suggests that other jobs may be forthcoming as Chinese entrepreneurs launch businesses ranging from restaurants to factories in Kabul.

Although the World Bank and an American consulting firm oversaw the auction process for the Aynak project, the Washington Post reported that some sources claim the Chinese paid over $20 million (some estimate it at $30 million) in bribes to Muhammad Ibrahim Adel, who was then Minister of Mines and Industries. Adel denies the

charge. Nevertheless, Karzai fired him from his job. Both World Bank and other international experts maintain that the Chinese bid was far superior to the other bids and achieved the contract on its own merits.

Although the Chinese were showing considerable zeal in moving the Aynak project forward in 2012, it was already encountering problems. Archeologists were struggling with imposed time limits to complete their work to save priceless archeological and cultural artifacts before Chinese bulldozers move in to destroy an irreplaceable heritage. Uncontrolled disposal of toxic waste was also polluting vital water sources. NGOs warned that the forced removal of villagers and attempts to underpay workers could spark riots and possibly an armed response

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Chinese barracks at the Aynak mine site. Photo©Edward Girardet

The National Solidarity Programme
By Naheed Mustafa

Perhaps the most successful of recovery initiatives focused on grassroots is the Afghan-run National Solidarity Programme, or NSP. With thousands of locally-elected councils throughout the country, the NSP seeks to respond to real needs from the ground up rather than dealing with policies imposed from Kabul or by the international community. It allows villagers to decide what they need as part of their own visions for the future. Canadian journalist Naheed Mustafa provides an inside glimpse into the workings of the NSP.

When the opportunity for a road trip into Afghanistan's north presented itself back in 2009, I snapped at it. My ultimate destination was a small village in Faryab province's Pushtun Kot district to see the local face of development.

A friend and I loaded up the jeep and started our journey. We headed out of Kabul through Parwan and Baghlan, then to Samangan and Balkh. From there I headed west then south from Jowzjan into Sar-e-Pul and finally headed west again into Faryab.

The scenery was - as with much of Afghanistan – rural and sparsely populated with mud houses nestled in bright green fields, mountains all around. There were small roadside markets along the way; enterprising young boys sold trinkets or food off the backs of donkeys. We passed through the occasional town with a larger bazaar where I could buy anything from plastic slippers to tiny dolls to burkas.

We eventually arrived in Maimana, Faryab's capital, the roads thick with mud. The early spring rain had made a mess of things. The village was about an hour's drive away. We drove in a steady rain through moist riverbeds and up the side of a mountain on to a plateau where we were greeted by a group of men and scores of little children. The women peeked out at us from behind doors and windows. The icy mud made it difficult to walk without slipping yet the villagers wore simple open sandals. Some children had hats and jackets – the occasional few without pants – but the majority were little balls, puffed up in layers of clothes and sweaters.

Northern Afghanistan is seasonally gripped by profound food shortage and drought. This was one of those times.

One of the men told me that roughly 70% of the village's livestock had been sold off or eaten. They were relying on food rations from the World Food Program (WFP) to get them through the rest of the cold season. But the villagers were not passive in the face of the many challenges before them.

This village was among thousands of rural communities working with Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program (NSP). Through its locally elected and run council, the people of this small village, tucked in the mountains, had a direct hand in envisioning and shaping their future. Through cooperation with the NSP, the village now had a new road. Sure, it was narrow and made of gravel, but it allowed them a chance to move a little more easily and opened up opportunities for greater trade with neighbouring villages. They could get to the town – and medical help – a little easier. As one villager said to me, "it might take an hour but at least we can get there." They also had a one-room school that ran in shifts – one for boys and one for girls.

The existence of the road helped one savvy young man start a one-car taxi business, ferrying groups of people into and out of area villages. The people were, no doubt, still poor but they could see a better life for themselves and their children.

Back in 2001, the post-Taliban administration in Kabul set about establishing a national vision for developing Afghanistan by focusing on, among other things, employment, transportation, education, and health.

The most successful of these national programs, by all accounts, has been the National Solidarity Program (NSP) – the Afghan program for development run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Funding comes from a variety of foreign donors and the money is administered through the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Technical help comes in the form of international advisors and large and small non-governmental organizations facilitating at the local level.

Despite the outside aid, the NSP is an Afghan-led, Afghan-run program. The project is based on the idea that successful development is community driven and when the people who are to benefit establish the goals, there is greater buy-in, and therefore, greater success, in achieving those goals.

The NSP mission is built around village-level Community Development Councils (CDC) -- locally elected bodies comprised of people living in the communities that elect them. Women's participation is a requirement and they currently make up

anywhere from 35-38% of CDC membership. Each community must have at least 25 families. Smaller villages are encouraged to join together to work on projects. The CDCs, with input from the local community, decide on their own needs. Some 80% of the projects focus on infrastructure like roads, schools, irrigation canals, or clean water supply.

The NSP was rolled out in three phases beginning in 2003. Now in its third and final phase, the program has, so far, reached more than 23 000 rural communities and approved more than 50 000 local projects. The program has disbursed a little over $860 million in block grants that are capped at $60 000 per community. The relatively small grant size ensures that money is easily absorbed and tracked. As part of the plan, community members must also come up with at least 10% of the project cost whether it is through in-kind contributions or labour.

Phase three of the program will run until 2015. Since the beginning of this final phase in 2011, 8000 new communities have established CDCs and some 5000 communities have received repeat grants to further their development activities. The ultimate goal of this third phase is to cover the remaining 16 000 communities that have never received money and to give a second block grant to 12 000 communities that have successfully used their first grant. The NSP is funding projects in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces.

The NSP, of course, is not without its failures – joint projects between villages gone awry; a breakdown in communication leading to the non-completion of a project; the exclusion of women from decision making. While women's participation is mandated, barriers do exist depending on local culture as well as the quality of the local-level leadership. Indeed, when the NSP was first established, many communities resisted participating simply because they were required to include women in the process. And, obviously, a less representative CDC means project selection won't reflect the desires and priorities of the entire community.

Perhaps the biggest concern involving the NSP right now is insecurity. The road trip I took just three years ago is most likely undoable today (at least, in the way I did it) with many of the districts I drove through now controlled by the Taliban during the night. While the Taliban have been establishing a foothold in the north for some time now, the level of violence has increased dramatically in the last couple of years. Pushtun

Kot district, mostly peaceful just a few years ago, now sees daily conflicts between Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces.

Given the increasing violence, how will the NSP continue to reach people? And if it does continue to run, what kinds of compromises will the program have to make to negotiate its way into local communities? Will the requirement for elections or women's participation be dropped? What happens if facilitating NGOs are unable to enter districts where NSP projects are ongoing? How will insecurity affect the monitoring process?

The international community is now thinking about Afghanistan post-2014 and the sort of long-term commitment it wants to make; political settlement and security forces are at the top of that discussion agenda. But if the international community is interested in investing in Afghans it is worthwhile to remember the NSP has proven to be a program that brings tangible benefits down to the village level, something internationals have struggled with from the start. Afghans, through the CDCs, have shown themselves to be reliable partners and effective managers at the local level and NSP successes have shown people the state can, in fact, do something right.

Naheed Mustafa *is a Canadian award-winning journalist and broadcaster, who also covers Afghanistan and Pakistan*

Private Military Contractors: Dogs of War?

By William Dowell

According to figures from the US Central Command, the US Defense Department was employing 107, 796 private contractors as of the 2nd quarter of 2013, or roughly 1.43 private contractors for each US soldier. The cost to US taxpayers for 2012 was estimated at $174 billion. Most of these contractors work at mundane tasks in construction, logistics or communications, but according to CentCom, just under 18,000 are employed in what's generally referred to as "private security." Of these, 1,378 are American citizens and another 1,573 come from countries other than Afghanistan. Slightly more than 15,000 are Afghans. At least 55 Private Military Companies, known informally as PMCs, vie for lucrative contracts.

Whether these companies should officially be classed as mercenaries, private militias, or simply as high priced bodyguards, is a matter of heated debate. The best known of the companies, Blackwater, which now calls itself Academi, and DynCorp are essentially private armies. Cofer Black, a former top US government anti-terrorist expert who served as Blackwater's co-chairman from 2005 to 2008, boasted during his tenure at the company that it was capable of producing a brigade-sized force, if needed.

The United Nations General Assembly passed the International Convention against Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries on December 4, 1989, but both the United States and Great Britain refused to ratify the agreement, although more than 30 countries have already signed on.

The technical definition of a mercenary is a soldier whose major motive for fighting is financial gain. Most of the private military companies, such as DynCorp and Academi (formerly known as Blackwater and then Xe) insist that they are not mercenaries in the traditional sense of the term. CentCom makes a distinction by insisting that private military contractors are not allowed to engage in offensive operations. That fiction is harder to maintain with companies like Blackwater/Academi which field their own armed helicopters and have a reputation for supplying the CIA with support during black ops.

Whichever terminology one decides to use, most Afghans see these companies as guns for hire, and in the end they are similar to the militias favored by Afghan warlords—the principal differ-

British private contractors in Helmand. Photo@Edward Girardet

ence being that they are better armed and don't speak the language. What particularly galls most Afghans is the number of incidents in which contractors have opened fire on innocent bystanders and then been hustled out of the country. Some of these shootings may be legitimate accidents, but the fact that Afghans have no say in the matter underscores their sense of impotence and the conviction that the country no longer belongs to them. The fact that the Karzai was forced against his will to grant legal immunity to military contractors makes the government in Kabul seem like a puppet controlled by foreign interests. .

In fact, while a US or ISAF soldier who commits a crime is subject to court martial, military contractors initially fell into a grey legal area. They were neither soldiers nor civilians. Afghan courts could not touch them, but they were also exempt from the US Universal Code of Military Justice, known as the UCMJ, which only applies to civilians accompanying US troops in time of war. Without a declaration of war from the US Congress, the

fighting in Afghanistan does not legally qualify as a war, at least according to the UCMJ. This situation changed in 2007, when Congress amended the military appropriations bill to change the UMCJ's wording. It now covers civilians accompanying military forces in a "declared war or a contingency operation." The drawback from the new wording is that it raises the question of whether civilian journalists accompanying American forces also come under the UCMJ.

A deeper concern is the effect that hiring mercenaries is likely to have on Afghan perceptions of the war effort as a whole. No one likes to be pushed around by armed foreigners. It is a point that most Americans, who have studied their own history, should understand. During the American Revolution, Britain's King George III hired some 30,000 Hessian mercenaries. The intention was to put down protests by unruly colonials, but the strategy led to intense rage at the thought that an Englishman would engage foreigners to kill fellow Englishmen. The effect was to crystallize resistance against the British crown and to intensify determination in the 13 colonies to rid them selves of the monarchy.

The presence of foreigners, in short, violated the American colonial ideals of loyalty and ethnic identity. The comportment of private military companies in Afghanistan and in Iraq has had much the same effect.

How did we come to this pass? Who are the mercenaries and where do they come from? As mentioned above, 15,000 of the private security contractors in Afghanistan are Afghans, but many of these are little more than independently organized militias for hire. Many of them belong to warlords accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Assigning them an official status in government functions obliterates any credibility that the Kabul administration might hope to have. In some cases, these militias are suspected of not only participating in extortion but also of aiding the enemy.

Hamid Karzai attempted to outlaw all private military contractors in 2010, but he was forced to back down or risk losing millions in development and assistance aid. Karzai bitterly referred to most of Afghanistan's 55 private military contractors as "thieves by day and terrorists by night."

Not everyone hates mercenaries, of course. Queen Elizabeth I commissioned privateers as an affordable way of expanding the Royal Navy's reach in combating the Spanish Armada and later in breaking the stranglehold that Spain had over the Caribbean

and Atlantic maritime routes. The use of mercenaries dropped off in the mid-19th century due in part to the concentration of global power that resulted from the spread of colonialism. Britain and France maintained large standing armies that were financed in part by their colonial possessions. Colonialism absorbed most of the available military talent, and relying on national armies guaranteed, continuity, discipline and centralized control. All of that changed dramatically with the collapse of colonialism in the 1960s.

The sudden proliferation of newly formed, supposedly sovereign countries, many of which were arbitrarily granted artificial borders that frequently ignored ethnic and tribal realities, was bound to lead to a new era of turbulence. Most of the new administrations lacked both experience and any comprehensive power base, and the most direct way to guarantee support tended to be through patronage, bribery and corruption.

To make matters worse, while many of these new entities possessed enormous wealth in terms of natural resources, much of it was unevenly distributed. Given the political weakness, lack of general development and low levels of education, it was only a matter of time before adventurers sought to separate the profitable regions from the rest, effectively leaving the poorer areas to fend for themselves or revert to their former native life in the jungle or desert.

One of the first examples of the new trend was the attempt by Moise Tshombe to secede the mineral rich state of Katanga from the newly formed Democratic Republic of the Congo in July 1960. Tshombe had support from Belgian mining interests and 6,000 Belgian troops who stayed behind. He also had some sympathy from the US, since the Congo's new Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, had been outspokenly anti-colonialist and seemed to be leaning towards the Soviet Union. The bloody civil war that followed was widely seen as a neocolonial effort to keep African resources while getting rid of Africans. The Belgians were eventually forced to withdraw their regular troops, replacing them with mercenaries.

Figures like "Mad Mike" Hoare and France's "Bob" Denard, formed groups of hardened, mostly European soldiers that the mining interests could hire for cash. The advantage was that they offered Tshombe and Belgian mining interests deniability as well as professional experience.

Mad Mike Hoare later volunteered his services to the US dur-

ing the Vietnam War, offering to fight the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, but the Pentagon declined. At the time, Washington dismissed freelancers like Hoare and others as amateurs who were likely to be difficult to control. While the number of low intensity conflicts mushroomed, the ability of the former major powers to continue to finance large, standing armies decreased dramatically. A number of trends soon converged to accelerate the shift to privatizing military force. Following the Vietnam War, General Creighton Abrams, argued for a greater reliance on the US National Guard to make up for the reduced size of the US's standing

A Blackwater helicopter gunship. The type is frequently used in Afghanistan

army. Abrams wanted to ensure that if the US went to war again, the cause would have to be important enough to have broad public support. Otherwise deploying the National Guard would prove politically unsustainable.

The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center mobilized public opinion, but the Bush administration's decision to go to war both in Iraq and Afghanistan quickly stretched the Army to its limits. As both conflicts began to look increasingly futile, recruitment became more difficult. No one wanted to see a return to a national draft. The PMCs began to look like a more politically expedient option. The phenomenon was boosted by the fact that the end of the Cold War led to dramatic reductions in many of the world's armies during the 1990s. An estimated six million former soldiers

were suddenly looking for work, and that included many former members of elite commando units such as Delta Force, Rangers and Seal teams.

While the changing geopolitical situation favoured PMCs, there was no denying that the shift to privatized armies also proved highly lucrative to Washington insiders who had played a major role in formulating government policy and now promised to reap rich rewards from their participation in shifting work to what amounted to private, for-profit armies. A single bodyguard for a major PMC might be paid as much as US$2,222 a day, roughly ten times the cost of maintaining an equivalent rank in a national army. Although it cost nearly a half million dollars a year to deploy a private military contractor, the funding could often be hidden in black budgets for intelligence operations which are shielded from oversight from all but a few highly select members of the US Congress.

Estimates are that anywhere from 15 per cent to 40 per cent of aid and development funding to Afghanistan never left Washington. The term "Shirley Highway bandits," refers to the freeway that winds past the Pentagon and links it to the hoards of private contractors trying to cash in on lucrative government handouts. The old saying that "you have to spend money to make money," was never truer than in Afghanistan and Iraq. Much of the money that was supposed to have gone into development and aid projects has gone to PMCs, ostensibly to provide security, which would otherwise have been provided by regular troops at a tenth the cost.

Not surprisingly, the security companies have lobbied massively in Washington, and have consistently upped the ante in Afghanistan itself by convincing diplomatic missions, aid agencies and private development firms that they need to engage costly protection in order to operate. (Many of the more experienced humanitarian organizations believe that developing good relations with local communities is a better form of protection).

Blackwater (now "Academi") is a prime example of how politics and inside connections favored the shift. The company was co-founded in 1997 by Eric Prince, the heir to an auto parts fortune. Both Prince and his family had been significant donors to the Republican Party, a fact that enabled Prince to open doors in Washington.

Prince, who eventually managed to spin Blackwater into nine separate companies, had been a naval cadet at the US Naval

Academy at Annapolis but had only lasted three semesters. He claimed that he dropped out because he objected to the approach Annapolis used in forming US Navy officers. He later re-enlisted in the Navy, attended officer candidate school, and volunteered as a Navy Seal. That enlistment lasted three years. And Prince dropped out again when his father died. In 1997, Prince bought 7,000 acres of the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina next to the border with Virginia and turned it into a black ops training facility. The name "Blackwater" was a reference to the colour of the water, blackened by peat.

The company immediately involved itself in clandestine CIA missions, and won a government contract to train US Navy sailors following the attack on the USS Cole off the coast of Yemen in October 2000. In contrast to conventional CIA cover organizations, Blackwater offered deniability without retirement benefits. With the right friends in high places, Blackwater could do the kind of things that some people in the CIA wanted to do, but would be likely to be blocked by Federal law and Congressional oversight. As a privately held company Blackwater could operate under the radar screen and independently of any government efforts to rein in the CIA.

The company was hardly short of friends in Washington. Cofer Black, Blackwater's co-chairman from 2006 through 2008 had run the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (CTC) at the time of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and from 2002 through 2004, he had coordinated antiterrorism for the US State Department. Earlier in his career, he had spent 28 years in the CIA's Directorate of Operations. After his time at Blackwater, Black helped set up a separate PMC focused on private intelligence collection, while continuing to maintain connections to Blackwater. Black's subsequent company, Total Intelligence Solutions, was originally created by Robert Richer, who had previously headed the CIA's Near East division.

The problem with running black operations is the absence of oversight and control over who gets hired and over the true goals of the organization. Blackwater had no obligation to tell anyone how much money it was making or to explain his long-range intentions. Prince's conservative political tendencies and his evangelical Christian background raised suspicions that he might be trying to carry out a 21st Century Christian crusade against Muslims in general. The fact that the company operated in secrecy meant that even wild rumors were likely to be believed.

In 2009, Prince, who had converted to Catholicism, began distancing himself from the company, which cryptically changed its name to Xe. The new name heightened suspicions that the company might be on a Christian Crusade. The "X" was interpreted as referring to the Greek letter Chi, the initial letter in the Greek word for Christ. The "e" was taken to stand for "epsilon," the first letter in "Evangilon" the Greek word for Evangelist.

Whatever the explanation, the company changed its name in 2011 to Academi, a supposed reference to Plato's Academy, which its new CEO, Ted Wright, explained was chosen to convey a "more boring image," or at least one that was more discrete. Prince dropped out from direct participation in 2009 and eventually moved to Abu Dhabi, where he set up another company, Reflex Responses. In 2011, Bobby Ray Inman, who had previously worked for NSA and the CIA, took over as head of the company's board of directors. At the same time, Ted Wright took over as CEO, and besides the name change to Academi, tried to set up a more orderly system of governance. The company's new board of directors was packed with former government officials.

While the use of PMCs may have seemed like a practical solution to providing immediate, short-term military support at a minimum political cost, the fact that these companies are primarily staffed by former intelligence and special operations personnel means that any reliance on them by civilian aid and development groups can easily turn out catastrophic. In the best of times, NGOs are automatically suspected of being spies, and consequently legitimate targets.

US efforts to set up "fusion centers" so that NGOs and the military could share information, further enhanced suspicions and dramatically increased the vulnerability of NGO and development personnel, who were already at risk. The fact that many PMCs enjoy special privileges and tend to act with arrogance towards ordinary civilians tends to increase the alienation. Even wearing sunglasses works to distance the individual PMC staffer from the local population. Many ordinary Afghans loathe the PMCs because of what they perceive to be arrogance, rudeness and lack of cultural sensitivity. To make matters worse, a growing percentage of the local population no longer sees any difference between military personnel, mercenaries or aid workers. This puts anyone working in development or humanitarian affairs at a greatly increased risk.

In determining the impact of PMCs on Afghanistan, it is the Afghan perspective that should count more than domestic American politics. Nevertheless certain historical parallels merit consideration. The fragile glue that holds Afghans together is their sense of ethnic, tribal and

clan identity. The same was true with the 13 original American colonies. George III's decision to hire foreigners to kill his own subjects ended any legitimacy that the monarchy might have had. Both Hamid Karzai and the government in Pakistan face a similar dynamic. The citizens of Afghanistan and Pakistan may fight one another internally, but, as the Soviets learned, when a foreigner enters the fray, Afghans band together to defend their own kind. When the foreigner's prime motive is financial gain and the rest of the country is poor, the sense of alienation can be intense. As soon as Hamid Karzai found himself forced to rely on highly paid foreign mercenaries for his own protection, he no longer counted as a true Afghan. He became, instead, a puppet of foreign interests.

The effect should not be difficult to understand. We have all reacted in the same way at one time or another. When it comes to the Private Military Companies, another critical factor enters into the calculations. Security contractors are at best a temporary stopgap measure, and an expensive one at that. They are basically unsustainable over the long haul, whereas an insurgent group, whose main driving force is ideological conviction is likely to be around for a long time. During the American Revolution, George III counted on putting down the uprising quickly and then returning to normal. As it turned out, the American colonial population had grown to four million people covering an immense territory.

George III could never muster enough troops to do the job. The arithmetic was stacked against him. The only option was withdrawal and a general recognition that the colonies had to work out their future on their own. The same may well hold for Afghanistan, particularly if the United States insists on maintaining bases on Afghan soil while ignoring what happens to the rest of the country.

***William Dowell** is a Geneva-based journalist and writer who has covered international affairs for the past several decades. He is also co-editor of the essential Field Guide to Afghanistan.*

Security Tips

By Graham Flood-Hunt

*British security and risk specialist, **Graham Flood-Hunt,** offers some tips for aid workers, journalists, consultants and others to bear in mind while in Afghanistan. Working, operating, travelling or living in politically unstable areas is always a challenge. When there is also a serious risk of random violence preparation is essential.*

It always pays to learn about recent safety and security-related events, but the shrewd operator also takes a look at how the general situation has evolved over the years. For that matter, anyone working in Afghanistan today needs to be aware of why certain developments have taken place in the years following the Soviet occupation. For example, it helps to know that many insurgents opposing the international community today were formerly supported by the US, Pakistan or Iranians during the 1980s. The Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan and its webportal, www.efgafghan.com are a step in the right direction. But there are many other excellent books out there. (See suggested reading list at the end of this Infobrief).

A first step is to identify which areas in which you are likely to be working, including routes to and from these locations. It is important to research how these areas have been affected by the war, and also to learn the details of any security incidents that may have occurred recently. The northern province of Kunduz, for instance, was relatively calm until NATO (notably German troops) became involved after 2004. Creating an overview is important when it comes to developing a plan that avoids danger and enables you to respond effectively if something happens.

If you are working for a large organisation, you should familiarize yourself with its standard operating procedures, general safety guidelines and contingency plans. You need to understand exactly how you fit into these plans, what is expected of you and what you can expect from your employer. Don't guess. Ask questions. You deserve the best possible support. There is always the danger that security plans may not have been updated or they may no longer be appropriate. It is up to you to find out. If you feel security measures don't fit the current situation, you should bring it to the attention of the person responsible for security. These need to be revised as a matter of urgency - it may

save your life or someone else's.
Reading about procedures is a good start, but be sure to take advantage of safety and security training events and make an effort to attend sessions– preferably before deployment. Remember, you are the priority.

If you are a member of a small group, or will be deployed alone, organising a support structure would be a smart start. Book yourself on a hostile environments course and a first aid course whether this is your first deployment or you are seasoned field worker. It is always important to update key skills and information. Be selective and choose a reputable training provider, you may have to foot the bill yourself, but it is good investment. Immediately you arrive in country ensure you get updated landmine risk and security briefings. The threat changes constantly, so it is essential to refresh your knowledge regularly. If possible try to place yourself under the safety and security umbrella of the United Nations or the International Committeee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The only drawback is that you will be expected to comply with their security restrictions and advice without exception or argument. Fertile sources of information can be friends, colleagues, contacts who have been in the area for a good while. Finding out from local people what they think, or believe about the situation, can be useful in predicting local reactions to events. This may be quite different from the official international overview. For example, if you are planning on travelling by road, then check with local truck drivers. They often have a better sense of the risk than anyone else.

UNDSS (UN Department for Safety and Security) holds daily briefings at the UNDP office in Kabul and can be contacted at other times if you need advice.
Creating a personal network of contacts within the international aid community can provide an informal warning system. Information takes time to filter down officially; however, a call from a friend with key information will give you a head start at taking effective action to avoid problems.

Locations frequented by civilians and particularly foreigners make excellent targets. The attacks on Kabul's Serena Hotel in January 2008 and the Intercontinental Hotel in June 2011 proved that even high profile armed protection does not guarantee complete security. Avoid these types of locations. Also avoid big publicised events. The unprecedented bombing of a hospital in Logar province in June 2011 caused many local fatalities and caused shock and widespread condemnation. The UN report of

June 2011 showed an increase in civilian fatalities during 2010 to 2,777 deaths, the worst year since records began in 2007.

Incidents have led many to believe that international aid agencies and relief workers are being deliberately selected as targets.

Two Oxfam workers were killed by a roadside bomb in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan in September 2010, which caused the NGO to suspend operations. The month before, ten members of the International Assistance Mission were murdered in Nuristan.

The UN itself has suffered direct assaults. An attack by insurgents on a Kabul guesthouse in October 2009, killed five UN staff and wounded nine others. Demonstrators stormed a compound in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif in April 2011, killing seven international UN staff. The unspoken rule that aid workers are 'off limits' clearly does not apply in Afghanistan.

The withdrawal of international troops and frequently aired doubts about the competence of Afghan security forces, make it doubtful that the security will improve significantly any time soon.

For your personal safety and security it is crucial that you understand what is going on around you, weigh up the pros and cons and decide whether you want to stay and work in Afghanistan. This is not a location where you can exist in a state of paranoia and fear and still be able to work efficiently. However, aid workers, agencies and journalists have worked in Afghanistan for many years effectively. A sensible attitude prioritizing personal safety and security, comprehensive preparation, extensive and proactive research and healthy caution have helped many to avoid serious incidents.

The following security tips are based on the personal experience of EFG editors, interviews with journalists and NGO staff, and advice provided by UN security manuals.

Before entering Afghanistan:

DO get the correct immunizations prior to visiting Afghanistan. Follow an antimalarial regime, and always carry oral rehydration salts (ORS).

DO put together a "survival belt" with a basic first aid kit, shell dressing, Swiss Army knife or equivalent, string, space blanket, poncho, ballpoint pen or pencil, notebook and your personal

documents. If you lose everything, you at least have this.
DO get insurance before travelling to Afghanistan, and make sure that the "threat of war and kindred risks" does not invalidate your policy. Make sure you are covered for possible loss of limb or life through landmine damage (SEE INSURANCE).

On arrival in-country:

DO go to the daily security briefings offered by UNDSS (UN Department of Safety and Security) at the UNDP's headquarters in Kabul.
DO attend a landmine and UXO awareness briefing (through the UN's Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan or Handicap International). Know the different types of mines. Be sure you know what 'cluster bombs' look like and the indicators and markings for minefields as well as how to deal with a mine-casualty situation.
DO keep updated on areas of mine and UXO contamination.
DO NOT do not take "short-cuts" when travelling by road. Stones painted red denote mined areas, however, the absence of markings is NOT a guarantee that you are in a danger free zone!
DO NOT step off the pavement in towns or rural areas for a toilet break, you may trigger a mine. A safe alternative is to take along a plastic bag
DO minimize time spent in bazaars and crowded areas. When you enter a bazaar, leave by a different route. Do not go back the way you came in. This avoids spur of the moment kidnapping.
DO keep car doors locked at all times. This prevents carjacking.
DO pay know the curfew in each destination and stick to it.
DO dress and behave in accordance with the local culture and religion (SEE CLOTHING & KIT and TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS).
DO avoid asking indiscreet questions or discussing religion and politics in public. What seems normal at home may be offensive in Afghanistan.
DO NOT walk alone through unknown cities or villages. Find a local guide or driver. Always vary your route and never backtrack.

Know what is happening and take appropriate precautions. More than half of security incidents occur during travel and most take place after dark. Prepare and plan your work accordingly.

REMEMBER: SECURITY IS A STATE OF MIND

Every day advice:

DO plan ahead. Write out an agenda and make sure you have everything you need for where you are going.
DO be discreet. Don't tell everyone where you are going, but make sure that some trusted friends know. Keep it on a need to know basis. Both the Taliban and other insurgents monitor Facebook and Twitter feeds, so don't broadcast your travel arrangements on the Internet.
DO NOT carry illicit drugs. Keep prescribed medication in original packaging with a short description of what it is in Dari and Pashtu. This can be useful if you are challenged.
DO NOT handle or fire weapons of any sort.
DO NOT take alcohol with you on any mission at any time.
DO NOT promise local people anything you cannot deliver. Do not make promises on behalf of others.

Crime:

DO NOT always stay informed. Accurate information can enhance your safety.
DO remain alert to changes in the situation where you work.If something doesn't 'feel right' do not ignore it. Assess, clarify and act accordingly.
DO NOTcarry valuable items where they can be seen in public, e.g. gold chains, cameras etc.
DO learn the locations of nearest hospitals and medical clinics.
DO keep your passport with visas on you at all times.
DO carry a flashlight (LEDs last longer), and some money on you at all times
DO have your cell phone and radio with you. Make sure the battery is charged and that you have phone credit. Keep a separate list of emergency numbers on you in case you lose your phone.
DO be very careful when you speak to Afghan women, and take the advice of experienced agency workers.
DO NOT delay. If an incident takes place while you are away from your office or residence, radio your headquarters and move immediately to the nearest international agency building. If possible, inform the UN Area Security Coordinator (ASC) of the situation (SEE TELECOMMUNICATIONS & RADIO).
DO NOTfight back if you are hijacked or robbed. Stay calm, act confidently and cooperate (within reason).
DO NOT buy obviously looted historical items which may be offered to you.

Road travel:

Check the latest security status for travel around Afghanistan with

UNDSS. The UNOCHA can provide maps of high risk areas. If you are stopped at a checkpoint, it is important to defuse any tension that might dvelop. Do not appear arrogant or insistent about your "rights of passage," and **Do not make the guard lose face. Listen before speaking.** Try to find common ground. Bring in some humour, practice your Dari or Pashto. Although you should generally stay inside your vehicle, smile and, if you have to get out, shake hands or touch the guard gently on the shoulder Afghan men are very tactile, especially in Kandahar!

When travelling by car remember:

DO use a recommended local driver.
DO be careful of what you say in front of Afghan drivers or passengers.
DO divide money between yourself and your colleagues if you need to carry large amounts.
DO travel in two car convoys especially at night. No single vehicles.
DO inform your headquarters of your departure, proposed route and arrival. Take a cellphone, HF or VHF radio and Satphone.
DO call in to your base station regularly during long journeys – usually every 60 minutes or when entering or leaving an area where there is a cell phone/radio.
DO always log in any long journeys with the local UN/ACBAR office.
DO pre-select 'reporting points' where you know you will be able to communicate your position.
DO plan your route identifying hospitals, fuel stations, safe havens (ie other aid agency compounds), safe places for meal/toilet stops (figure these into your schedule).
DO ensure that your base station has a copy of the same map you are using, knows your route and knows the locations of your reporting points. Calling in at the reporting points will allow your base station to monitor and log the progress of your journey. In an emergency others knowing your location is crucial if you need assistance.
DO get advice on where you may need armed escorts or unarmed guides.
DO be adaptable and prepared to change your plans at short notice
DO keep your fuel tanks full at all times.
DO have a back-up driver in your group who must have a working knowledge of the vehicle you will be travelling in. If your usual driver becomes tired, ill or injured this is essential.
DO carry basic spare parts, tools, tyres, flashlights, fire extinguishers, water and first-aid kit in your vehicle at all times (see check list). Know how to use these items.

DO keep cameras, cassettes and other valuable items hidden from view at checkpoints.
DO keep the windows wound up and the doors locked, especially after dark.
DO always park your vehicle 'back-in, front out' in case you need to make a quick exit. This applies especially in your compound at night.
DO always be polite with whomever you deal with in any situation. Often it is better that your Afghan colleagues or driver talk first especially at checkpoint.
DO try to radio your base station if you are being hijacked. Only do this if it can be accomplished without the hijackers noticing. Do not compromise your safety..
DO NOT drive alone.
DO NOT drive in rural areas after dark.
DO NOT stay out after curfew if there is one in place.
DO NOT leave vehicles unattended in an insecure location.
DO NOT drive off-road where it may be mined.
DO NOT jump a checkpoint: DO slow down, turn on the cabin lights (if you are travelling at night), have your ID easily accessible, chat with the guard and always be patient and cooperative if searched.
DO NOT get out of your vehicle at checkpoints unless unavoidable be patient and cooperative if you or your car are searched.
DO NOT forget that checkpoints can be targets so passing through them expeditiously is to your advantage.
DO NOT never raise your voice or get into an argument at a checkpoint.

Public Transport:

NGO workers and most kowledgeble foreigners no longer use public transport because of the security situation.

Walking and cycling:

Some experienced aid workers like to get around by bicycle or on foot. This is not recommended outside secured areas sometimes called 'boxes'. Even in secured areas, caution should be exercised.
The risk of kidnapping is serious. Public crowded areas do not offer the same deterrent effect as in many other countries. Travel in pairs and/or take a local guide. If you are a women and you are followed, molested or beaten in a public place, the best tactic is to make a scene by shouting or screaming. Often the offending persons will be afraid and take flight if other passers-by start noticing.

Emergencies

The UN and ICRC categorize emergency status at different levels

depending on the gravity of the threat. Higher threat levels can require the evacuation of all non-essential personnel. If you want UN or ICRC protection and/or evacuation you must inform them ahead of time and then play by their rules. A BBC television crew violated this rule when it kept an evacuation convoy waiting so that it could get last-minute footage for a news report. This resulted in endangering the entire convoy. Evacuations have to be planned in advance, so do not expect to be able to jump on the evacuation bandwagon at the last minute.

Some journalists argue that the best course of action in an emergency is to seek out the local Afghan commander. If he takes you in as his guest, he will, in theory, offer you protection as a matter of honour. Whatever course of action you decide on, you need to make your decision early and then stick by it.

Some basic rules for emergency situations:

Do not overreact. First check to see if your information is accurate. Consult with the ICRC Delegate and UN Regional Representative for evacuation plans. Once you commit yourself to the care of the UN or ICRC, obey orders.

The UN has protective bunkers at Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar. These provide protection against rockets and artillery. They are intended primarily for UN personnel, and those under the UN security umbrella subject to space limitations. Contact the local UN Area Security Coordinator for current information.

If your location is being shelled or rocketed and you cannot reach a UN bunker, take shelter behind or under a solid construction ,for example the basement of your house. Stay away from windows.

If in an active war zone, sleep with your boots on and keep a small emergency pack by your side at all times with extra clothes, a space blanket, some rations, a first aid kit, and if possible, a shortwave transistor radio. You need to be able to leave on the spur of the moment.

Do not go outside during shooting. What goes up comes down. It is common for bystanders to be injured or killed by stray bullets and shrapnel.

In a medical emergency, go straight to the nearest ICRC, medical NGO or UN office. ICRC-supported hospitals with surgical units are located in Kabul (Karte Seh and Wazir Akbar Khan hospitals), Jalalabad, Ghazni and Kandahar (Mirwais hospital). The ICRC treats all emergency cases regardless of nationality.

Loss of personal possessions

If you are moving to Afghanistan for an extended period, make sure that you provide your main office with a detailed inventory of personal possessions. This will facilitate reimbursement in case of loss or destruction.

If your passport is stolen report the incident immediately to your embassy and the UN. US citizens who have a photocopy of their passport can usually get it replaced within a day. In any case, it make sense for everyone to keep a phtocopy of their passport and visa separate from the actual passport.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is widespread in certain parts of Afghanistan. In a recent incident three expatriate UN election monitors were kidnapped in broad daylight by armed men in uniform. Ultimately freed, they may have been the victims of an inside job.

To minimize the threat of kidnapping:

Make sure that your presence in-country is reported to the regional UN office, ACBAR, an NGO office or media organization, so that someone will notice if you go missing.

Keep a low profile, especially after normal working hours.

When entering and leaving your house and office, check for suspicious vehicles or individuals. Potential kidnappers will often watch a house for several days to check on your movements. If in doubt, stay at home or drive past the house, and report anything suspicious to ISAF or the UN. Request the ID of any official claiming to be Afghan police or army, even in uniform. They are required to identify themselves properly.

Alternate your routes between home and office and maintain unpredictability in your movements. .

Watch out for vehicles which may follow you. If you think you are being followed drive to the nearest UN/NGO office, checkpost or village (if on mission). Do not let the other vehicle overtake you.

Avoid driving or walking alone. Lone people are easy targets. Travel in pairs or take a guide. Always carry a hand-held radio with you.

Take advice on appropriate dress. Do not disguise yourself as an Afghan, but try not to stand out.

When answering the door or gate to your house, check who the caller is before you open the door. Look from an upstairs room if no windows are near the door/gate.

Whether the armed individual or group intend to rob, carjack or kidnap you the first minutes are the most dangerous and unpredictable. Both you and the potential aggressor are pumped full of adrenaline. Stay calm. Do not resist. It is not worth getting shot.

Suggestions if you are abducted:

Demonstrate a minimal amount of neutral cooperation with your captors, but do not volunteer money, information or other assistance.

- Avoid appearing aggressive or threatening.
- Avoid staring directly at your captors, but try to get a good mental picture of their faces and other physical attributes.
- Only try to escape if there is a good chance that you will get away. [Note: The US Army advises the best opportunity for escape is within the first 24 hours of capture. In some cases, kidnap victims who did not attempt escape were simply murdered. Whether to attempt escape or not is a difficult decision and it requires a sensitive on the spot assessment of the situation.--The Editors]
- Observe your kidnap location and routes to it, if possible.
- Talk to your captors. Creating dialogue can sometimes reduce the risk of violence and may improve your conditions.
- Appear strong and impassive, even if you are terrified. Do not be submissive or arrogant since this may provoke them.
- Keep hydrated and nourished. Drink frequently – this is a priority - and eat small amounts regularly. Keep mentally and physically active; talk, think, plan; stretch & do some exercise if possible.Stay mentally alert. Get as much sleep as possible. Kidnappers are often ruthless.

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Urban recovery or chaos?
By Jolyon Leslie

When the international community stepped in to help Afghanistan with recovery during the post-Taliban period, there were many things it could have done right, but did not. The same goes for the Afghan leadership over the past decade. On-the-ground experts warned that unless imaginative urban development was undertaken as soon as the bombs stopped, such as the renovation of war-shattered Kabul and other cities, including what remained of the Old Towns, the building of proper sewage and water systems, and the integration of an effective public transport combined with bike paths to cut back on traffic and pollution, it would face the overcrowded and polluted horrors of what today constitutes one of Asia's fastest growing urban rates. ***Jolyon Leslie,*** *one of Afghanistan's most informed development specialists, explores the current situation and the options that remain.*

The towns and cities of Afghanistan have enchanted and dismayed visitors in equal measure over the years. In the early 16th century, the Mughal emperor Babur fell in love with Kabul's climate and natural setting, inspiring him to lay out several gardens. By contrast, colonial travellers to Kabul during the 19th century remarked on the overcrowded residential quarters - and the chaos of its bazaars. Visiting Herat in 1972, Peter Levi echoed the reaction of earlier travellers in describing the tile-clad Timurid minarets, as "strange and brilliant towers (that) made the sky look pale." As in the case of Kabul, however, accounts of the densely-populated residential quarters and bazaars of the old city of Herat were altogether less poetic.

Having lost many distinctive landmarks due to both conflict or 'development,' it is perhaps the chaotic street life that provides contemporary Afghan towns and cities with a degree of continuity with their past. Since 2002, the urban population across the country has surged, and nearly a quarter of Afghans are now thought to live in urban centres. This is manifest in the massive sprawl of unplanned suburbs around a nucleus of heavily-fortified government buildings, embassies and ostentatious residential enclaves, which are often gated. Largely confined to their "green zones," the legions of diplomats, international advisors and aid workers seem oblivious to the extent to which their presence contributes

The war has driven thousands of Afghans into Kabul and other cities, making urban reconstruction a top priority. A lack of coherent strategy has led to chaos. Here, a boy in Kabul's old town ponders an uncertain future.. Photo © Edward Girardet

to the speculative urban boom, which has both social and environmental consequences. Numerous international organizations also could have set examples of appropriate urban development by establishing compounds that did not rely on costly diesel-fuelled generators for power or which sought to respect Afghan cultural heritage in their design. These are opportunities that were discussed but rarely came to fruition.

In the main cities, garish mirror glass-clad high-rise buildings puncture the skyline in a poor imitation of Dubai. Often cited by visiting journalists as a sign of the dynamism of the Afghan economy, many of these complexes remain empty, for their prime function is said to be to launder shady profits from drug trafficking, corruption and other illegal assets rather than generating any return. Many of these buildings are own by well-connected individuals or warlords both in the government and private sector.

Well-versed in a narrative of "war damage, overwhelming population growth and a lack of resources," Afghan politicians and civil servants are reluctant to admit that it is their failure to undertake reforms or take difficult decisions that lies at the heart of the current urban crisis. There is a distinct lack of vision among both the Afghan and international leaderships. This includes taking the necessary steps to protect green areas that could be developed into urgently-needed playgrounds or parks, or to prevent private operators with privileged connections from usurping government land for private profit.

Most officials acknowledge that the many planning and urban management systems are outdated. They are of limited use in coping with what is now one of the fastest rates of urbanization in Asia. The present chaos, however, is highly lucrative - especially for those who issue building permits – and this may well be a factor in their resistance to reforms and pressure for a more transparent manner of urban governance. Attempts to protect unique cultural heritage buildings in towns, such as Kabul and Herat, have been thwarted by corrupt officials in cahoots with the entrepreneurs who, virtually the same day, would raze the structure as police stood by preventing from the restorers from taking action. Similarly, proper regulations could have ensured the building of bus lanes, sidewalks and bike paths, also used by animal or human drawn vehicles, that would promote better safety in an urban landscape with shockingly high accident rates, or reduce the stifling automobile traffic that has now gripped Ka-

bul and other cities.

In the face of these attitudes, it is perhaps little wonder that external support for urban development has been paltry, at least when compared to other sectors. The likelihood of an urban 'surge' was anticipated as early as 2002, and yet only 2.5 per cent of the 1383-6 (Afghan dates) government budget was earmarked for urban projects, with even less actually disbursed. Attempts to prepare a coherent strategy for urban development, as part of efforts to attract additional funding for the sector, have been both fitful and reactive. They have been driven more by the cycle of international donor conferences, where participants often had little idea of the needs, than any real-time analysis of the situation on the ground.

An ambitious National Urban Programme (NUP) was formulated jointly by government and international experts in 2004. This comprised five sub-programmes, including governance and management, to address "the overarching political, administrative, managerial and technical institutional structures and mechanisms that will deliver effective, efficient and accountable urban government"; community-based upgrading to ensure "the integrated upgrading of conditions for households living in informal and under-serviced housing areas, with special emphasis on marginalised and vulnerable communities, through community participation to determine investment in infrastructure and services"; land development and management, to facilitate "the development of urban land – with special emphasis on sites and services development for housing – and associated technical mechanisms, such as town planning, land registration and transfer, cadastral mapping etc. that will increase the supply of serviced land in urban areas;"

The remaining two included vital heritage conservation and revitalisation aimed at "strengthening communities" links with urban heritage, through conservation of historic buildings and areas, retaining their essential character while finding roles that can sustain urban activities;" and infrastructure and services to be improved through "....expansion of main infrastructure networks and services to standards commensurate with the availability of resources, and the strengthening of the operating agencies to ensure effective and efficient service delivery."

Such assertions sounded encouraging, but in the absence of the political will – let alone the human or financial resources – to realize this array of sub-programmes, the underlying strategy

behind the NUP appears to have been largely forgotten. In fact, there has been remarkably little acknowledgment for public debate despite concerns raised by civil society groups and media.

Six years after its formulation, only limited progress has been made in the areas defined in the NUP. Issues of sub-national (including urban) governance are being addressed by the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG), established in 2007 and currently engaged in strengthening municipalities across the country. Progress has been made in safeguarding and conservation of urban heritage, mainly through NGO-implemented initiatives in the old cities of Kabul and Herat, but these gains remain fragile as long as there is no enforcement of development controls.

Infrastructure needs have been addressed through improvements to piped water networks in Kabul and 11 other cities, funded by Germany among others, and the 'corporatization' of the national water utility. The World Bank-funded Kabul Urban Rehabilitation Programme (KURP) has enabled upgrading of infrastructure for some 250,000 inhabitants of Kabul, building on similar initiatives undertaken by Afghan and international NGOs, as well as UN Habitat, since the early 1990s. Such investments, however, well outstrip demand, and it is estimated that less than 10per cent of Kabul's population has benefited from upgrading in recent years.

A similar gap between demand and investments applies to land, with a reported backlog of some 40,000 applicants for municipal plots in Kabul alone, according to the Kabul Municipality. Only a tiny fraction of urban householders in the city have secure tenure, while a significant proportion live in homes that have been built on land that they do not own. Attempts to regularize these settlements – which will require tough decisions to be made – and to reform the system of land management, however, have made little progress. In the meantime, the very politicians who call for the removal of 'squatters' seem able to render swathes of valuable government land with complete impunity, and to sell it on for a tidy profit. If, as has been projected in the 2004 report, Securing Afghanistan's Future, the country's urban population doubles by 2015, there is a likelihood that the three-quarters of households presently denied access to affordable land or services will increase yet further, with unknown social and political consequences.

These consequences seem far from the minds of planners who, since 2006, have been engaged in the design of an "eco-neutral New Kabul" in Dehsabz, to the north east of the capital. Here, it is confidently predicted that up to three million people might settle by 2025, but already the first stage of the project has foundered on competing land ownership claims. Aside from these obstacles, the notion that the scheme will be funded largely from sales of residential and commercial land seem implausible, as do those of the "recycle-oriented resource use" in this brave new urban world. On a more practical level, the ongoing review by the Ministry of Urban Development Affairs of the master plans of five cities represents real progress, but risks remaining a paper exercise unless there is effective enforcement on the ground.

The disconnect between lofty aspirations - on the part of Afghan politicians and international donors alike - and the grim reality is borne out in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, which states that: "by end 2010; Municipal governments will have strengthened capacity to manage urban development and to ensure that municipal services are delivered effectively, efficiently and transparently; in line with MDG (Millennium Development Goal) investment in water supply and sanitation will ensure that 50per cent of households in Kabul and 30per cent of households in other major urban areas will have access to piped water."

By even the most upbeat estimates, fewer than one in ten urban residents across the country presently have access to piped water, so it is difficult to imagine how such a service deficit could have been addressed by 2010. Despite persistent claims that "public-private partnerships" might help to close this gap, experience from other countries calls into question the effectiveness of the private sector in service provision, especially if affordability is a critical issue.

As part of efforts to provide a realistic analysis of the challenges facing the sector, consultations were held between Afghan and international urban specialists during 2008, culminating in the drafting of the urban component of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Most of this analysis was removed from the highly-sanitized final version of the ANDS document that was presented to donors. This set out a case for a National Urban Policy (with barely a reference to the 2004 exercise), Institutional Reform Action Plans, Revenue Improvement Programs and Infrastructure Investment Plans, but with little detail on how these

might actually be achieved. Just as with the Afghanistan Compact, the ANDS seems to have quickly slipped into the background to make way in 2010 for "the Kabul process," which foresaw the phased transition towards transfer of security and governance responsibilities to Afghans by end 2014. This once again focused attention, as one of a series of National Priority Programmes, on the crisis that faces urban centres across the country.

While significant additional investments, including an ambitious National Urban Solidarity Programme, are being discussed, the core challenge remains a political one: the need to initiate radical reforms in how towns and cities are planned and managed and to ensure that institutions are more accountable to the urban population. Without such reforms, Afghanistan's urban landscape will remain highly volatile, with the needs of the majority of urban residents hostage to the interests of developers and their political allies.

South-African born architect Jolyon Leslie is an urban development and heritage consultant. He has managed a wide range of field programmes for NGOs and the United Nations, addressing reconstruction needs after natural disasters, post-conflict resettlement, urban recovery/ development and heritage conservation in the Middle East and central Asia. Leslie currently works as an independent consultant and is widely regarded as one of the most experienced experts on Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

Inspire:
Saving Afghanistan's Heritage
By Edward Girardet

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

During the brutal 'Battle for Kabul' of the early 1990s, whole swathes of the city were turned into Dresden-like rubble. This included parts of Kabul's renowned Old Town. The city suffered further devastation, primarily neglect, during the years that followed. This was not helped by the lack of visionary urban planning since the start of recovery from 2002 onwards when both city authorities and the international community. Both largely ignored the opportunity to do

things right.

Greedy urban developers or warlords, often with the support of corrupt government officials, have been moving quickly – sometimes overnight - to grab any potential landspaces to construct new and often totally inappropriate buildings. This was before the original structures could be saved or otherwise preserved. While such garish office blocks and residential compounds may have promised their owners millions, their initiatives are being perceived increasingly by concerned Afghans as a disgrace to their country.

While many Old Town buildings are no older than 200-300 years, they represent a significant mix of architectural and cultural influences that future generations will regret losing. Rampant urbanization is also ignoring the urgent need to build more parks and recreational spaces for both young and old.

Fortunately, a small handful of organizations have been stepping in to try and save some of the last surviving clusters of historic fabric in Kabul, Herat and other towns. One of these is the Old Town Kabul neighbourhood of Asheqan wa Arefan, which takes its name from an important shrine at its centre. This is an example of what needs to be done elsewhere in the country, where buildings of historic or cultural value still exist, before it is too late.

Since early 2003, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) (LINK http://www.akdn.org/afghanistan) headed by Jolyon Leslie, one of the country's true urban heroes, has renovated 11 homes and 15 historic public buildings using traditional methods. At the same time, the Swiss-based foundation has improved living conditions for more than 60 Old Town households. Much of this impressive change has been brought about by providing local house owners with small grants and building advice, notably to show what can be done to preserve their area's fast vanishing cultural heritage. This approach has engendered an enormous amount of pride among local inhabitants.

The AKDN has also upgraded back alleys and streets with traditional and aesthetic paving coupled with the construction of water and sewage drains. Many Kabul streets are often quagmires of rubbish, sewage and mud in the winter or heavy rainfalls. This has led to a marked improvement of basic water supplies plus a more healthy street environment. It makes it a pleasure to stroll the back lanes. Such forms of rehabilitation have benefited

nearly 20,000 residents plus generated some 80,000 days of local employment. The initiative has also helped train more than 60 apprentices instructed by 15 master-craftsmen and 65 skilled labourers, thus ensuring that traditional methods of construction are not lost.

Efforts are now being made to protect and upgrade public spaces throughout the Old Town. In the case of Zarnegar Park to the north, the AKTC has transformed a former degraded urban area littered with garbage and rubble through the planting of trees, installation of irrigation, paving and provision of public facilities. The park now offers thousands of visitors a shady place to rest, play or have picnics. The Foundation also supports various Old Town residents by providing home-based training and literacy courses for women, plus the operation of a restored community hamman or bathhouse, whose revenue is used to meet the costs of neighbourhood upgrading. A second bathhouse is currently being restored.

Together with other organizations such as the Turquoise Foundation Mountain (LINK http://www.turquoisemountain.org/), which also preserves historic buildings and supports cultural initiatives through the Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture, the AKTC works closely with the Kabul Old City Commission to oversee urban development. It also supports planners the Kabul Municipality and the Ministry of Urban Development. In 2008, the Foundation helped initiative a planning framework for the Old Town and a national policy for urban heritage preservation. (SEE URBAN).

However, turning such initiatives into reality are another issue. They often conflict with political agendas and corruption that often emerge the moment valuable property assets come into question. This is clearly an area where independent local media should investigative what is really going on.

Herat: Old city rehabilitation initiative

The western city of Herat is another urban centre of strategic, commercial and cultural significance that urgently needs more effective Old Town renovation in the face of rampant urban developers. Often regarded as the seat of Persian culture, Herat came under the rule of the Abbasid caliphate at the end of the eighth century and was renowned for the production of metalwork. At a crossroads between competing armies, traders and cultures,

Herat was home to Persians, Pushtuns, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Baluchs and Hazaras. Timur sacked the city in the 14th century, but Herat re-emerged to experience a renaissance under the rule of his son Shah Rukh. Though repeatedly ravaged by war throughout its history, many significant Islamic monuments have survived. As with Kabul, the Aga Khan Development Network has been seeking to safeguard the remnants of this unique heritage.

The distinctive rectilinear plan of Herat' s Old Town coupled with bazaar and residential quarters are what make this city so unique. One only need stroll through the Old Town to behold some of the most extraordinary wood and stone latticework on the buildings with their once extravagant inner courtyards. Sadly, however, much of this has been destroyed since 2002, largely the result of uncontrolled construction involving the destruction of historic homes or commercial buildings.

The AKDN has undertaken a series of surveys to track these rapid and often unstoppable changes that continue to ravage what is left. While city officials often appear concerned, some are secretly in cahoots with the developers. When police are called out to halt illegal development, they simply standby as the bulldozers and workmen knock down, sometimes in hours, what is left of this invaluable cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, the AKDN has sought to formulate appropriate plans for key neighbourhoods as a means of preserving the Old Town's unique character.

In 2005, AKTC began mapping all Old Town properties. To date, it has helped conserve five key historic houses and 17 public buildings, along with provision of small-scale grants to more than 70 households. Furthermore, it has upgraded basic infrastructure in two Old Town quarters providing more than 60,000 days of local employment. It has re-built drains, laid more than 4,000 square metres of stone alleyway paving and cleared away tonnes of solid and liquid waste benefitting more than half the Old Town residents. Finally, the AKTC is providing technical support for an Old Town Commission for overseeing more appropriate urban development within the historic quarter.

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Women's Rights
By Sharifa Sharif

Does political reconciliation, leading to effective peace, rule out women's rights? Or is this an artificially-imposed necessity to satisfy highly conservative elements within Afghan society? ***Sharifa Sharif*** *explores the options of women in Afghanistan today leading up to 2014 and beyond – and the threat of yet another gender retreat.*

Since the collapse of the Taliban in the fall of 2001, Afghan women have once again sailed towards brighter horizons. The voyage has begun for the third time in their history of progress and retreat. King Amanullah (1919-1925) initiated the first reforms following his visits to Europe in the early 20th century. President Daoud introduced the second wave for women's full integration in 1969. The movement died between 1992 -2001 when the mujahideen took control after the collapse of the communist People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) regime in April 1992 leading up to the Talib takeover of Kabul over four years later.

Since then, the new 2004 Afghan constitution has affirmed gender equality clearly. A Civil Law (2009) has considered violence against women a crime for the first time in the history of Afghan government. In 2009, President Hamid Karzai signed a Shia counter-law subjecting women to subordination of their husbands, but the acted stirred international outburst and opposition by women in Kabul. Women, at least in Kabul and other cities, have gained partial space and voice in all public domains. This has prompted social debate creating a more prominent language for gender equality. Afghan women have now entered the international agenda creating strong support for protecting their rights.

These are all positive signs. Equality for women, however, has remained largely part of the female agenda in Afghan society. For the majority of men, women's issues are second-

Women in Bamiyan. Some Afghan traditions place women in a subservient role limiting their possibilities.. The exclusion of women is a luxury that the country can ill afford. Photograph©Edward Girardet.

ary, just as the ministry of women's affairs is peripheral to the government. While dialogue has begun in civil society circles, it has yet to become part of the sort of nation building required to interweave development, security, peace and prosperity with issues of equal access, participation and decision-making for all the population, and not just half of it.

The situation of Afghan women is by all means not a homogeneous one. The political strategies providing legal structure for women's rights are applicable almost only for urban women. It is a different situation in the countryside, where nearly 80per cent of the population live. Traditions largely determine the lines and limits of status for the majority of women nationwide. Women's access to rights and development has remained diverse and volatile, and subject to region, ethnicity, environment, and rural or urban settings. Hence, the aspirations, attitudes and responses of women to change and development differ from village to village, valley to valley, region to region.

This diversity has existed throughout the history of Afghanistan's women's movement. In 1970s, when I was studying at a co-ed university in Kabul enjoying full access to modernity relating to female politicians, journalists, artists and musicians, young girls were being exchanged for sheep in marriage to elder married men in remote villages in both the north and south of the country.

It is hardly that much different today. While women in Kabul and some other big cities can enjoy the same sort of sophisticated training as in New York or Paris, there are many young girls in the villages just north of Kabul, who are not allowed to see a doctor in the city. (SEE HEALTH)

These on-the-ground realities represent the different contrasts of how life is led by both urban and rural women. The "war on terror" is taking place mostly in the southern and eastern Afghanistan, and largely in the villages. Scores of women and children are victims of nightly raids by NATO forces or insurgent suicide attacks. Numerous families are destroyed or caught in between these two belligerents obliging ordinary Afghans to play a very careful game of survival. While Coalition and Afghan security forces may have pushed back some Taliban in some places, most people are aware that most of the internationals may be gone by the

end of 2014, but not the Taliban.

Mothers agonize over whether to risk the lives of their boys by sending them to government schools, or to keep them at home illiterate. Daughters don't even count. While the number of girls attending in schools is on the rise in Kabul and other cities - the same goes for women working in government jobs - coupled with open access to expanding list of of TV channels and radio stations, it is a contradictory situation in the countryside, where the number of number of widows, orphans and destroyed households is also growing.

Ending the war is on every woman's agenda. While peace warms the heart of every Afghan child and adult, the questions of negotiation with the Taliban and other insurgent fronts, their potential return to power deeply worries the majority of urban women. They see their quest for equality poisoned by more appalling questions: will there be another u-turn in the women's movement? Will the Talib laws of invisible secondary citizens be forced back on them as happened from 1996 to 2001, when they controlled nearly four-fifths of the country? Will schools, work, public space and other rights be snatched away for the third time? Will violent crimes against women become the government norm yet again?

Such prospects would be the nightmare for the majority, if not all of the Afghan women. At the same time, however, given the constant death, devastation and destruction of women and children in the war zones, the appeal for peace remains embedded n the heart and mind of every woman.

Afghan women are caught between two wars. A long overdue one against oppression nourished by economic, cultural and developmental inadequacies. And a current war against terror fed by darker shadows of oppression. The current situation of Afghan women calls for a sacrifice. What frames women's response to the question of negotiation with Taliban is the cost and the price of this sacrifice? Should women and children terrorized by bombs sacrifice their lives for the promise of a prospective democracy for the future for their granddaughters? Or, should the movement risk its momentum for a volatile peace that jeopardizes women's rights altogether?

Will peace be a passive path gradually leading to extreme misogynistic norms, or will it be a moderate - and modest - form of democracy incorporating basic progressive human rights for all citizens of Afghanistan? Negotiation

Afghan girls in Khoja, photo©EdwardGirardet

with Taliban has to be conditioned to their agreement with basic principles of the current constitution. If the cost for stopping the war and saving the lives for women means wearing a scarf and studying in a segregated school, then it is worth the retreat. But, if the price means denying half of the population of its right to full citizenship and the gains made over the past century, then it represents a defeat, far too costly and bitter to swallow.

***Sharifa Sharif** is author of On the Edge of Being: An Afghan Woman's Journey (Sumach Press, 2011). **Dr Sharif** is currently a cultural advisor on Afghanistan to the government of Canada. She also served as an advisor on international affairs to Afghan President Hamid Karzai from 2007-08.*

Women in conflict & peace building
By Alfredo Witschi Cestari

*The following contribution by **Alfredo Witschi Cestari,** to whom the 4th edition of the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan is dedicated, was completed shortly before his death in 2012. (Instituto de la Paz y los Conflictos (IPAZ), Granada University, SPAIN).*

In many armed conflicts around the world, the role of women has been central and, more often than not, crucial. This was the case in Central America, where Nicaraguan female political and social actors played key roles during the Sandinista revolution; during their administration and at the end of the conflict between "contras" (the popular name given to the US-backed paramilitary fighters who fought the Sandinis) and the Sandinista government. This is how Ms. Violeta Chamorro won the presidency. In El Salvador, women in the field were not only part of the conflict as guerrilla fighters but also as heads of households and, most importantly, key actors at the community and national levels. In 1980, when the Guatemalan refugees arrived in Mexico, most women in the indigenous communities were set aside of all decisions making processes.

The vast majority seldom spoke Spanish. When they returned to their country as from 1994, almost all of them spoke the language of Cervantes and many had key roles in keeping the communities together and leading many of the changes that transformed the destiny of thousands of refugees. Refugee women evolved from weak, frightened and ready to abide to the traditionally "powerful" men, into brave, coherent, though masters of their own destinies. They were instrumental within their communities' leadership when they obtained a seat at the negotiation table, together with governments and international organizations, when time came for them to organize their return home.

Today, many in the Western Hemisphere wonder why Afghan women cannot have comparable roles in their own society. The life of the vast majority of women in Afghanistan is as it used to be before and during the Taliban regime. Why the support from western countries and organizations (especially

from Western women) still meet skepticism and so little success? Why is the fate of women so strongly dependent on the patriarchal society that prevails all over the country?
Afghanistan, on the one hand, remains a very traditional and deeply religious society. As it is well known, in Afghanistan religion and tradition combined impose values that consider that women are the symbols of families' and clan's honor. On the other, women are outrageously marginalized within their own families and communities, including in relation with events that are of their own direct concern.

Alfredo Witschi Cestari

The imposition (by men) of over thirty years of an atrocious war and the lack of any kind of effective and accountable national governance, are key causes of such a situation. The country is devastated, while strength and brutality are the main pillars of power. This has not helped women to raise their profile as actors in their own society. And we, the Western "actors", either governmental or not, have not been coherent when considering how to support the fate of the women of Afghanistan.

Here are some reasons for this state of affairs:

- In the eighties, the western media reduced women's role to symbolic "VICTIMS" (widows; destitute, disempowered mothers or single heads of households; etc…) of the Soviet invasion and the communist regime. Meanwhile, no matter the amount of aid provided, the fate of women in mujahedeen ruled territories and in refugee camps was ignored.
- From the day the last soviet soldier left Afghanistan (15 February 1989) until the Taliban's entry in Kabul (17 September 1996) Western powers turned their attention far away from the country "as Afghans were killing each other, and violence against women was just part of it... "
- When the Taliban launched from Kabul the conquest of almost 90per cent of Afghanistan, suddenly, the plight of Afghan women

attracted foreign attention. Afghan women moved to the center of Western priorities as regards their country.

- The Taliban were refused access to the Afghan seat at the U.N; all dealings with the so called “emirate” were subject to the Taliban handling of the situation of women (access to education, work, public roles, etc...).
- In the UN (including myself as the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the country) we refused to move an inch from the very strict rules imposed by HQs on all dealings with the ultra-conservative mullahs.
- Western glamorous visitors (international star journalists, high members of the European Commission; representatives of Executive and Legislative branches of democratic countries, or high level UN bureaucrats) visited both Afghanistan and Pakistan, taking initiatives that were open provocations to the “de facto” rulers in Kabul (or, rather, Kandahar).
- As a direct consequence of this, for years, Afghan women and men kept on surviving in appalling conditions, alone under their powerful, radical but most inefficient rulers.

- Following the intervention of the US Armed Forces and its allies in 2001, the Western community designated the “new rulers” of this country at war, imposing a “democratic process” that has remained obscure and irrelevant for the vast majority of Afghans of both genders.

- Finally, the external support to women causes has not been coherent enough.

Former internationally condemned “war lords” became key players in inner circles of power. Criminals, who abducted, raped and killed women and young kids during the nineties (when the Afghan civil war was not in the political agenda of Western powers) assumed or resumed key public roles. Since, instead of the reconstruction and reconciliation processes that most Afghan expected, the presence of foreign troops has yielded, above all, the extension of war. The Afghan people feel betrayed and fear its future.

A visit (January/February 2012) to Afghanistan seemed to univocally confirm that only a few international actors have learned anything from the past. Conclusions of political and technical missions repeat the same recommendations that were already made at the beginning of the nineties; cooperation is obsessed by numbers and so-called “results”, instead

of the fate of people. The issue of Afghan women advancement is still very far away from reaching objectives set by benevolent supporters in Western countries. Yes, since 2002, there are women in the Parliament; women in charge of public administrations, including ministries and governorates; women on TV screens and advertisement boards. But, with few exceptions, this tiny minority of women is to be found in cities; especially in Kabul itself.

In smaller towns and in the countryside, with exceptions here and there, little if anything has changed in the lives of women. There is no difference between their lives today and their lives in the second half of the last century. Today, as in the past decade, figures pop-up in any conversation: "so many women have been trained… of which XX per cent works (seldom more than 5 to 10 per cent) in public services…" But, in fact, the large majority does not work anywhere or anymore or has never worked. More over, when women do get a public job, they are almost systematically ignored (when not harassed) by their male colleagues. Often, one can find them marginalized in a corner of an office with no assignment at all, sitting at empty desks, but ready to bow to any foreign visitor who wishes to witness the presence of women in the public administration.

More over, Afghan women of any delegation or working group, are almost systematically mute, taking the floor only if a male participant tells them to do so. In meetings with community *shuras*, in committees or commissions, one may see a woman sitting at the end of the room, all by herself and profoundly silent. If the visitor makes a remark about this, her nearest male colleague would whisper something in her ear and, before the end of the meeting, she'll ask for the floor, just to agree with what their male companions had said. Of course, there are women who are leaders, but they are rare exceptions who take enormous risks when assuming public positions. The list of female public servants murdered and maimed is long; terrible threats condition the destinies of those who persevere and their families.

At the universities, the number of female students is growing regularly, but there are still many who have to quit before completing their studies. Often, they have to marry and their tasks from then on would exclusively be related to their households. In cities like Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Ba-

myan or Herat there have been some improvements; but in places such as Kandahar or Khost, even the statistics of women in aid programs remain miserable; not to mention those of women at work.

The cause of women is, primarily, the cause of all Afghans, especially of the Afghan women themselves. They are conscious of it and they know that it will require additional generations of committed women, whose constant efforts towards a comprehensive progress, beyond urban centers, need the solidarity of their male co-nationals. Therefore, the most important signs of solidarity that they need from Western friends are PATIENCE and SUPPORT to their own initiatives. Indeed, their task is even more complex in a furiously patriarchal society at war. Exacerbated by the endless armed conflict, their reality is the result of centuries of an old and profoundly embedded set of beliefs and traditions that are casted not only in the minds of elders and male leaders or rural and uneducated men, but also in the hearts of the vast majority of the Afghan women themselves.

*--**Alfredo Witschi Cestari** was an expert on emergency management and recovery in armed conflicts and disasters. He had a long career in which he made important contributions that improved living conditions for the most vulnerable. He served as UN Head of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan and as Resident Coordinator for the UN system in Colombia.*

INSPIRE: Daring to speak out

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

Zakia Zaki was an inspiration to women journalists all over Afghanistan. A strong figure who headed Afghanistan's first post-Taliban radio station, Sada-e- Solh (Voice of Peace), located on the outskirts of Jabal-e-Saraj at the foot of the Hindu Kush north of Kabul, she was a pioneer for female journalists in the first tentative years after the fall of the Taliban. While she first operated her station as a local initiative with only FM coverage, she later managed to obtain a medium-wave transmitter enabling her to reach the whole of Kabul.

Interviewed in the heady period immediately following the fall of the Taliban, when everyone believed that peace and democracy were just around the corner, she was characteristically conciliatory towards those around her, even who might just harbor anger and suspicion against a woman so bravely outspoken and so bold a pioneer. "We have no hard feelings (against the old mujahed commanders" she said, "as long as they support democracy. But some of the local commanders are not happy that a woman is in charge of this radio station." Zakia's words were prophetic: on the night of June 5-6, 2007, she was shot and killed, as she slept with her 20-month old son in her arms.

No one has ever been convicted for her death. Rumors circulated for years that it had been a personal feud, that she had been eliminated by political rivals, or that the powers-that-be in her corner of Afghanistan were opposed to a woman heading

Mourning the murdered journalist

a radio station, especially one that sought to expose wrongdoing and promote a freer way of life.

Zakia's murder has never been solved. Other female journalists have been targeted: Shakiba Sanga Amaj, a presenter for Shamshad TV, was killed in her home just a few days before Zakia Zaki. Many expected that the position of women would improve immediately and dramatically once the Taliban had been toppled. But the prejudices against women are deeply held in Afghanistan, and not the sole purview of the black-turbanned fundamentalists. One prominent journalist in Herat, a relatively secure province in western Afghanistan, said that her life has been threatened on numerous occasions. "I used to report in Kandahar," she said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "In the heart of the Taliban, I never had a problem. But now that I am here, the warlords are making my work nearly impossible."

--EG

Afghan Youth: A neglected resource

By Lola Cecchinel

Afghans in their 20s have never seen their country at peace. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP),

these youth now account for nearly 70 per cent of the country's population. Starting with the Soviet invasion back in late 1979, and continuing through to the civil war and the NATO-led intervention following the post 9/11 attacks, young Afghans have never had the opportunity to experience life in a free and independent state. Many spent their childhood as refugees in neighbouring countries, which exposed them to a different form of life, and are still struggling to define themselves as 'Afghan'. They also feel alienated from the former Jihadists of the 1980s, the rival factions of the 1990s and the privileged elite and warlords of today who have benefitted so massively in financial and political terms from the western involvement since the end of 2001. For them, these "older" Afghans represent a different world.

When discussing young Afghans' aspirations, education comes first. For roughly half of men between 15 and 24 years old, and women, of whom 80 per cent are illiterate, schooling is an indispensable gateway to earning a stable living, particularly in the city. The emphasis on job creation and development in urban areas is driving youth from the countryside (where at least 70 percent of the population still lives) to the cities where access to education, public sector employment, and information about the outside world is greater. Learning English and computer technologies

are priorities for an urban generation now focused on a globalized world.

The current generation of increasingly educated youth has already surpassed the capacity of the existing labour market to provide new jobs. Roughly 40 per cent of unemployed Afghans are graduates from regional universities. Other higher education Afghans have been forced to accept unskilled jobs. Nepotism and corruption are barriers to employment in government or local administrations. Only a very few Afghan students can afford a Masters' degree in the US or Europe or even one provided by a private institute in Kabul. Kabuli youth, often portrayed in the western media as modern with cell phones and internet savvy, are hardly representative of the youth population in the rest of the country.

For most, emancipation from elder authority, income security and basic education remains out of reach. Without the right connections, even brilliant young scholars living in rurals, cannot make it to college, or well-equipped Kabul-based high schools, which might enable them to pull out of their rural environments. One significant problem of the international community is that key donors, such as the Americans, Germans and Scandinavians, have focused more on primary schools and universities, but not secondary establishments leaving a major gap in the educational process. Young people have little power in a society characterized by the traditional domination of elders, who tend to exclude them from decision-making processes.

Poor rural youth working in agriculture are often targets for insurgents in provinces where endemic unemployment, administrative corruption and a foreign military presence trigger disproportionate frustration towards the government and its international supporters. Many young people in the ranks of the Taliban were previously radicalized in Pakistani madrassas and then sent back to Afghanistan to participate in anti-government activities. But the insurgents also appeal to young potential fighters from the countryside because they are able to offer other options, including guns.

The arrival of thousands of foreigners occupying military bases, patrolling streets, and financing one of the world's largest development programs in a country that had spent decades under the radar has prompted the 15-24 generation to question whether a decade of investment in development really has opened a new horizon of opportunity for them. Many, too, feel alienated from these outsiders who often act as if they are the ones running the country. The arrogance of some, such as American or British mercenaries, has revolted many a young Afghan who resents being told what to do by a foreigner with a gun.

While progress in education is one of the international community's genuine achievements – and even this is relative given that so many schools must rely on poorly trained teachers or do not benefit from a proper building or access to books -- a prolonged deficit of jobs could

crush any benefits resulting from it. The Afghan Ministry of Youth Affairs (created in 2005 as a department of the Ministry of Information and Culture) has proved ineffective in addressing the increasing general demand for more youth representation in government.

Young urban Afghans–mainly in Kabul-- have established a number of projects ranging from the to the Youth Voices Festival, the Afghan Youth Initiative, which have echoed abroad (Afghans have joined the Youth Parliament based in India), and regrouped more recently in the "1400 Movement." Young journalists, too, have been particularly active and are beginning to understand the role of the Fourth Estate to monitor government and other activities. However, political mobilization is embryonic and too often exploited by political parties along ethnic, ideological or religious lines.

As the largest segment of this society, Afghan youth are a source of hope and concern for the future of the country. They offer a promise of change, but also of instability if they are excluded from power in the challenging years to come. Overall, Afghan youth represent a crucial aspect of this country which both the international community, more obsessed by the "war on terrorism" or insecurity than real recovery, and the Kabul government have consistently failed to address. Since 2010 or 2011, there has been growing recognition among western governments for the need of any peace and reconciliation negotiations to include the Taliban and other insurgent factions as the only way of the country's current morass. The war, which has killed and wounded many of Afghanistan's youth, has hardly resolved any of the country's issues.

At the same time, Western governments rarely refer to the need to involve Afghanistan's young people. Without them, such talks will never succeed. The previous and current Afghan leaders, who have indulged so heavily in war, corruption and nepotism for the past 35 years, have not only failed their country, but above all, Afghanistan's young people.

Lola Cecchine, currently a consultant in Kabul, provided valuable research and input for the 4th edition of the EFG. She is a graduate of the Insitut de Sciences Politiques in Paris.

TRAVEL

Travel by Air

Since the fall of the Taliban, international and domestic air connections have improved considerably. An added factor is that the worsening security situation throughout the country has prompted many aid workers and private consultants to travel by air rather than risk a road trip. There are numerous charter and commercial services into the region, principally via Dubai, Sharja, Pakistan and India. Many are daily and even several times a day. There are flights from Europe and Central Asia. Regular flights also operate between Kabul and other Afghan towns such as Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

Kabul International Airport (KBL) was badly damaged during the 1993-94 Battle for Kabul (there had been some rocket attacks during

the Soviet occupation). Further damage was caused leading up to the collapse of the Taliban in November, 2001. For years, the runway aprons were lined with the shattered wrecks of rocketed or crashed military and civilian planes and helicopters. And in between the runways, the semi-arid surroundings were littered with landmines. The airport was finally fully refurbished in 2006 with most of the surrounding ordnance and airplane hulks removed. The airport, which is also used by NATO, was recently supplemented by a spanking new Japanese-funded international terminal. The old terminal now serves primarily domestic flights.

The airport runs relatively efficiently with private firms providing security. Airline processing as well as bag arrivals are surprisingly quick. The only drawback with the airport is that security is extremely tight meaning that it is quite a process to both enter and leave the premises. Unless you have VIP clearance (diplomats and others are able to meet cars at a nearby parking lot), you have to walk a ways to find a taxi or your pickup.

The quality of the airlines can vary with safety records and maintenance questioned. In 2005, a Kam Airways flight crashed in the Pamir Mountains near Kabul killing all 104 people on board. It was the worst air disaster in Afghan history. The plane had to divert because of bad weather in Kabul. Following considerable cover-up by both Afghan and Coalition officials (the full story has yet to emerge), it appeared that the plane had run out of fuel having been denied permission to land at the NATO-controlled Bagram Airbase. Bagram Tower reportedly threatened to have the plane shot down if tried to land. The Kam flight was then ordered onto Peshawar in neighbouring Pakistan, the nearest available civilian airport. Allegedly, too, the Kam owners had a policy of providing its aircraft with only a minimal of reserve fuel. In 2011, the authorities closed Pamir Air, another private Afghan airline, officially for poor safety and maintenance, but primarily because of financial discrepancies and lack of transparency relating to a Bank of Kabul loan.

Please check with the international community, such as United Nations security or western embassies, on which airlines they now prefer to send staff on. As flights and prices to Kabul vary depending on the time and day, it is best to be in touch directly with the airline. You can also purchase tickets at most local travel agencies.

We have listed selected airlines below:

From the Indian Subcontinent and the Gulf

Dubai to Kabul

FlyDubai: http://www.flydubai.com/

Safi Airways: http://www.safiairways.com/

Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com/home.php
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp

Dubai to Kandahar
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp

New Delhi to Kabul
Safi Airways: http://www.safiairways.com/
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com
Air India/Indian Airlines: http://www.airindia.com
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp
SpiceJet: http://www.spicejet.com/Schedules.aspx

Sharja (UAE) to Kabul
Air Arabia: http://www.airarabia.com/home
From Islamabad to Kabul
PIA: http://www.piac.com.pk/
Afghan Jet International
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp
From Peshawar to Kabul
PIA:http://www.piac.com.pk/

Europe to Kabul
Major international airlines (British Air, United, Air France etc.) and travel agencies offer tickets to Kabul via Dubai, Delhi or Islamabad. However, there are some direct flights offered by Turkish, Ariana and Kam.

Istanbul to Kabul
Turkish Airlines: http://www.turkishairlines.com/
Airana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com

Frankfurt to Kabul
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp

Moscow to Kabul
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp

From Central Asia: Dushanbe to Kabul
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com

Baku to Kabul
Ariana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp
Azerbaijan Airlines: http://www.azal.az/

Almaty to Kabul
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com

From Iran
Mashad to Kabul
Iran Aseman Airline: http://www.iaa.ir/home.aspx
Kam Air: https://www.kamair.com

Tehran to Kabul
Mahan Airline: http://www.mahan.aero/intro.asp

From inside Afghanistan
Towns such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Chaghcharan, Bamiyan, Tirin Kot and Zaranj are all connected by air with Kabul, primarily by Air Jet International, which does not appear to have a functioning website. Check with local travel agents.
Air Jet International
Airana: http://www.flyariana.com/index.asp

Aid Agency Operators
Three charter air services (UNHAS, ICRC and Pactec)are operated inside Afghanistan with some flights to Dubai and Dushanbe. Seats are normally restricted to UN, NGO and other aid workers.
United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS)
For UN and other aid workers operating in partnership with the UN (but also sometimes journalists on assignment with or for the aid agencies), the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) operated by the World Food Programme (WFP) still runs daily services between Kabul and other Afghan towns such as Faizabad. Despite funding problems and rising costs – as well as danger – the service has managed to continue as a crucial service with outsourced contracts and aircraft. (The crews tend to be South African, Danish, Canadian, American…) You need to book and pay for seats directly with UNHAS. Flight reservations must

be made at least 48 hours in advance (in person or by the agency). Prospective passengers must provide an agency identity card or request letter on an official letterhead. A maximum of two persons per agency is allowed per flight. "No shows" are taken seriously and may lead to a ban. All passengers should hold valid passports and visas. See latest updated flight schedule: http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters/Logistics.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operates from Peshawar to Afghanistan primarily for its own personnel. www.icrc.org.

PACTEC/Air Serv International operates light aircraft out of Kabul for aid workers to more remote locations. See the Pactec site for further details and bookings. http://www.flypactec.org/

Flying to Afghanistan under the Taliban: "One lump or two?"

By Jonathan Walter

As I peered through the window, eight US-made Pakistani F-16 fighter aircraft landed, refuelled and took off again, their wings weighed heavy with weapons of war. Once the last of the jets had vanished in a haze of airfuel, our slim white aircraft, emblazoned with the protective red crosses of the ICRC, taxied to the end of the runway. We were flying into Kabul from Peshawar Airport the Pakistan Air Force's closest airfield to the frontline.

It was 1997: my first time in Afghanistan. I expected to rough it, tossed in the back of a Hercules military transport plane, surrounded by sacks of food-aid or boxes of medicine. I had some US Army boots, khaki trousers and a rather mangy beard (which an old Afghan hand had advised me to grow). But on boarding the plane I found all the male passengers were clean-shaven, sporting neatly-pressed chinos and shiny loafers. The women wore elegant long summer dresses and shawls. Inside, the aircraft was cleaner than a dentist's waiting room. The deep-upholstered seats even had white "anti-macassars" folded over the headrests (originally introduced by 19th Century English hostesses to protect their antique furniture from the exotic gentlemen's hair oil which it was fashionable to import from the Celebes at that time). And we were flying into a war-zone?

As we waited for clearance from air-traffic control, the pilot gave us a security briefing. Here we go, I thought, heart racing: action in the event of mid-air interception? Tactics to avoid anti-aircraft fire? A calm, clipped South African accent crackled over the intercom. "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Our flight time to Kabul

will be approximately one hour. Coffee is in the flasks at the front of the cabin, but take care to use two cups. It's very hot." Was this the hottest it got?

Flying over the mountains flanking the Khyber Pass, ridge after ridge of rock thrust skywards like shark's teeth. To the north lay the snowcapped mountains of the Hindu Kush. Westwards the land became drier and more parched, with only the thin emerald ribbon of the Kabul river for relief. As we dipped and landed, the airport was littered with wrecked Soviet aircraft and pockmarked with the potholes of past rocket attacks. Despite the smashed windows and scarred walls of the terminal building, there was an Afghan official checking everyone's visas. As we waited in the queue, one of the passengers whispered to me:
"You'd better shave that goatee off. It makes you look like a Tajik.They're the enemy around here!"

Travel Overland

In the days of the "Great Game" that vast strategic game of chess played across Central Asia between the foreign ministries of Britain and Russia throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries you would travel to Afghanistan in disguise. Slipping away from your regiment or colonial office on the pretext of "shooting leave," you would head for the frontier clad in the garb of a Muslim holy man or Baluch carpet dealer, with nothing but your wits and a few gold sovereigns between you and an anonymous death in a dark dungeon or dank defile.

Today, travelling into Afghanistan is more prosaic but not necessarily less risky than a hundred years ago or during the Soviet war. While numerous parts of the country remain relatively safe, the United Nations now considers over 70 per cent a "security zone." And even some of these 'safe' areas, including the Panjshir Valley, are now prone to attack, notably a suicide assault in early 2013. Kabul itself is constantly under "lock-down" because of security reasons and many international personnel are no longer allowed to travel except with special escorts. Basically, security in Afghanistan started going downhill when the NATO-led Coalition forces found themselves fighting a new war with former Taliban and other insurgent forces. By 2005 or 2006, many parts of eastern Afghanistan which, until then, had been relatively safe, were considered hazardous to travel in. And as for the southern zones, notably Helmand and Kandahar provinces, forget wandering around on your own.

WARNING! Many parts of Afghanistan are dangerous for individual travel. Please check with UN and NATO security prior to any planned trip by land. Insurgents or brigand attacks, particularly against foreigners, are not uncommon. IEDs and landmines are an ever present danger.

Crossborder infiltration across the Hindu Kush as during the Soviet war is still possible, and often an open desire by those who knew Afghanistan from those days. Such sentiments will have to remain nostalgic, at least until there is peace and a degree of reconciliation. The tribal areas on the Pakistani side of the border are now no-go areas. Even if you make it up to the relatively safe traditional tourism centres such as Chitral in

the far northwest, you can no longer travel to the border to trek over the Diwana Baba or Dorah Passes leading into Afghanistan. The Pakistani military have closed off the frontier zones to all foreigners. They will certainly arrest you if you try.

Most at-risk travellers, mainly foreigners but also Afghans working with the government or international organizations,

The road to Kabul

must now commute between towns by air. This is a pity as travelling overland remains the best way to see the country. You get more of a feel for what's happening than if you simply jet or helicopter in and out of Kabul International Airport. Most foreigners, particularly embassy staff, are now completely out of touch with the country itself. They could be living anywhere.

Technically, you can still travel by road from Pakistan to Jalalabad and Kabul. The Peshawar to Kabul highway, which was completely re-asphalted by 2006, is Afghanistan's busiest and serves as the main transport link with the outside world. (The road, however, is constantly deteriorating from over-usage). Much of Afghanistan's imported goods ranging from building materials to fuel are brought into the country, primarily by lorry or vans, along this route. Regular buses and minivans also commute between Peshawar and the Afghan capital, although

many oblige you to change vehicles at the border. Occasional foreigners still risk it, but you're exposing yourself to kidnapping and other 'incidents.' As one savvy observer noted, "you can do it, as long as you don't mind being buggered for three months somewhere in tribal area." Don't imagine that no one will notice you hunched over in your bus or minivan seat. All it takes is an informer to notify another 'element' by mobile phone telling them about the potential target and when the vehicle can expect to reach the next vulnerable road point.

Since 2010, the Pakistanis have banned any foreigners from traveling by road until further notice. This includes the Torkham crossing point, but also through the northern tribal areas such as Bajaur Agency which has access road links to Kunar Province. Until then, any foreigner needed a permit from the Khyber Political Agent's office to even get beyond the first checkpoint outside of Peshawar.

Our advice for any form of road travel in Afghanistan is to check on the security situation. Both the UN and NATO have security assessments available on a daily basis, but talking with the truck drivers at the market stops on either end usually gives you a clearer "on-the-ground" picture. It is always best to check the security situation before proceeding. The information below is only valid if security conditions are favorable.

From Pakistan

Until foreigners are allowed once again to cross the Khyber Pass, this is what you're missing. The route from Peshawar over the Khyber Pass towards Jalalabad and Kabul remains one of the most exhilarating and romantic ways to enter Afghanistan. This rocky cleft in the Hindu Kush has been breached in both directions by invaders for most of recorded history from columns of Alexander the Great's army to Moghuls, Persians and British imperialists.

Heading west from Peshawar, the road takes you through Khyber Agency, one of seven semi-autonomous tribal agencies of what was once known as the North West Frontier Province, re-named Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010. Since 2001 and the military influence of NATO, the Pentagon and others with their penchant for alphabet acronyms, the tribal agencies are often known as FATA, or Federally Administered Tribal Agencies. No

real Afghan hand ever calls them "FATA's" but rather the more romantic "tribal agencies." For centuries, these tribal areas, particularly Khyber, have been home to smugglers, arms dealers, drug barons and, more recently, al Qa'eda.

The route then winds up into the Khyber Pass before reaching the border crossing at Torkham about one and a half hours by car. The frontier closes between 1200 hrs and 1300 hrs and Pakistan time is ahead of Afghanistan (half an hour in winter, one and a half hours in summer) so time your arrival at the border appropriately if you are driving back to Peshawar. The Pakistanis buckle down their side at 1700 hrs but may still be persuaded to let you through later.

From the forts and picket posts of the Khyber you descend into the Nangarhar valley. Before the war, this area boasted several hundred thousand acres of irrigated citrus fruit and olive farms created under a joint Afghan-Soviet scheme to reclaim the desert. Tall poplars planted as windbreaks still sway elegantly in the breeze, but many of the orchards were ripped up during the two decades of fighting. The mujahideen gave the farms their coup de grace by completely trashing them, hard on the heels of the government forces in 1989. What has changed since 2001, however, is the incredible progress the region has made in the development of agriculture and other businesses. Much of this is based on individual investment and a thriving border trade with Pakistan since refugees first began returning en masse.

The odd fir and cypress tree herald your arrival in Jalalabad (one and a half hours from Torkham), a town founded by the Moghuls who were among the first to make this route via the Khyber popular. The military garrison at Jalalabad was the distant sanctuary towards which a British column of 4,500 soldiers and 12,000 camp-followers was desperately retreating after an ignominious departure from Kabul in January 1842. Apart from a few dozen prisoners who strayed back months later, only one Englishman, Dr Brydon, completed the retreat; the remainder were cut to pieces in the passes which lie between here and Kabul.

West of Jalalabad the road joins the Kabul River the most westerly tributary of the Indus. On the other side are Buddhist caves carved into the cliff-face. Over one thousand Buddhist sites and stupas are scattered across the Jalalabad valley, the most famous of which is Hadda, which once housed the Buddha's skull

bone. Some stupas date back as far as 200 AD but many have now been badly looted (SEE CULTURE). The road continues past the turquoise Darunta Reservoir, built in the 1960s and once home to four types of Chinese carp, and across a flat plain punctuated with typical fortified qala (Pushtun houses) and chaikhane (teahouses). With the Taliban gone, the strains of MTV, Tolo TV and Hindi movies emanate from these *chaikhane*. Women in the fields or by the road seldom wear the all-encompassing burqa, but still cover their heads at the sight of strangers.

The next part of the journey from Darunta dam to Sarobi scenes of heavy fighting during the Soviet war used to be a potholed dirt track. But in late 2002 it was graded, cutting the driving time from Jalalabad to Kabul down to three and a half hours. It was then asphalted but the intense road traffic coupled with the occasional NATO assault against a suspected insurgent vehicle or anti-government IED has ensured that parts are always in a state of disrepair. Before Sarobi you pass through Tangi Abreshom, the Silk Gorge, which was the scene of one of the most spectacular mujahed ambushes of the war: several hundred Soviet soldiers are believed to have perished when their armoured column was fired on.

Some of their vehicles remain, as still as headstones, in mute testimony to a misguided war. This gorge was where four foreign journalists were murdered by Al Qa'eda in November 2001. Newly arrived French military forces also suffered brutal casualties in 2008 at the hands of local insurgents, primarily because they had not paid the prerequisite bribes as had their predecessors, the Italy army. Sarobi, however, has always been known as a difficult part of the country where neither the mujahideen during the 1980s nor the Taliban or government today fully trust the groups operating in this zone.

From Sarobi the route passes high to the south of the Naglu Reservoir before plunging between the sheer rock faces of the Tangi Gharu gorge, considerably more impressive than the Khyber Pass. Once spat out onto the Kabul Plateau, the capital is within sight. Almost immediately on your left is the massive edifice of Pul-e-Charkhi, the notorious East German-built prison used by the communist government for detaining thousands of political and military opponents during the 1980s. This is where Taliban and other insurgent prisoners are being held. Now the highway is lined with the armed bases of Coalition forces, supply depots and

UN and aid agency offices surrounded by high walls and barbed wire. The whole journey from Peshawar to Kabul can be done in a day, if you start early. The Torkham-Kabul leg takes about four to six hours, without stops. An alternative overland route from Pakistan involves travelling from Quetta, via the border crossing at Spinboldak, to Kandahar. But since 2003, this region has been considered too dangerous for Westerners to travel.

From Iran and Central Asia

Intrepid travelers can still enter Afghanistan from the west and north, as restrictions on border crossings have gradually eased following the fall of the Taliban. Today, there is also far more cross-border trade from the former Soviet Central Republics and from Iran. In the years ahead, these northern and western routes can be expected to improve, particularly as trade picks up and Afghanistan becomes less reliant on Pakistan and the Freeport of Karachi as its main link to the outside world. Theoretically, you can drive to Istanbul in three days straight from the Herat border with Iran. If and when the political situation lightens up with Tehran, then one can imagine the old 'hippy' route once again serving as a principal access point to Afghanistan from Europe. At the same time, countries such as Azerbaijan see themselves as part of the access link between Europe, Russia and the Afghan border.

Iran

From Meshad in Iran, the journey to Herat is now fairly straightforward. The Afghan consulate in Meshad will issue you with a tourist visa. (You can travel from Tehran to Meshad by train). A three-hour bus service takes you to Taybad, from where you can get a taxi or minibus to the border post at Dogharun. The Iranians have been building a new rail link from Meshad to Herat, but the final link with the Afghan border and Herat has yet to be completed. Over the years, there have been many planned rail projects for Afghanistan, including a long-projected route across Afghanistan to Pakistan. From Islam Qala (the Afghan side of the border), the 123 km Iranian-built road to Herat, which was inaugurated in 2007, is now fully asphalted and relatively fast. Iran, which has maintained very close ties with former Afghan governor Ismail Khan, the former mujahed fight and self-styled Amir of Herat who earned a fortune from the transit taxes he levied at Islam Qala.

To the north, Afghanistan borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. During the Taliban years, these frontier crossings were resolutely shut and heavily guarded by Russian troops, as Moscow was determined to prevent radical Islam from percolating into its sphere of influence. The 'Friendship Bridge', which joins Afghanistan to Uzbekistan across the Amu Darya (Oxus River), was blocked by concrete and barbed wire. In 2002, accredited aid workers and journalists have been able to cross here, but freelance travellers have encountered difficulties. Little has changed since.

Uzbekistan

The Friendship Bridge across the Amu Darya links Hairatan in Afghanistan to Termez in Uzbekistan. This is the rail and road bridge that once helped the Soviets to invade Afghanistan in December, 1979. Many a Red Army conscript was deposited at its main rail terminus on the Afghan side to go and fight a people he neither knew or cared about. There are still remnants of this period in the form of Cryillic signs and barbed wire. Although officially opened to tourist traffic in 2005, Uzbek customs officials still give one a hard time when trying to cross, particularly individual travellers with no specific business papers. Aid workers need to provide a letter of introduction from the UN. Check with the UN and other offices for advice.

The best way to reach Hairaton is from Mazar-e-Sharif by taxi. There are buses and mini-vans; the problem is trying to track them down. Given the width of the river, it takes 5-10 minutes to cross, and then you have to deal with the Uzbek border guards, who seem underpaid with little interest in helping. Once on the Uzbek side, you can arrange a ride with one of the private cars often waiting or a minivan to take you to Termez, the nearest main town.

Tajikistan

Today, there are three crossing points leading from Tajikistan into Afghanistan. The first is at Shir Khan Bandar with onward access to Kunduz. The two others lead into Badakhshan province, one at the border post of Ishkashim, the other

at Khorog. Afghan visas can be obtained in Dushanbe, if possible with a letter of introduction from your embassy or agency. There are shared taxis available on both sides of the border.

Turkmenistan

Two official border crossings lead from Turkmenistan into Afghanistan. The crossing point at Serkhetabat (sometimes referred to as Kushka or Gushgi) in Turkmenistan leads to Torghundi in Afghanistan is the most commonly used route, primarily because of its proximity to Herat. Some aid workers use this crossing to go on R and R in Turkmenistan. Another possible, but less used crossing is at Imam Nazar near Andkhoi. However, if you are going to travel this route, make sure you have right visas and stamps. Check with the consulates in question.

Once inside

Road travel within Afghanistan is always exciting, but never without its risks. Best not travel in an obviously 'foreign' vehicle unless you wish to attract attention. Battered, non-descript cars are better. Car-jackings, landmines or IED attacks are not the only danger. Afghans are notoriously terrible drivers resulting in horrific accidents. Another threat is rockfall, particularly if there has been recent rain or snow in the mountains. Some regions are safer than others, so best check with the UN security office in Kabul before heading out. EFG writers still travel by road but only with careful preparation, including leaving early and always ensuring that there is traffic on the road.

From Kabul, the principal arteries are east towards Jalalabad and over the Khyber Pass to Peshawar; north through the Salang Tunnel to Mazar and Central Asia; and south-west to Kandahar, then up to Herat and Iran. But there are innumerable exciting detours such as up the Panjshir Valley or into Bamiyan.

There has been much construction of roads in Afghanistan since 2002. The manner with which these roads have been built, however, have not necessarily led to better security. The Kabul to Kandahar highway is beautifully asphalted but unsafe. Obsessed by the need to do things quickly, USAID engineers neglected to negotiate with or otherwise involve local villagers. Or to rely primarily on local workers. Instead, they brought in more expensive outside contractors. The end result was that few Afghans along the way felt that this was 'their' road ensuring that no one would have any

commitment to its security. Enormous opportunities were lost by the failure of the international community to use the construction of badly-needed roads as a means of employing thousands of ex-combatants and returnees, kick-starting the local economy and attracting young men away from two decades of gun-culture.

Some roads remain lethal for different reasons. In February 2002, half a dozen died in blizzards in the Salang Tunnel. The tunnel, Afghanistan's main artery linking Kabul to the markets of Central Asia, remained unlit, unpaved, heavily polluted and choked with snow for much of the year. In 2003, the tunnel was closed altogether for repairs. The tunnel was also closed for long periods because of snow and rockfall in the winter of 2004-05. It was the same in the winter of 2012/2013.

Most highways such as from Pul-e-Khumri to Kunduz and Badakhshan are now good, but some stretches are still joltingly bad from ongoing deterioration. The road to Mazar is tarred and relatively comfortable. The Jalalabad to Kabul road, built largely by Chinese road crews, is now asphalted but also deteriorating in parts.

Many donors have expressed interest in rebuilding roads since 2002, but progress has often been painfully slow. In May 2002, Iran began to repair the road between their border and Herat, and showed some interest in extending this road through to Bamiyan. In March 2003, the World Bank finally approved a US$ 108 million credit to improve the vital Kabul-Pul-e-Khumri-Kunduz highway, including the Salang Tunnel. Germany undertook repairs to Kabul's road system. The Asian Development Bank provided investments to repair the connection between Kandahar and Spinboldak. The European Union donated money for the Kabul-Jalalabad route and significant repairs and grading were made in 2003. Italy funded the road from Kabul-Maidan-Bamiyan. And the US, Japanese and Saudi governments supported the construction of the shattered highway from Kandahar to Herat. Today, however, reconstruction, including road repairs, has been seriously held up by the security situation.

For more details on road travel within Afghanistan, refer to the regional Travel sections which follow. For the latest, detailed information on the conditions of roads and reconstruction, check with UNOPS, IOM and other aid agencies in Kabul.

Friendship Bridge at Hairaton, linking Afghanistan to Uzbekistan

Essential reading and weblinks

- *The Survival Guide to Kabul*, Dominic Medley & Jude Barrand, Bradt Travel Guides Ltd (England, 2003)
- http://www.kabulcaravan.com (online travel guide to Afghanistan)
- http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com (online chat room see Asia/ Central Asia section)

The Central Region & Kabul

Central Afghanistan comprises the provinces of Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan and Wardak, with the city of Kabul at its strategic crossroads. To the north, lies the snow.capped Hindu Kush mountain range, soaring to over 5,000 metres. The Salang Tunnel cuts through the range towards Mazar and Central Asia. To the east, the main artery to Jalalabad and the subcontinent follows the course of the Kabul River, plunging through the spectacular Tangi Gharu and Silk Gorges before climbing through the Khyber Pass into Pakistan. The road towards Ghazni and Persia, for millennia the route of choice for successive conquerors of Kabul, Kandahar and beyond, escapes southwest through a cleft in the mountains. To the west and northwest lie difficult mountain passes into Hazarajat and central Afghanistan proper.

Kabul

Afghanistan and the country's largest city is 1,800 metres above sea-level. Because of the city's elevation, summers are relatively dry and not too hot. Winters can be cold, but not devastatingly so. Much of the year has good sunshine and pleasant temperatures, although there is considerable rain during the spring. The city, one of Kabul Province's 15 Districts, has a population that fluctuates wildly according to the military situation. In 1978 it had 500,000 inhabitants; by 2005, the number had swelled to 2.5-3 million, mostly from returning Afghans and rural migrants seeking jobs. Current 2013 estimates put the population at 3.5-3.8 million, with some sources suggesting more than four million. Kabul is ranked as the fifth fastest growing city in the world, with rapidly spreading, un-planned suburbs, many of them consisting of over-crowded slums and festering shanty-towns with poor access to clean water and alleyways filled with run-off sewage.

Kabul's strategic location, in a fertile valley surrounded by high mountains and straddling major trade routes, has been a natural choice for settlement since antiquity. It was known as Kubha in the Rig Veda of c.1500 BC, and as Kabura by Ptolemy (2nd Century AD). In the mid-7th Century AD, Muslim Arabs captured the city, but its Hindu rulers were not ousted for another 200 years when the Saffarids finally introduced Islam to the city. As part of the Ghaznavid empire, Kabul was attacked by Genghis Khan's

Kabul at night

hordes in the 13th Century and subsequently became the capital of a province of the Moghul empire, whose founder, Babur Shah (1483-1530), is buried on the eastern slope of the Sher Darwaza mountain. The Moghuls held Kabul until the mid-18th Century, when the Pushtun Ahmed Shah Durrani established the first Afghan Empire based out of Kandahar in 1747.

From 1776 onwards Timur Shah, son of Ahmed Shah, made Kabul his capital. For the next 40 years bitter infighting between

Timur Shah's Sadozai brothers destabilized the city. From 1819 right through to 1973 a rival Pushtun clan, the Mohammedzais, held sway, both as Amirs and as Kings.

The "Great Amir" Dost Mohammed emerges as the key figure in mid-19th Century Kabuli politics, ruling the city from 1826-39 and again, after a brief and bloody British interlude, from 1843 until his death in 1863. Dost had provoked the British by making overtures to Russia and Persia, and by permitting a Russian agent, Vitkevich, to come to Kabul, and also by hinting that he might try to acquire Punjab territory that had already been captured by Ranjit Singh. The British backed Singh, invaded Afghanistan and sacked Kabul in July 1839. Thus began the First Afghan War.

The British installed a puppet ruler of Kabul, Shah Shuja, who proved to be so weak and unpopular that the British invading force was forced to become an army of occupation. It brought with it polo matches, ladies with parasols and thousands of Indian camp-followers. Ironically, the open and un-protected British military cantonment of 1842 is almost exactly where ISAF-NATO headquarters are situated now.

Afghan resentment was fired up in November 1841, and a mob attacked the British delegation, hacking to death the head of mission, Sir Alexander Burnes, in the process. During the subsequent and infamous retreat from Kabul the following January only a handful of the 16,000 British troops, wives and camp-followers survived. Most were cut down in the passes between Kabul and Jalalabad. Tribesmen, who had offered them safe passage, felt little compunction about going back on their word. Exacting vengeance, the British invaded a second time in 1842, torching the covered bazaar and plundering much of the city. Dost Mohammed returned to govern Kabul for another 20 years. During that period, he brought Herat, Kandahar and the north under the control of his capital. Meanwhile the British withdrew to lick their wounds and engage in a policy referred to in the diplomatic language of the day as "masterly inactivity."

Dost Mohammed's son, Sher Ali, who became Amir on his father's death, provoked Britain into the Second Afghan War by inviting a Russian General into Kabul in 1878 to sign a treaty. Britain invaded and established a new mission in Kabul the following year, but after only six weeks mutinous troops murdered the hapless envoy and his staff. In 1880 Amir Abdur Rahman consolidated rule in Kabul and established the present-day boundaries of Afghanistan. From his time onwards, the history of

Kabul and that of Afghanistan as a nation become inseparable (SEE HISTORY).

Sher Ali in 1867

A series of Pushtun kings ruled Afghanistan with Kabul as their capital until the ousting of Zahir Shah in 1973. Through much of this period, Kabul had been creaking slowly into the 20th Century, but the provinces failed to follow. The radical reforms of King Amanullah, who ruled in the 1920s, backfired. The first school appeared in Kabul in the early 1900s, and Kabul University was founded in 1932 with the establishment of the School of Medicine. A new campus was built in 1964.

As Soviet influence increasingly infiltrated Afghanistan's ruling elite during the 1960s-70s, the gulf between the modernizing capital and the traditional hinterland rapidly widened. Afghan women wandered the streets of Kabul in mini-skirts, and the capital became a stopping off point along the hippie trail to Kathmandu. However, when Kabul's pro-Moscow ruling party seized power in April,1978 coup (Saur Revolution), their attempts to impose communist ideology on rural Afghans led to open revolt. When the Soviets invaded the following year to bolster the communist regime, rural rebellion rapidly transformed itself into a guerrilla jihad not unlike the current insurgency today.

In the 1980s, Kabul became the power base for Soviet forces and their Afghan allies, known as the 'Regime'. Life in Kabul became increasingly westernised, as Soviet-style factories and offices spread. Women studied and went to work, and the number of university students doubled. But beneath the surface, the hated KHAD agents of the East German-trained secret police were everywhere ensuring pro-Soviet sentiment. Suspected members of the opposition were imprisoned, tortured and killed in no fewer than 11 detention centres in and around Kabul as well as the notorious Pul-e-Charkhi prison, off the Jalalabad Road.

The city, nevertheless, managed to escape the carnage inflicted

on rural areas during the Soviet war, which killed over a million Afghans and forced nearly six million more into exile. Apart from political assassinations, urban guerrilla commanders only managed a few successful attacks against the Soviets and their Afghan government allies within the city precincts. Rockets occasionally hit Kabul airport, but the damage was minimal.

As the war wrecked the country's economy and the value of the Afghani (as the national currency is known) plummeted, urban dwellers, notably in Kabul, were sheltered by government subsidies on food. In many ways, Kabulis were far better off than the average Soviet citizen. This both demoralised and infuriated Red Army troops who could not help but notice that conditions were often better in the Afghan capital than back home. When the Soviets finally retreated in February,1989, eventually cutting off most of their aid, and President Najibullah, resigned in the face of invading mujahideen in 1992, Afghanistan descended into brutal civil war.

During the devastating battle for power between rival mujahed factions from 1992-1996, at least two-thirds of the capital's buildings were reduced to rubble. Four opposing factions slugged it out: the Tajik-dominated forces of Jamiat-e-Islami, under Ahmed Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani; the Uzbek-dominated Jumbesh-e-Melli, under Abdul Rashid Dostum; the Pushtun-dominated Hezb-e-Islami under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; and the Hazara-dominated Hezb-e-Wahdat.

Soldiers on all sides committed atrocities. (Most of the warlords who participated in this struggle – apart from northern commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by al-Qaeda on September 9, 2001 just before 9/11 – eventually became part of the western-backed Karzai regime or they decided to join insurgency). Kabul's professional classes fled, and government machinery ground to a halt. The fighting killed and wounded more than 50,000 Kabulis, and forced a million to flee. Then, on September 27, 1996, the Taliban arrived in Kabul. Security returned, but at a heavy price. The new rulers smashed televisions and dangled audio and videotape from their checkpoints. They forced untrimmed beards on men and the all-encompassing burqa (veil) on women.

The Taliban, who were supported by the Pakistanis, Saudis and later the Americans, provoked international outrage by dragging the communist Najibullah from his sanctuary and executing him

in a United Nations compound and then hanging him from a police tower in the middle of town. Najib's erstwhile enemy Massoud had offered to help him flee, but he refused believing that he could still negotiate a modus vivendi as part of a new government, given that many former Khalqi communists had joined Hezb-e-Islami or the Taliban.

Looking back on the Najib days, many Kabulis recall the Soviet period with nostalgia, and hold the former President in increasingly high regard. For them, the constantly deteriorating security situation and rampant corruption of Hamid Karzai and his cohorts are worse than the 1980s. Nevertheless, during Talib rule of 1996-2001, the black-turbaned "bushboys from Kandahar" – as some Kabulis referred to the Taliban - alienated aid agencies and Kabulis alike by preventing women from going to school or working. Conditions worsened with rising food costs and shortages. In addition, Kabul's population began expanding again during 2000-01 as a devastating drought forced thousands to seek food and work in the capital and other Afghan cities.

The events of 11th September 2001 and the subsequent US bombing campaign drove the Taliban from the political stage – at least for the time-being. They fled Kabul in November 2001 and, despite some protests from the international community, the mainly Tajik United Front (Northern Alliance) troops were sucked into the security vacuum. Kabul saw scenes of jubilation as men crowded into barbershops to shave their beards and music filled the air.

By early 2002, however, a second invasion, this time of foreign aid workers with their trademark 4x4s, began flooding into the capital. More than a thousand delegates at the Loya Jirga, held in Kabul in June 2002, elected Hamid Karzai as provisional president. He and his Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA) occupied the remarkably undamaged presidential palace compound, which had been turned into a security bastion heavily guarded by specially-trained Afghan soldiers (increasingly Pushtun). During the early years of the Coalition, American bodyguards, hired from private US security firms—essentially mercenaries-- protected the Afghan president. Ultimately, they were the only armed group that Karzai – and the Americans – could really trust. Diplomatic missions were re-established. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)

Around half the two million Afghans, who initially poured back home from exile in Pakistan and elsewhere, descended on Kabul, putting immense pressure on the city's infrastructure and social

services. (SEE REFUGEES) The air filled with car fumes and the banging of a broken city rebuilding itself. Rents rocketed ten-fold as a result of the presence of big-budget aid agencies, companies and wealthy returnees. Small NGOs who couldn't afford the rent were evicted. Many also lost their staff, including qualified doctors and engineers, to the UN, World Bank European Union, ISAF and other international institutions seeking translators and drivers because they could pay salaries 5-10 times more. Many ministries, too, saw their best people leave for better paying, even if more menial jobs.

When warned that over spending was severely undermining the re-construction of a new Afghanistan, these big agencies simply shrugged. They were more interested in keeping the flow of cash moving through their own organizations. More than a decade later in 2013, as donors wrap up their projects and slash their funding, the bubble has burst. Rents are plunging and many Afghans find themselves forced to accept salaries that are a fraction of what they previously earned. (SEE ECONOMY) Others are desperately trying to move abroad and to leave what they see as a sinking ship. These are the very people who are needed to build a new country, yet once again, the international community has decided to focus its attention elsewhere. Ordinary Afghans feel abandoned in the rush to leave and to consign half-finished projects to the past. The Obama administration's "Good Enough" strategy for withdrawal, essentially deciding the minimal commitment needed for withdrawal, has not gone unnoticed.

During the immediate post-2002 period, tens of thousands of poorer Kabulis had to sleep rough, often in ruins despite the continuing presence of mines and booby-traps. They had scant protection against the elements. Squatter settlements soon comprised half the city's housing and only about 20 percent of the population had access to clean water. Electricity remained scarce – and still does. In some parts it is non-existant. By early 2005, significant reconstruction had taken place with aid agencies - and privileged Afghans – fleeing the high rent areas of central Kabul to more distant districts, such as Karte Seh, which soon turned into 'wannabe' versions of Dubai, complete with wedding halls, chique shops, and Internet cafes. By 2013, conditions have improved in the well-heeled parts of the capital. Roads have been asphalted, modest but aspiring shopping malls have opened along with some new hotels, banks (16 banks have now been licensed) and office blocks. Traffic, nevertheless, now ranks among the

worst in Asia comparable to Katmandu and Bangkok.

Such conditions have not kept developers from promoting the "Kabul New City" project, a grandiose 37-billion dollar initiative that, according to urban planners, might make sense in the oil-rich UAE or Saudi Arabia, but certainly not in Afghanistan. The multi-phased "mega project" reeks of corruption designed to benefit a privileged few. With a master plan of the so-called Dehsabz City Development Authority (DCDA) formulated by French private investors and the Japanese government, linked to influential Afghan entrepreneurs and government officials, the New City calls for 740 square kilometres to be turned into two major sub-centres, with administrative complexes, shopping malls, offices and residential parks. To placate inevitable criticism, it also proposes green belts, a nature reserve and recreational parks with sports facilities.

It would make much more sense to develop the country's other cities and small towns, such as Jalalabad, Faizabad, Khost, and Keshm, where there is more space and better water resources, especially since Kabul is fast exhausting its supply of water. (SEE WATER) Urban planners have been urging decentralization for years rather than adding to the pressure on Kabul. Most small towns have been woefully neglected over the past decade. Most donor funding has gone to the capital or to military-related projects. Furthermore, observers point out, both the international community and the Afghan government should be encouraging people to remain in their home regions rather than migrating to Kabul which is in danger of turning into yet another disastrous Third World megacity. What Afghanistan does not need is another real estate fiasco that only benefits war lords, corrupt government officials and foreign entrepreneurs.

Approaching 2014, security in Kabul still depends largely on the foreign peacekeeping troops of the NATO-run International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). But responsibility for law and order, including counter-insurgency, is now officially the responsibility of the Afghan army and police. They are the ones called out to deal with guerrilla assaults or suicide attacks. NATO advisors try as much as possible to remain in the background. Nevertheless, security has become steadily worse with incidents increasing in 2012 and 2013 as the Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami, Haqqani Network and other insurgent groups seek to prove their capacity to attack when and where they want.

Insecurity started almost as soon as the Coalition forces had

established themselves at the end of 2001. Throughout 2002, Kabul was rocked by the assassinations of two cabinet ministers, occasional rocket or mortar attacks and several fatal car bombs. In June 2003, the capital was shocked when a suicide bomb unexpectedly killed four German peacekeeping troops. Three expatriate electoral monitors were kidnapped in late 2004, and in early March, 2005, a British aid worker was shot dead outside the UNICA guest house. There were suspicions that that killing may have involved rogue elements in the government.

The situation went from bad to worse, with growing numbers of incidents against hotels, embassies, government offices and

Smog in Kabul has become a major health hazard for Afghans and foreigners

military compounds, including ISAF headquarters. In 2009, armed men attacked a UN guesthouse killing at least eight aid workers and civilians. In 2010, insurgents assaulted the renowned Intercontinental Hotel overlooking the city. At least 10 civilians were killed. One of the worst suicide incidents was the Ashura bombing against the Shiite Abu Fazl Mosque. More than 70 civilians, many of them women and children, died.

In May, 2013 insurgents penetrated heavily fortified central Kabul, forcing their way into a residential compound of the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Hundreds of Afghan security forces managed to keep the six heavily armed attackers at bay, enabling hundreds of international aid workers to flee. Nevertheless, at least four people were killed and more than a dozen wounded. One Talib source referred to IOM as being a "den of spies."

Aid agencies, which – intentionally or not - have long crossed

the humanitarian-intelligence divide, are increasingly vulnerable. While most IOM employees are legitimate aid workers, some are known to be western, mainly American, intelligence operatives. The issue is hotly debated among humanitarians who increasingly blame western military and intelligence organizations for jeopardizing the lives of bona fide aid workers. Later attacks in June, 2013 focused on the international airport and other prestigious targets.

Since 2005, western embassies, UN agencies and other organizations have progressively barricaded themselves behind high walls, electronically-manipulated entrance barriers and intense security restrictions to the point that most personnel rarely get out. For many, the contact with Afghanistan is little more than they would have living in London or Bethesda. Many US embassy personnel never experience Kabul at all except for a few brief glimpses on the way to and from the airport. By 2013, it was no longer possible to see most embassy or international aid offices from the street. The walls were too high. Even worse, whole swaths of Kabul have been denied to ordinary Afghans. Security checkpoints and barricaded streets prevent them from going directly to school or work.

Getting there

By Air

By 2006, Kabul's international airport, located16 kilometres from the city centre, was almost fully rehabilitated. A second major airport, Bagram Airbase, a former Soviet stronghold, lies 40 kilometres to the north but is only used by NATO and other military. Unexploded bombs and other ordinance have been removed from the main Kabul runway, which is now asphalted, and the surrounding area has been cleared of mines. The wreckage of old Soviet MiG fighters, helicopters and transport aircraft has also finally been cleared away. The Japanese helped build a new international terminal, which opened in 2008. The original terminal now serves domestic flights. Part of the airport is also used for Coalition military aircraft.

Once inside the airport officials use the latest technology to check passports. Kabul International is not the place for duty-free shopping. Smuggling alcohol is not recommended. You can now fly direct to Kabul from Baku, Delhi, Dubai, Dushanbe, Frankfurt, Islamabad, Istanbul, Peshawar, and Tehran.

Overland

Short of trekking in by foot disguised as a mullah or lurching in on a camel, the most interesting way to reach Kabul is by road. The capital is linked to the rest of Afghanistan by the Circular Road (officially, Highway Nr. 1) to Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, and back to Kabul. More than 80 percent has been paved since 2002. Over 4,000 km of roads throughout

the country have been re-graded and asphalted. The city is also linked to Jalalabad and the Pakistan border at Torkham and Peshawar by a highway to the east that is now in relatively good condition.

Entering Afghanistan via Pakistan requires a six-hour trip by car from Peshawar to Kabul. The Pakistanis have banned foreigners from travelling by road through the Khyber Pass since 2010. With recent grading and tarring, the trip is quicker than in the past, but in early 2005 parts seemed even worse than before. The Jalalabad to Kabul Highway is now fully asphalted, but sections are already crumbling due to overuse. Already in the 1990s, UN and other development agencies stressed the need to build a railway. This would prove five times cheaper both in fuel costs and constant renovation than having the Afghan capital rely exclusively on truck transports. The plan was put on the table in 2002, but was then flatly ignored. A mere two or three days of the war effort since the end of 2001 would have covered the costs of constructing a rail link from the Pakistan border, including the refurbishing of the Peshawar to Torkham line built by the British. In 2010, the World Bank expressed interest in funding a 1.5 million dollar feasibility study for a Peshawar-Jalalabad railroad, but given the current deplorable state of the Pakistan National Railways, this may remain a subject of conversation for years to come.

On a good day the views from the Jalalabad to Kabul Highway are fantastic, ranging from spectacular rocky passes and snowcapped mountains to turquoise lakes and emerald green pastures bordering the Kabul River. During the Soviet war the road was thick with tanks, APCs and troop columns. Most journalists and adventurers had to trek in clandestinely by foot. In the "bad old days" from '92-'96 you could be stopped at more than 60 different checkpoints along this road, all manned by local commanders with similar weapons but varying allegiances. Numerous aid workers and reporters were held up at gunpoint and their possessions or vehicles stolen. During the Talib era, the road was relatively safe. But in November 2001, four journalists were murdered, and for much of 2002-04 the route was considered a high risk by UN security advisors. Until the Pakistani closure of Torkham in 2010, dozens of Kabuli cabs made the trip to the border and back each day at around US$ 50, depending on one's bargaining skills.

By 2013, one could still do the Kabul to Jalalabad journey,

although proceeding toward Torkham, past Jalalabad airport and the former Soviet orange farms, was considered dangerous. Travel along the Jalalabad-Sorobi-Kabul Highway roads remains relatively safe around noon. It is not recommended to travel along the road erlier in the morning, and police security points overlooking the Tar – as the road is known – winding down their operations around 2-3 pm. This is when the Taliban and other insurgents, who have made deals with the local police, begin to assert their presence (SEE TRAVEL OVERLAND).

To the north, the road from Mazar across the Hindu Kush and through the Salang tunnel is magnificent but takes a day. The tunnel and its approaches are derelict and often snow-blocked, although major repairs got underway in late-2003 (SEE NORTHERN). A central route from Herat to Kabul taking at least four days via Chakhcharan and Bamiyan is also possible. This is also the planned route for a new highway and even a railroad. Donors have helped repair these and many other roads in Afghanistan, significantly reducing travel times in different parts of the country.

Alexander the Great marched into Kabul from the southwest, but the road – refurbished by the Americans - from Kandahar, via Ghazni, to the capital has become increasingly dangerous since the fall of the Taliban. Pro-Taliban and anti-government fighters, often mounted on small motorbikes, have killed and wounded numerous aid staff and construction workers in hit-and-run attacks in the area. They regularly stop buses and kidnap or arrest suspected government collaborators. Already in March, 2005, experienced journalists and aid workers were nervous about driving it, a fear ridiculed at the time by one IOM coordinator who adamantly maintained there was no danger. Ignorance may be bliss, but also treacherous.

Even with drive time now reduced to six hours, it is not advisable for foreigners or Afghans with government or international affiliations to take the road. In 2010, The Taliban kidnapped two Afghan accountants of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, one of the most experienced agencies in the country. The men were carrying salaries for the organization's workers. Threatened with death if they proved to be government collaborators, they were taken off into the hills to meet with the commander. On learning that they were Swedish Committee, which operates with less than a dozen expatriates out of five thousand employees, the commander immediately released them,

returned their money and ordered his men to stop another bus to take them where they wanted to go.

Kabul is bisected by the Kabul River, which flows (when not parched from drought) through the centre of town from the southwest to the northeast. Many international agencies operating in Kabul are still based north of the Kabul River in Shahr-e-Naw (meaning “new town” and begun in 1935) and the adjoining Wazir Akbar Khan (named after Amir Dost Mohammed’s son who murdered the British Garrison Commander in 1842). In the centre of Shahr-e-Naw stands the Arg, a citadel and walled palace built in 1888 by Amir Abdur Rahman to replace the old Bala Hissar fortress. But since 2008, growing numbers have moved to the outskirts, particularly along the Jalalabad Road, because of lower rents but also as a means of providing better security for employees. The main UN compound, far removed from the dust and clamour of Kabul, is now on the Jalalabad Road.

The airport lies five kilometres northeast of Shahr-e-Naw. To the northwest rises the Kolola Pushta or Round Fort, and the Intercontinental Hotel perches on a spur of rock four kilometres to the west. The mountains southwest of Shahr-e-Naw through which the Kabul River squeezes are the Koh-e-Asmai and Koh-e-Sher Darwaza. The road running west through this rocky cleft leads to Kabul University and Karte Seh, heavily shattered by the shelling during the Battle for Kabul but now well on its way to reconstruction. South of the Kabul River lies the old town and, nestling at the foot of Sher Darwaza mountain, the original Bala Hissar fortress which was destroyed by the British in 1878. In the 1920s King Amanullah built his own capital at Darulaman, nine kilometres south- west from the city centre beyond Karte Seh. His palace, the Kabul Museum and most of the surrounding area, which remained largely intact during the Soviet occupation, were devastated by the civil war of the 1990s. Maps of Shahr-e-Naw and Wazir Akbar Khan are produced by the UN’s Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS), while one of the best city maps of Kabul is still to be found at the back of Nancy Dupree’s An Historical Guide to Kabul (2nd edition 1972).

INSPIRE: Kabul at work

INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation

The subjects are diverse – from the conventional to the bizarre – but each adds insight to an ever-growing tableau of the life of a city that has been at war for many years. With over 60 photo, video and text profiles to date, each asks a question that relates to a Kabuli in a different walk of life: Who is the Skateboard Teacher? Who is the Chapandaz (buzkashi player)? Who is the surgeon? Who is the Woodcarver? Who heads City Power? Who is the Chaos Creator? Who is the Women's Activist? Who is the Car Washer? Who is the Ice Cream Seller? Who is the Gambler? Who is the Child Prodigy? Who is the Burqa Salesman? Who is the Female Army General? The list goes on… Led by a team of international and Afghan creators, who profile their subjects with brief interviews, photographs and videotapes, and make

the results available on a multimedia website, Kabul at Work provides an extraordinary glimpse into the people who make the Afghan capital work. These small, but focused, vignettes reveal the soul of a much-misrepresented city and offer both the Afghan public and international audiences a positive view of the vibrant economic life that still exists in Afghanistan.

While Kabul, like any other large city, has its problems, ranging from severe air pollution and poor urban planning to sprawling shantytowns and disruptive insecurity, Kabul at Work seeks to show the other side of the story. Since the end of 2001, despite ongoing war and mayhem, Kabul has developed into a vibrant metropolis of nearly four million people. The project gives the people who help make it work a voice, whether the person interviewed is the real estate agent selling million dollar homes to Afghanistan's nouveau riche, the long-serving British cemetery keeper or the candy-maker in the bazaar. Rich or poor, mundane or eccentric, they all tell their own stories about who they are, their lives and their vision of Kabul.

The long-term objective of the Kabul at Work project is not only to dispel negative images of Afghanistan that are often unfounded, but also to inform the people of Kabul about themselves and to provide a forum that will attract global interest. The results are highly imaginative.
Http://www.kabulatwork.tv/ is an exceptional media-oriented, but also

educational, website that we would recommend to any teacher, whether in New York, London, Geneva or Herat, to explore with students. In particular, the site can easily serve as a brilliant template for creative communities elsewhere in the world. It shows what can be done to promote a better understanding of our own cities, countries and living environ-

ments. As the Kabul at Work organizers point out, there is also the potential here for a study in urban anthropology that can be expanded to areas outside Kabul.

Getting around

Following the 2001 collapse of the Taliban, Kabul rapidly became awash with 4x4s, ranging from the shiny UN white Toyota Land Cruisers, complete with snorkels and air-conditioning, to the more battered and understated Mark II Land Rovers of the BBC World Service. They were soon joined by thousands of yellow taxis, fume-spewing lorries, along with the latest tinted-window luxury limousines, imported from Dubai for Afghanistan's privileged. Public transport in the form of city and private buses are also available, but there are no functioning timetables. You grab what comes.

The greatest barrier to getting around is not shellfire, but traffic jams. This is getting worse by the day. The German-trained traffic police valiantly try to control the flow but are routinely ignored. Occasionally you'll see them beating drivers with truncheons for infringing the rules at roundabouts. If you are not working for, or sponsored by, an aid agency, the solution is to hire a taxi, but negotiate beforehand. Foreigners have been robbed or otherwise assaulted so never ride alone. And if you travel at night, pre-arrange with a trusted driver. (SEE SECURITY TIPS). Several private taxi services have vetted drivers that you can phone to pick you up at a restaurant, office or a private house.

Some old hands like to get around by bicycle or on foot. This can be extremely rewarding, and it may even be safer than driving. The traffic jams can expose you to an attack. This is precisely how some foreigners have been kidnapped. Walking gives you a better sense of security, particularly if you stroll quickly and with purpose. However, it is best

to remain vigilant and to change one's route constantly. Avoid identifiable routines. Near the outskirts of town, be conscious of land mines and do not stray away from "the beaten track." The simplest rule of thumb is: check with the locals, and if they avoid certain areas, avoid them also. Local residents can alert you to suspicious persons who are not known in the neighbourhood. If possible, travel in pairs or take a guide.

Public transport in Kabul is improving. The director of Kabul's bus department estimates that 2,500 buses are needed to provide the city with a decent service. The Japanese and Indians have been adding new vehicles at a significant rate, and have even set up clearly marked bus stops. Many Afghans, however, still rely on shared but crowded taxis and mini-buses. Private carriers constitute more than 90 percent of public transportation in the city.

Aid Agencies

Aid agencies have flooded into Kabul since late 2001. Most organizations including the UN transferred their headquarters from Pakistan to Kabul after the departure of the Taliban, leaving support offices in Peshawar and Islamabad. By early 2005, there were nearly 2,500 local and international organizations in the country although many were technically not NGOs but private businesses. A number of NGOs, however, have been winding down or leaving for lack funds or because of security concerns leading up to 2014 and beyond. Virtually every UN agency has an office in Kabul, but operations are increasingly moving to the suburbs. For an overview of agency activities in Kabul and the latest recovery situation try calling on the Kabul offices of the following organizations. (Please note that for security reasons we have been requested not to provide addresses):

- Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS): http://www.aims.org.af/
- Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR): http://www.acbar.org/
- Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU): http://www.areu.org.af/Default.aspx
- Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA): http://www.afghana.com/Reconstruction/AfghanistanReconstruction.htm

Kabul A-Z
Accommodation & Food

Accommodation in Kabul has become very expensive since the departure of the Taliban and the arrival of thousands of well-paid expatriates. Hotels, guesthouse and restaurants have been popping up (but also closing) left and right. Security has become a concern and many consultants with the United Nations, World Bank and other organizations are only allowed to stay in specific, approved guesthouses either run by the agencies themselves or which have regularly checked security clearance. The same goes for restaurants. Certain establishments are out-of-bounds, while others have been cleared but can only be visited with appropriate security minders.

Here is a selection of some of the most obvious, but check with friends and colleagues of where to stay. Several establishments favoured by EFG editors and contributors have asked not to be mentioned.

Perhaps the best known – and 'oldest' (post-Taliban) – guesthouse in Kabul is **Gandamack Lodge.** http://www.gandamacklodge.co.uk/ Set up by British cameraman/producer Peter Jouvenal within weeks of the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001 – the original house in Passport Lane near the Indian Embassy was rented by Osama bin Ladin for his fourth wife – Gandamack became a favourite for most savvy journalists, aid workers and other Afghan hands. In 2005, primarily because of skyrocketing rents, Jouvenal moved Gandamack to another site near the Iranian Embassy and the UNHCR offices. Rooms decorated in a comfortable British colonial style go from US$ 75-180 with full internet, TV and other facilities. There is a restaurant plus a **Hounds and Hare** watering hole. Jouvenal tries to keep things discreet and secure, so there is no sign advertising its location. There is also courtesy airport pick up and drop off. Gandamack is popular for all those in the know and is a good place to meet people. Also a good place to work with a pleasant, compound garden.

The Mustafa Hotel, on Chahrahi Sadarat near Chicken Streets in Shahr-e-Naw, was one of the first. Recently renovated, it became popular with journalists and travellers for its roof terrace. A classic. Rooms US$ 35/100. Facilities include: Italian restaurant, TV, Good internet, darts, pool room, bar and

basketball. (Tel: 070 276021/E: mustafa_hotel@hotmail.com). The biggest hotel in town remains the **Intercontinental Hotel** (Satphone: +873 761 469690; Tel: 020 220 1320/1321 - http://www.intercontinentalkabul.com/, situated on a hilltop with a spectacular view of the capital. It boasts an excellent brunch on Fridays. Rooms US$ 130-260. Facilities include an internet café, restaurants and cafes, fitness centre, tennis, swimming pool, billiards, sauna, barbershop, gift and book shops. In late 1996 the Taliban discovered several thousand bottles of beer concealed in the cellar and crushed the lot with a Soviet tank, while a group of parched correspondents looked on longingly. Insurgents attacked the hotel incurring at least 21 deaths, nine of them guerrillas.

The luxury **Serena Hotel** (originally built in 1945 and known as the **Kabul Hotel**) http://www.serenahotels.com/serenakabul/ was fully renovated a few years after the Talib collapse and retains much of its previous classical look integrating traditional Islamic architecture. Not long after it was re-opened, insurgents attacked the gym area in an assault which cost six lives, including that of a Norwegian journalist. Security has since been tightened even more. Located in downtown Kabul not too far from most of the major embassies it has a health centre with heated pool, plus several restaurants and cafes. Rooms start from US$ 356 per person. The **Safi Landmark Hotel and Suites** is another recent addition to the Kabul scene. Modern and not far from the airport, it boasts conference facilities, a gym, restaurants/cafés and a shopping area. For room rates check website: http://www.safilandmarkhotelsuites.com/

Guest Houses

Kabul has a hodgepodge of guesthouses of varying quality started by adventurous foreign and Afghan entrepreneurs, including members of the government. Prices can normally be negotiated if you're staying longer.

Gandamack

The ASSA Guest Residence House is located in Sharh-e-Naw with easy access to all main arterial routes, plus most major government offices, UN agencies and NGOs. It offers some 110 rooms , each with its own bath or shower, television, tea and coffee facilities, and fridge. Breakfast and dinner are also available. There is also a pleasant garden and pool. Room rates run from

US$ 90-140. See www.http://assaguesthouses.com/. **The Park Palace Guest House** is popular with aid workers and consultants. Located in Shar-e-Naw (P.O. Box No. 5459, Kabul, Afghanistan), the hotel has a pleasant garden and quiet, but modest facilities. **The Afghans4Tomorrow Guesthouse** is a small, locally-run but comfortable and well-managed establishment located 15 minutes west of the city centre in the Guzar Gah area (3rd district). The area is relatively quiet. Quite a number of travellers recommend it. Room rates are moderate at US$ 50-60 depending on the period. You can arrange a discount for longer stays and there is internet at three dollars per night. A satellite television is available in the common room. There is a day and night guard, plus the guest house can offer transportation and translation facilities. See http://www.afghans4tomorrow.org/. **The Heetal Heritage Hotel** (Street 14, Wazir Akbar Khan Kabul) is well-located on the edge of Wazir Akbar Khan at the foot of Bibi Mahru Hill. Not too far from where some of the smaller western embassies (Denmark, Switzerland, Belgium) plus several of the ICRC residences. It markets itself as Kabul's first "eco-friendly" boutique hotel and has an adequate restaurant offering a variety of different cuisines. Good walking or running in the vicinity, when the pollution is tolerable. **The Euro Guesthouse** (Street 15, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul) near the Danish and Swiss embassies, the Indira Ghandi Hostpital and the excellent Tarverna du Liban Restaurant, is easily recognized by its tangerine-daubed walls as you drive past on the main road from the airport – about 15 minutes away. (It can get a bit noisy). You are also walking distance from major embassies, shops and restaurants. The establishment offers different types at rooms (premium, deluxe, business) at different prices, from US$30-130. The staff are friendly and they can arrange for drivers, translators and other services. Tel. +93 70 197220. See www.http://euroguesthouse.net/. **The Le Monde Guest House** touts itself as the best accommodation in Kabul – and indeed quite a few veteran journalists, aid consultants and photographers make it their home whenever in town. For those who knew it from before, it has moved to a new location: it is now at Nr. 7 Herati Mosque St, Shar-e-Naw, very close to the park as well as various shops and restaurants. The food is still good and the garden relaxing. And always a friendly and congenial atmosphere where you can meet faces, new and old. Tel. +93 (0)799 614 872 or +93 (0)70 280 751www.http://www.lemondeghkabul.blogspot.fr/.

Shahr-e-Naw Guesthouse is located just off Flower Street is a relatively pleasant place a couple of minutes walk from the Shahr-e-Naw park. It offers different sized rooms at varying prices, all negotiable. Tel. 93 70 267814. **The Jamil Hotel** (Mohammad Jan Khan-Wat, Zarnegar Park Area, Kabul) down the road from the Serena Hotel and the French Lycee Istiqlal used to be popular with backpackers, but reportedly is now off limits to foreigners.

The UNICA Guesthouse is one of the places where visiting UN missions have to stay for security reasons. (Shar-i-Naw, Ansari Wat, Kabul) Located at the north-western end of Kolola Pushta road in Shahr-e-Naw and known locally as the "UN Club", it has been a guesthouse since 1945. Unfortunately Afghans are not allowed to enter nor are NGO workers and journalists permitted to stay. Security concerns have limited access to outsiders, but with a letter of introduction from your agency you can use the facilities, which include a restaurant, swimming pool, squash, pool tables, table tennis, badminton, a weights room and a beautiful garden. Rates are US$ 45-50, but the rooms are cramped. The facilities are good by Kabul standards with a pleasant garden, swimming pool and bar. Dinner buffet is US$ 6, but you need to start early or the food is gone. Tel. +93 (0)20 2201022).**The International Club** (Street 3, Charahi Haji Yaqoob, Shahr-e-Naw, Kabul) located near the foot of the Kolola Pushta fort in Shahr-e-Naw, has been renovated completely with en suite guestrooms (US$ 100/room), swimming pool, tennis and squash. The breakfast and dinner are reportedly excellent for some who have stayed there. There is good security. Previously the German Club, one waiter who worked here for 40 years remembered hundreds of guests before 1992 and a thriving amateur dramatic scene with tennis and indoor bowls.

Eating out

Kabul dining has come a long way since the sheep curry and kebabs available under the Taliban. With several dozen or so restaurants catering specifically to expats with European prices to match, here's a flavour of what's on offer. Always bear in mind terrorism risks, so check on where to go. The UN and western embassies often place restaurants off-limits during security alerts.

Afghan restaurants

The Herat almost opposite the Shahr-e-Naw park cinema remains one of the most popular Afghan restaurants in the city. The food is excellent. A lunch of qabuli, maast & chai sabz (rice & mutton, yogurt and green tea) still costs less than a few dollars. For some of the best Afghan cuisine, however, try the **Sufi** restaurant with its art exhibitions, traditional music and poetry readings near the Aryub Cinema in Karte Parwan. Tel. 070-210651). **The Kulba** is another excellent Afghan (and, yes, Italian) restaurant, plus it offers live Afghan music. (Esmat Muslim St., Shahr-e-Naw. Tel. 93 799 452151, or 93 70 034979) Good pulao, kababs and other traditional Afghan dishes. **The Chaila** located in Kart-e-Se is an Afghan-American restaurant. A satisfyingly good mix of pizzas, milkshakes and capuccinos with Afghan-style foods. Wifi internet and TV. Another interesting place is the **Haji Baba** (Charahi Torabaz Khan, Shahr-e Naw, Kabul) offering western Afghan (Herati) food. **The Khosha** located in the Golden Star Hotel in Charahi Haji, Kabul, boasts a rooftop setting with great views of the city. With its Kuchi decorations inside, it offers the usual Afghan cuisine. **The Safi Landmark Hotel/Restaurant** is located in a modern setting, but serves good – even excellent – Afghan food. For those who want a 'safe' location without venturing out into the 'real' Afghanistan. **The Anaar** (Lane 3, Street 14 , Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul Tel. 079 9567 291) serves mixed Afghan and international cuisine. A nice change if you want something different.

International fare

International: Bs Place Restaurant (also a guesthouse - Str.2, Qala-e-Fatullah, House No.3, Tel. 93 70-276416, 93 70-276711.0 serves a good pepper steak in the garden, as well as pizzas, Mexican and English dishes, Thai curry. **Gandamack Lodge** (see above) is open to non-residents craving an English breakfast or delicious three-course dinner. **The German Club Restaurant** has a buffet on Thursday nights. **Le Divan Restaurant (formerly L'Atmosphere),** Str.4, Qala-e-Fatullah. Tel. 93 799-300264, 93 700 224982. Serves a good choice of French dishes. Its garden with pool and outdoor bar makes it an ideal summer haven for those wishing to escape the dust and rush of Kabul. Nothing like sitting outside and enjoying the peace and quiet of hard day. A good

place to bump into people. **The Taverna Du Liban** has become one of Kabul's favourite Lebanese restaurants. Good food and good service, plus a security awareness which softens the hearts of the even the most hardened mercenary protection consultants. (Lane 3, Street 14 Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, Afghanistan. Tel. 070 210651). **Le Bistro,** a French café-restaurant off Chicken Street. (Tel. 079 9598 852) offers good breakfasts and brunches, plus has its own bakery. A nice atmosphere for dinner too. **The Los Amigos Steakhouse** features Spanish-Afghan food if you can believe it. Not easy to find for security reasons, but certainly worth going to. The Boccaccio is a good fun place with enjoyable Italian food, excellent pasta and piazza. Very relaxing. For hanging out or informal meetings, try the **Cabul Coffee House** (Street 7, Qala-e Fatullah, Kabul. Tel. 070-29314). An excellent coffee house with great atmosphere. Good fruit juices too. **The Mustafa Hotel** (see above) claims to sell the best pizzas in town (they are indeed good) and offers rooftop eating. It also has a ground floor café for milkshakes and fruit juices. **The Bella Italia** is another good Italian-style restaurant with tasty pizzas and pasta dishes, but expensive mains. Bella Italia (Street 14, near the Pakistani Consulate, Tel.93 799 600 666). **The Anaar** is one of the best Pak/Indian restaurants in Kabul (St 14, Lane 3, Wazir Akbar Khan Tel. 93 700 284 315 (anaarkabul@yahoo.com). Sitting at authentic Afghan low tables, cushions, carpets and beautiful carved Nuristani woodwork, you can enjoy excellent Indian-style dishes but also a delicious green and red Thai curry. The restaurant has UN security clearance. **The Luck Restaurant** also offers excellent Pakistani-Indian cuisine, but a bit pricey.

The Delhi Darbar (Cinema Zainab Rd, Shahr-e-Naw between the park and Flower St. Tel. 93 799 324 899) is another Indian restaurant with good rather than great food, but the dishes are ample. Intimate indoor seating with spacious garden for outdoor dining. **The Kabul Serena Hotel** Silk Route Restaurant stands out as one of the best Central Asian style restaurants in Kabul. **The Café Zarnegar** in the same hotel is also good; an excellent place for buffet breakfasts with the full hog. **The Mai Thai** (Street 15, Wazir Akbar Khan; Tel: 070 297557) certainly ranks as the best, but also most expensive Thai restaurant in Kabul boasting a Thai chef. Very popular with the diplo and aid crowd.
Afghan International Pizza Express (Darulaman Road near Ministry of Commerce and Ariana TV. Tel. 93 700 383 918. Good

pizza. Destroyed during the May 2006 riots, but has since been rebuilt and has a new chef. **The Vil Vil Croatian Restaurant** is one of those bizarre places where the food is not really defined. Quite a few former Yugoslavs, including Croatians, have set up shop in Kabul, but this restaurant seems more Italian style and not particularly Southern Slav. Okay but not great food. **The Elbow Room** is a renowned expat haunt nestled between the UNDP compound and the Chinese embassy with classy – and not cheap - continental cuisineand bar (Tel: 079-352538). **The Popo'Lano Restaurants** (there is one in Ansari Square, Shahr-e-Naw, the other in Wazir-Akbar Khan) were among the first restaurants to open in Kabul Popular with internationals and wealthy Afghans. Good food with takeaway service available, but expensive.

Chinese cuisine

Quite a few oriental restaurants have opened since 2002, but some were closed in February 2005 by the Interior Ministry for indulging in activities which had more to do with women being served up than sweet & sour chicken. They also appealed to some very high up Afghan officials. **Golden Key Seafood Restaurant.** Good Chinese food but not sure about the seafood for a landlocked country. (No 284, Lane 4, Wazir Akbar Khan – fourth turning on the left off St 13. Tel. 93 799 002800, 93 799 343319. Garden dining in the summer, Sheesha, Karaoke and English breakfast on Fridays. http://www.goldenkeykabul.com
Hong Kong Restaurant, (Wazir Akbar Khan near Pakistani embassy). Good Chinese food.

Other Eateries

• Carlito's Restaurant & Bar (Str 15 Wazir Ak Khan) Tel. 93 799 159697, 93 799 167824. Mexican cuisine plus English Menu.
• Cafe du Pelican (Daraluman Road) Run by a French couple, good French cafe food with a bakery.
• Chief Burger (Shahr–e-Naw near Park Cinema). No great shakes, but offers fast food; burger and pizzas.
• Escalades Restaurant (MicroRayon 2, Matba block 104, Tel. 93 799 473763) European cuisine. edit
• The Grill Restaurant (Street 15, Wazir Akbar Khan near British embassy). Lebanese food in pleasant garden surroundings.
• Istanbul Restaurant (Microrayan 2, Matba block 104, Tel. 93 70

200116, 93 799 356282. Excellent Turkish cuisine. Popular with Afghans.

• New World Korean Restaurant (Charyi Ansari, Shahr-e Naw Tel. 93 799 199509). Now moved to a new location, but the food is still excellent quality. Good selection of Korean dishes, including excellent kimbab (Korean sushi).

• Zadar Croatian Restaurant (Wazir Akbar Khan 13th St. Tel.93 70 0220884) Romantic restaurant with lounge bar.

• Pamir Restaurant, Bagh-e Bala road, Intercontinental Hotel. Tel.93 20 2201321). Offers an excellent and cheap.

• The Springfield Restaurant & Bar (Wazir Akbar Khan) Pizza and assorted Italian/Western fare.

• Raven Rae Restaurant (Off Koche Qasabi, first lane left. Located in the Raven Rae Villa compound, 6th building on the right side. Tel.93 779 057640 (ravenraevilla@ravenraeresources.com). Pizza, steak, seafood soups and salads. Good brunch in the rose garden.

A Note of Caution about Alcohol

Alcohol is illegal and not the sort of thing one needs to boast about. No point in obliging the Afghan authorities to take action. If they do, they will probably confiscate the booze to sell on the black market. Or drink for themselves. Nevertheless, alcohol is relatively easy to find, including in some of the expat restaurants. Other options are to buy your own supplies through contacts with the military or the western embassies. Just ask around. Beer and spirits are available at UNOCA, but the selection is not particularly good and you can't take it off the premises. Otherwise, we're keeping mum on where to find it.

For more information on sleeping, eating and drinking in Kabul, check out:

• *The Lonely Planet Guide to Kabul* http://www.lonelyplanet.com/afghanistan/kabul

• *Trip Advisor:* http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g660089-d3721832-Reviews-Marco_Polo_Inn-Kabul_Kabul_Province.html.

• *The Survival Guide to Kabul* http://www.kabulguide.net/kbl-hotels.htm Last updated in 2004, but still offering good hints.

Books

Kabul is surprisingly well-served by bookshops; you can find several of them around Chicken and Flower Street. Some, too, focus on old editions ranging from Karl Marx to Persian poetry published at the end of the 19th century. Most sell the latest books on Afghanistan albeit often in pirated version. One of the best known culprits is Shah Mohammed of the *Bookseller of Kabul*, renown who with other collaborators in Pakistan shamelessly prints up his own versions, including the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan, to sell both in Afghanistan and Pakistan at outrageous prices. (SEE BOX on The Bookthief of Kabul). Every pirated book purchased from Shah sets the literary community back a notch or two, and more or less sabotages what the international community has been trying to achieve in the country. So even though his offerings might look tempting, it is best to play it straight and order from Amazon.com or another distributor, including, yes, book shops in London, Paris, or elsewhere.

For more reading on Kabul, try:

The Survival Guide to Kabul, Dominic Medley & Jude Barrand, Bradt Travel Guides Ltd (England, 2003) Small but essential pocket guide for visiting the capital. Some copies sold by street children, mainly in pirated format.

An Historical Guide to Afghanistan, Nancy Hatch Dupree (Kabul, 2nd Edition, 1977) required reading.

Cabool in 1836-37 and 8, Being the Personal Narrative of a Journey to, and Residence in, that City, Sir Alexander Burnes, (London, 1842; reprinted by Ferozsons, Lahore, 1964 and by Akade-mische Druk u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1973). Despite the author's knowledge of the city, he was hacked to death by a frenzied mob in 1841.

An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, Mountstuart Elphinstone, John Murray (London, 1815; reprinted by Akademische Druk-u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1969 and by Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1972)

Signal Catastrophe; The Retreat from Kabul, 1842, Patrick Macrory, Hodder and Stoughton (London, 1966).

Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839-42,

William Dalrymple. Alfred A. Knopf (London and NY, 2013)
Killing the Cranes – A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan. (Chapters on the Battle for Kabul, 1993-94, the Taliban period (1996-2001, and current), Edward Girardet (Chelsea Green, Vermont, 2011 and revised 2012)

Embassies & Visas

During 2002 many diplomatic missions, which had abandoned Kabul during the 1980s and 90s, re-established heavily guarded embassies in the city. By the end of the year 25 countries were represented. But the fighting had taken its toll on the buildings themselves. The Russian embassy was reduced to a shattered ruin; the magnificent British mission home to the "best housed man in Asia" and guarded until 1994 by a team of Gurkhas armed with little more than kukris was handed back to Pakistan and promptly shelled. The American Embassy now looks like a huge university campus with high walls, office blocks, residential complexes, bunkers and reinforced cellars, and even a tunnel leading from one section to another. Make sure you register with your own embassy on arrival. Afghan visas may be renewed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Passport Lane, Shar-e-Now. "Exit visas" to leave the country are no longer necessary. For getting visas to visit Afghanistan, check with the Afghan embassies in your country. SEE VISAS.

Emergencies

If you find yourself in Kabul when under attack, lie low and wait for an opportunity to leave if things get too hot. (So bring along a good book and your short-wave radio. Don't expect the Internet to work if power is knocked out or you find yourself in a location with no access to a generator.). There is a bunker under the UNICA club in Shahr-e-Naw, but all buildings with UN security clearance also have sandbagged shelters or cellars. Otherwise hide under the stairs. It may sound obvious, but resist the temptation to go outside if there is shooting: what goes up must come down. People have been killed or injured by falling bullets and shrapnel.

Kabul was one of the most heavily mined cities in the world. Most have been removed, but be careful to stick to well-used paths, or be sure to get a guide. Some mines are still out there.

In an emergency, the ICRC and the UN will try to evacuate their staff and everyone else (in that order) either by vehicle or by air, so keep in touch.

Security Information

First stop should be for a security briefing call on ACBAR, ICRC or the UN or details. For more information about UN activities, contact AIMS, whose staff can update you on the latest. The US, British and other embassies provide wardens' briefings over the internet or through the agencies. Make sure you receive some kind of landmine awareness update, preferably from the UN's Mine Action Programme in Kabul (MAPA) before travelling widely in Afghanistan. For more details on NGO activities contact ACBAR. The best way to connect to the humanitarian grapevine is through the keyed-in guest houses or to turn up for drinks at places like Gandamack or the Elbow Room. The UNICA Guesthouse used to be a good place for information, but with so many security restrictions on movements in and around the country, UN and embassy personnel are sometimes the last to know. For internet updates, check out:

- http://www.aims.org.af (website for the UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service/AIMS)
- http://www.kabulcaravan.com (online travel guide to Afghanistan)
- http://www.kabulguide.net
- http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com (online chat room see Asia/ Central Asia section)

Local Rules

Kabul is in many ways a unique city, quite different from the rest of Afghanistan. Although the Taliban have vanished, security remains a hefty concern. City security is now handled primarily by the Afghan army and police – and they seem to be getting better. However, the police – as with the Ministry of Interior - are notoriously corrupt, so should not be trusted. Nothing wrong with being on their good side, but don't be taken in. Some are known to be collaborating with the Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami, Haqqani Network or other insurgent or freelance groups. Nevertheless, as a foreigner, they will certainly treat you better than local

Afghans whom they constantly hit up for bribes or other forms of 'protection.' However, when kidnappings or other similar incidents occur, fingers often point to one of the ministries and not just the Taliban or Hezb.

The international security companies and mercenaries that protect the embassies, private companies and other international institutions, are constantly upping the ante when it comes to security. This is obviously their business, but as some experienced NGOs point out, it is far better to have good local relations rather than armed guards. The answer probably lies somewhere in between. Kabul is safer than other cities, notably Kandahar, but the city has witnessed a growing number of "security incidents" (UN or NATO speak for insurgent attacks) over the past several years. Always be aware of your surroundings. Keep your car windows and doors locked at all times. A locked car door can slowdown a potential kidnapper and give you more options. Most of all, learn to be street savvy. If something doesn't look or feel right, the chances are that it isn't. The best way to identify a threat is to be sensitive to anomalies that depart from the usual.

Many Kabuli women still wear the burqa, fearing for their safety on the streets. Women should avoid travelling alone and dress in respectable Western clothes, plus ensure their arms and legs are fully covered. Chadors (head veils) for western women are optional in Kabul now. Shorts worn by either sex are considered offensive, so leave them at home. Government curfews were lifted for the first time in a decade in November 2002, but most international organizations such as the UN maintain their own curfews. Be careful at night. Street lighting is poor and the risk of accidently tripping into a gaping hole and injuring yourself is far greater than being attacked.

Never leave valuables unattended in taxis or unlocked rooms; why provoke temptation. Be discreet in your consumption of alcohol, particularly in the presence of Afghans. It could be insulting to them but they can also risk punishment simply for being there. Always ask permission before taking photos of people, particularly Afghan women. Begging and baksheesh are a constant issue. Ultimately, the decision is a personal one. Salaries are so low that it's good to tip any Afghan who helps you out, but avoid paying bribes to police or government officials. It only makes the situation worse.

As for begging, giving zakat to the poor is a central tenet of Islam. EFG editors found the best solution was to carry a

quantity of small denomination Afghanis for handing out. Giving to children runs the risk of encouraging families to take them out of school to beg.

Medical

Access to health care in Kabul may well be better than in many Western towns. There are dozens of agencies specializing in the medical sector and over 20 mainly private clinics in the capital, but some of the Afghan hospitals still have shockingly poor facilities and power shortages. There are also numerous pharmacies but check the expiration dates and the drugs issued. Best check with friends to see which of the pharmacies are trustworthy. There are a lot of counterfeit drugs. If you are suffering from an emergency and have nowhere to go, it is probably best to check with ISAF or your embassy. You can also arrange to see a health NGO through ACBAR. Most aid agencies are more than willing to help out. The Italian NGO, Emergency, runs a highly efficient emergency surgical centre on Cinema Zainab road in Shahr-e-Naw, full of friendly staff. (Tel. 070 287519). The ICRC runs surgical units at Karte Seh and Wazir Akbar Khan hospitals and will operate on all emergency cases. (SEE PERSONAL HEALTH).

For medical and security emergencies, call your embassy or:

- **Afghan NGO Security Office (ANSO; Tel. 070 283320/079 9322 133. Email: coordinator@afgnso.org)**
- **Ambulance (Tel. 020 112/079 9357 049)**
- **ISAF (Tel. 079 9512 904)**
- **Kabul City Police (Tel. 020 100/079 9046 714)**
- **Kabul Fire Brigade (Tel. 020 210 1333)**

(Note: The Kabul fire department has come a far **way since the Battle of Kabul days of 1993-94 when it had** a single landline telephone, which rarely worked. And when it did, the only way to deal with a fire was to hail a taxi).

Or check with these hospitals, all privately operated.

The Cure International Hospital (Tel. 079 9883 830; near Darulaman Palace, Jad-e Darulaman. Closed Fridays) General practice and surgery.

The Blossom Group Hospital (Tel. 070 298397; www.blossom-group.org ; Hanzala Mosque Rd, Shahr-e Naw) This is an Indian-run hospital with walk in general practice clinic and emergency treatment.

The DK German Medical Diagnostic Centre (079 9136 211; www.medical-kabul.com Street 3, Charahi Ansari. Reminding one of the US health care system, it demands a US$100 deposit prior to treatment. It provides a wide range of services including lab diagnostic tests, vaccinations, X-rays, dental and gynaecological.

Money

There are now 14 Afghan banks and other international facilities in Kabul with ATMs. But only a few establishments take credit cards, so make sure you bring enough cash; Euros, US dollars or Pakistani rupees are the best. There are numerous street dealers, so ask around for the best exchange rate. The moneychangers, all sitting in front of little tables or desks with mobile safes behind them, are based mainly at Charahi Torabaz Khan or in the market around Pul-e Khishti Mosque. Look for the small stands with piles of money. There are also moneychangers around the taxi stands of Serai Shomali motor park.

You can send or receive money through Western Union, which now has a number of representatives in town. Some dealers (if they trust you) take personal cheques drawn on European and North American banks. The market is open rather than black. In order to avoid carrying vast wads of cash around, the Transitional Administration reissued the Afghani currency in late 2002, knocking three zeros off the face-value of bank notes. **(Reminder: The people of Afghanistan are Afghans, not Afghanis. The latter is the currency)**. The rate in early 2005 was around 50 Afghanis to the US dollar, and it has not changed much. The going rate in 2013 was 57 Afghanis to a US dollar. There is an increasing preference for Euros. You can open dollar accounts at a number of banks such as the Da Afghanistan Bank, Afghanistan International Bank (AIB - www.aib.af) or Standard Chartered Bank (SEE MONEY).

Post & Telecommunications

Afghanistan's postal services, which joined the Universal Postal Union (IPU) in 1928, now run surprisingly efficiently. You can send and receive letters with wonderful stamps. And somehow, despite there being few formal street names or house numbers, the postmen somehow manage to track you down. We have no idea how. One postman admitted that it might take more than a few hours to track down an individual, particularly given that sometimes only a name and city district are mentioned, with perhaps an added note of some other known location, such as a restaurant. The Central Post Office has yet to establish a postal coding system. DHL and other companies operate their own delivery system, which is quicker and probably more reliable, but at least the Afghans are trying.

With the mobile telephone network, Kabul is better connected now than ever before (you can more or less forget landlines). Well over 90 percent of the country has mobile telephone coverage. However, it is probably still best to have a satphone in case of emergency, particularly if you're stuck in some mountainous or desert zone. There are four main GSM operators in Afghanistan: the state-affiliated Afghan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC - http://www.afghan-wireless.com/), Roshan http://www.roshan.af/Roshan/Home.aspx , the Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (Etisalat) http://www.etisalat.ae/en/index.jsp and the South African MTN group http://www.mtn.co.za/Pages/MTN.aspx. All offer roaming, call plans 3 G and other facilities. You can use North American and European mobile phone on the local system.

No self-respecting Afghan is seen without a mobile, although many have them only to receive rather than make calls because of cost. Handsets and SIM cards can be bought throughout town at specialised phone shops, while street vendors hawk top-up cards. The more expensive Thuraya satphone has become something of a fashion accessory for well-heeled aid workers, but its main advantage is that it works in both urban and rural areas. While UN agencies set up their own internet access in early 2002 (they did not bother to help the NGOs or local civil society), most aid agencies and journalists had to rely on expensive satellite downloads until the first internet cafés began opening in late 2002. In early 2003, Neda Telecommunications set up Kabul's first dial-up internet access. Other companies have now jumped

in. There are numerous internet cafes in town while most hotels and guest houses have wireless or hook-ups in their rooms.

Recreation

Roller-blading around Kabul hasn't caught on yet, but skateboarding has. (SEE SKATEISTAN) A surprising amount of recreational possibilities have been set up since 2002. With the worsening pollution in Kabul, many expats and Afghans are desperate for healthy workouts. Some of the hotels and guest houses have pools, gyms, tennis courts and other facilities. Many Afghans have set up their own fitness and body building clubs. Cricket, too, has taken off in Afghanistan. Most kids tend to play in the backstreets, but there is now a brand-new cricket stadium seating 6,000 and which opened in 2011. Depending on where you live or work, there various possibilities to play football (soccer), basketball, and other sports. Afghans, of course, are avid wrestlers. The Coalition forces at Camp Phoenix on the outskirts of Kabul have sophisticated sports and running facilites. No one is quite sure whether they will be dismantled or handed over to the Afghans when foreign troops leave.

The UNICA Guesthouse boasts a badminton court (the squash court was shattered by a bomb in 2002 but is back in operation), a volleyball court, table tennis, and weights room. There are even two pool tables for diehard elbow fitness freaks, while couch-potatos can sunbathe by the swimming pool (closed October-April). Both ISAF and the US Embassy/military offer excellent gym facilities. The Intercontinental and Serena Hotels have swimming pools, health spas and fitness areas. (The latter hosts the Hash House Harriers.) The Sufi Landmark Hotel, for example, has an extremely well-equipped, modern gym.

If you can't find anyone to run with, try scaling Bibi Mahro hill behind Wazir Akbar Khan popular with expat joggers. But Kabul's excessive pollution and dust may kill you first. Or go for a long weekend to the Panjshir Valley or Bamiyan. There you can run to your heart's content – and in clean air. The Gold Gym at Macrorayon 2 (an old Soviet estate) has new weights machines and is cheaper than the Intercontinental. The International Club has three tennis courts and a pool. Racquets and balls are available as well as changing facilities. Volleyball, bowling, and billiards are all on offer as is a fully-equipped theatre.

Despite the departure of the Taliban, bear in mind Islamic

considerations regarding dress before exercising outdoors. Always change beforehand and never wander around Kabul in shorts. If you must undress, do it beside a swimming pool, not on the roof of your guesthouse. Some joggers run at the university or head out of town to the dams or golf course but be aware of security. The more established expats go riding with their own horses to the south of Kabul, but by early 2005, you could rent horses - and camels. The local extreme sport is buzkashi, which has made a comeback in Kabul Stadium and is played most Fridays. If you're looking for rough and tumble but don't have a horse, try rugby at ISAF (opposite the US embassy) on Fridays. Turkish baths and massage parlours are popping up around town. Kabul Scene magazine seeks to keep up with the latest - and increasingly sophisticated - cultural and other activities. For children (quite a number of expats or Diaspora Afghans have come with their families), there is precious little to do.

While there are public parks with playgrounds, most expats prefer to keep a low profile for security reasons and are reluctant to head out in the country. Nevertheless, there are several excellent playgroups and home schools in well-protected compounds. Kargha Lake and Reservoir 9 kilometres from Kabul is a great place for walks, runs and even bird-watching, and to get away from the city. But be security-wise.

Shopping

Shopping in Kabul took a turn for the worse after the British Army torched the famous covered bazaar 120 years ago. The Afghans however, never ones to miss out on a quick buck, have bounced back and import startling quantities of goods from Dubai, China and Russia. You can now buy everything from brand new 4x4s to the latest Apple computer equipment. Basically, with some new shopping centres aspiring to emulate malls you can more or less find whatever you need, albeit at a price. If *qabuli, maast & chai sabz* are not your style, there are a number of western-style supermarkets with a solid array of imported foods, such as Italian olive oil, American Oreo cookies and French cheese. One such shop is 'Chelsi Market' off Chicken Street, where you can Pringles, Pampers, Marmite and Milk Tray chocolates. Its promotional literature boasts: "Selling of All Groceries, food in Addition, Exchang Dollar Check and Ropes". There are also a number of good French-style bakeries.

Some Afghan shops discreetly (but also less discreetly) sell beer and vodka, the preferred drink of the Afghan bourgoisie from the communist period. Supreme, a private PX outlet on the Jalalabad Road, and several other international supermarket operations, sell respectable selections of wine and beer.
Chicken Street still attracts the rookie trophy hunters, but for bargains you need to look elsewhere. Turcoman carpets, lapis jewellery, Kuchi bed-spreads, and fake Lee Enfield pistols are all on sale but the men in black flak jackets and shades have pushed up prices. Be prepared to drink lots of green tea and haggle hard. A number of art galleries selling traditional work have opened in Kabul. Also check with the Aga Khan http://www.akdn.org/afghanistan and Turquoise Mountain http://www.turquoisemountain.org/ Foundations, which support traditional local crafts. Please don't buy animal skins,especially snow leopard, as many of Afghanistan's fauna are seriously endangered. (SEE CONSERVATION)

The Bazaars: There are still a few great bazaars in Kabul, all specialising in something: kitchenware, hardware tools,electricity items, vegetables, poultry, camels…Much more fun than the supermarkets. Shor bazaar is one; Charchata another. Ask around but best go with someone local.

Sights in Kabul

Sightseeing may not be the first thing which comes to mind when in Kabul, but there are some places well worth visiting. For great panoramic views of the city and the mountains, drive up one the hills to the south west of Shahr-e-Naw (e.g. Koh-e-Asmai) early or late in the day. Alternatively, climb Bibi Mahro behind Wazir Akbar Khan. The best sources for sightseeing remain the two 1970s guidebooks by Nancy Dupree. What follows is a modest update.

Arg Citadel

Built by Amir Abdul Rahman in 1880 to replace the Bala Hissar, which had served as the citadel for Afghan kings, destroyed by the British during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the Arg (Dari, Pashto and Turkish for 'citidal') was used as the Royal Palace. It was initially designed as a castle with a water-filled moat. It's central attractions were the Salam Khana (Hall of Salutation)

and Dilkosha Palace (Heart Delight Palace), which later served as offices of the President. The Arg was severely damaged during the shelling that erupted around Bacha-e-Saqa'o's nine month rule and then overthrow in 1929. Located in a now largely restricted 33.5 hectare part (for security reasons) of Wazir Akbar Khan in Kabul, the Arg was partially restored by King Nadir Shah and then further enlarged by the last Afghan king, Zahir Shah. Former Afghan President Mohammed Daoud and his family were murdered inside the compound during the April, 1978 Saur Revolution when the communists took power. The Arg today serves as the Presidential office together with Protocol Office, the National Security Advisor's building, and various offices of the Afghan security forces. Several of the buildings are used for ceremonial purposes and for receiving delegations. Obviously, members of the public cannot visit unless specifically invited.

Babur's Garden

The 16th Century founder of the Moghul dynasty, Babur, so loved Kabul that he asked to be buried here. The gardens climb the sides of Sher-e-Darwaza mountain and are considered to be the most beautiful part of the capital. They are also the largest public green space (11 ha) in the city. At the top are the finely carved marble tombs of Babur and his wife, plus a beautiful little mosque built by Shah Jehan (more famous for the Taj Mahal). The garden itself was laid out in the classical charbagh (four garden) design with a series of rising terraces separated by a striking watercourse. Abdur Rahman Khan partially restored the gardens during the early 20th century with public access allowed during the 1930s. During the Battle for Kabul in 1993-94, locals cut most of the trees for firewood. Not much of the greenery survived (The Taliban had the remaining vineyards ripped up), but UNESCO and the Aga Khan Foundation have undertaken a major restoration of this remarkable spot (SEE CULTURE). Today, the gardens are surrounded by high, protective walls. A traditional caravanserai is scheduled to serve as a visitors centre with archaeological artefacts discovered prior and during the restoration. Many traditional trees and other plants mentioned in the Baburnama, notably cherry, mulberry, quince, walnut and apricot, have been planted.

Afghanistan's historic citadel, located in Karte Naw, was finally destroyed by the British in the 19th Century. But the ruins and old city walls are worth looking at. Don't wander off the road as the place may still have landmines.

Christian Cemetery

Located at Char-e-Shahid in Shahr-e-Naw, this walled graveyard contains over a century-worth of Christian remains, including those of intrepid explorer Sir Aurel Stein plus hapless hippies from the '60s and '70s.

Kabul Museum

Officially known as the National Museum of Afghanistan, this was one of the most important collections of archaeology and ethnography in Central Asia prior to the 1978-present war. With over 100,000 items stretching back several millennia, the Hellenistic, Greco-Buddhist, Ghaznavid and subsequent periods were all represented. Opened in 1919, its neoclassical home, constructed by King Amanullah in Darulaman, 10 km from the centre of town, was shattered by factional fighting between 1992-1996. The museum was located on the frontline, where guerrilla groups had set up operations, regularly shelling each other. Much of the collection was believed looted or destroyed. Collaborating with Pakistani and Afghan antique traffickers, the former mujahideen took the more precious items and sold them on the black market, select pieces making their way into private collections in Europe, North America and Japan. These included some of the famous Kunduz hoard of Graeco-Bactrian coins, Balkh pottery as well as numerous Gandhara Buddhist statues. Some of the remaining collection was moved in 1996 to the Kabul Hotel for safekeeping, a decision that protected it from the Taliban. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Talib fighters led by the so-called "Minister of Culture" from entering the museum premises and deliberately destroying sculptures and other artefacts too large to remove.

Since then, some of these statues have been superbly restored. While less than a third of the museum's original exhibits have survived, various items believed gone have been found. A considerable amount had been locked away in sealed boxes. This was inventoried and put back on display in 2004, when a first section of the museum was re-opened. Progress by the

international community and the staff to rebuild the museum on its current site has been slow (SEE CULTURE). But today, it offers a surprising display of items and is well worth a visit. Or two. Since 2007, both UNESCO and Interpol have helped recover over 8,000 artefacts, including some which had been trafficked out of the country during the 1990s. This included a limestone sculpture from Germany. The British Museum also returned some 843 items, including the famous 1st Century Bagram Ivories. Even more exciting, much of the famous "Bactrian Gold" (some 20,000 ornaments) from the Tiliya Tepe archaeological site was rediscovered in 2006 in some hidden crates in the cellar of the museum and then put on travelling display around the world from Paris to London.

The shell-shattered remains of Amanullah's early 20th Century Darulaman Palace are nearby. You can also still see the rusting iron steam locomotive – one of three brought in by Amanullah – representing the first attempt to build a railway in Afghanistan. Only a few miles of track were ever laid.

Kabul Zoo

Despite taking a direct rocket hit during the 1990s, the zoo is a popular destination for Kabulis. Founded in the 1960s, many of the original animals were killed or stolen during the fighting. Its most famous inmate, Marjan the Lion, survived decades of war and a Taliban grenade attack, only to die in 2002. Since then, some 300 animals representing 45 different species of birds and mammals, plus a similar number of fish, have joined what was a very sorry-looking bunch of inmates, including: a jackal, four wolves, some baboons, a small wild cat, a fox, hundreds of rabbits, two monkeys, a deer, a few vultures, some owls and a sore-nosed Asiatic black bear called Donatella. The zoo was one of the first initiatives to receive international backing in 2002, when a British newspaper made a call for donations to help the animals. Their pitiful living conditions, resulting in the deaths of some animals, are slowly being improved. China has donated two lions, but much of the zoo still looks a sorry sight. The Chinese say that they will not offer any more animals until conditions are up to standard. A North Carolina zoo in the United States is helping to train up zookeepers plus build new facilities.

Mausoleum of Amir Abdur Rahman

Standing out as a landmark in the centre of town, just north of the river, the mausoleum stands in Zarnegar (lit. "adorned with gold") Park, although neither gold nor park is much in evidence today. Originally built by the Amir (1880-1901) as a private pleasure pavilion, his son Amir Habibullah laid him to rest here. The Mausoleum represents one of the finest examples of 19th century baroque architecture remaining in Kabul today. Closed to visitors, much of the mausoleum is covered with graffiti. The nearby tomb of King Amanullah's brother Hayatullah is used for drying laundry.

Mausoleum of Timur Shah

Dedicated not to the great Tamerlane, but to one of Ahmed Shah Durrani's sons, this impressive early 19th Century monument was saved during the war by freight containers stacked around it. Sited near the Kabul river in the oldest part of Kabul by the 'Titanic Market', the octagonal brick mausoleum and the garden which once surrounded it are still being restored by the Aga Khan Foundation as part of its Old City renovation project.

Minaret of Maiwand

Only the stump of this unremarkable monument remains; but it signified a remarkable Afghan victory over the British near Kandahar in 1880. The Afghans were about to give up when out rushed a young Pushtun bride named Malalai, ripped off her veil and raised it over her head as a battle standard with the cry, "My love, if you do not fall today in the battle of Maiwand, by Allah you will be saved as a symbol of shame!" What would the Taliban, the current insurgents and the more conservative elements of the 'new' Afghanistan have made of her?

Pul-e-Khisti Mosque

With a blue dome rising just across the river from Zarnegar, this is Kabul's largest mosque, built at the end of the 18th Century. It stands next to the Pul-e-Khisti (lit. "Bridge of Bricks") in the former centre of 17th-19th century Kabul. Many Kabulis assert that the Iman of this mosque for many years in the early part of the 20th century was an Englishman who had converted to Islam, and that he returned to England after relinquishing his position at the mosque. Damaged during the fighting of the 1990s and early 2000s, it is one of the few buildings in the area to have had

restoration work.

Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque

Built in the reign Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque (the name translates to Mosque of the King of Two Swords) is a yellow two-story building just off the Kabul River near the Old Town in the center of the city. It was built during the reign of King Amanullah Khan. The Mosque is located next to a tomb of an Arab commander who died in the 7th century when the Arabs entered Kabul.

Sherpur Mosque

Located in Chehrani Haji Yaqub on the edge of Sherpur and Shahr-e-Naw, the mosque is relatively new, built only in 1957. The external blue tiling on its façade originates from the famour Friday Mosque Tile Workshop in Herat. It is referred to locally as the Majid-e-Haji Yaqub.

Day Trips

Istalif

North of Kabul in the Koh Daman, a valley ringed by barren hills with villages boasting green apple, pear and apricot orchards with vineyards, Istalif is famous for its green and blue pottery, plus picturesque bazaar. It is a stunningly beautiful place, which despite considerable war damage – the Taliban appeared to have it in for the Istalif people – looks over the verdant Shomali Plains with its 100 varieties of exceptionally tasty grapes. (Many of them were destroyed by the Taliban who forced young men at gunpoint to rip them up). One EFG editor brought back several vines to grow in his garden in France, but they have yet to produce grapes.

Kabul Gorge

One of the most impressive gorges in Afghanistan is the Tange Gharu, the Kabul Gorge. For those reporters and aid workers who traveled clandestinely inside the country during the Soviet war, this was a part that had to be crossed – by foot and at night. A former stone picket stands at the top of the gorge from where one can look down on the Kabul to Jalalabad

highway with a series of painful switchbacks (attested by the various truck, bus and car wrecks at the bottom). A great and unique view, but please be security conscious, particularly from early afternoon onwards when traffic begins to diminish and you may stand out as a target for the insurgents or simply a criminal gang in search of kidnap victims.

Guldara Stupa

There are a lot of stupas to be found off the Sarobi-Jalalabad Highway from Kabul, but this one is just down the road 22 kilometres south from Kabul. Not far from the village of Guldarra, it appears to date from the late second Century AD as some gold coins from the Kushan King Vima Kadphises (113-127) plus another two from his son, Huvishka (150-190) were found in the area. None were particularly worn. The Guldara Stupa with its solid mass of stone and mud is one of the best preserved in Afghanistan. A small stupa, a replica of the main one, can be found nearby together with the remnants of a fortified Buddhist monastery. A further stupa and monastery are located close to the nearby village of Shiwaki. The Guldara Stupa stands on a square base (decorated with two false Corinthian columns) with two cylindrical domes topped with another dome. There are also a number of niches, which are believed to have contained statues. As with other such edifices throughout Afghanistan, it was originally plastered and painted ochre-yellow.

Paghman

Just up the road west from Kabul lies this former much favoured summer resort for the city's royals and bourgoisie. Once called the "garden of Afghanistan," this town has been badly damaged during various stages of the country's nearly three and a half decade long war. More than half of it was destroyed, when it was fought over by the mujahideen during the Soviet war and many people fled the district. Sadly, little remains of the once elaborate European-style villas and country homes that were more reminiscent of Deauville or Nice than mud-and-stone Afghanistan. Nevertheless, parts are being re-built and it is becoming increasingly popular again as a holiday and picnic destination for many Kabulis who come to enjoy the greenness of its fruit orchards and walnut trees.

The imposing Paris-style "Arc de Trioumphe" victory arch,

standing in the central square, was built by King Amanullah in commemoration of the War of Independence in 1919 at the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Springs from the Paghman area at the foot of the Hindu Kush serve as the source of the Kabul River. The road passes by the Baghe Umumi (Public Garden), where tea stalls have been set up. Returning to Kabul, you pass by Kargha Lake with the Spozhmay (moonlight) restaurant and the Kabul Golf Course, established by Amir Habibullah Khan in the early 1900s.

Then...a letter from Kabul, July 15 2003

By Dominic Medley, co-author of The Survival Guide to Kabul (www. kabulguide.net)

Mobile phone ringtones are the new sound on the streets of Kabul. The Lambada tone is particularly popular, annoyingly so. The James Bond theme tune is moving up the Top Ten ladder.

Afghans are relishing new freedoms like other post war countries: everyone wants communications. But the Afghans are too polite and friendly for mobile phones. Their extensive greetings to each other when they meet go on for minutes. They'll need to adapt. Otherwise they'll keep greeting each other over and over again, getting cut off after 30 seconds each time. Everyone wants to travel. The streets are as clogged as the mobile phone network. There might be as many as 40,000 taxis in Kabul. New cars keep appearing the yellow Mazda MX5, the stretched Mercedes limo, the flashy Land Cruisers. Toyota Corolla drivers have to be the worst. Every car crash usually involves a Corolla. It's worth learning a few choice words in Dari to shout at them.

Internet cafés are springing up. Hourly charges are beyond the reach of most Afghans. But the cafés are still full of youngsters surfing for photos of their favourite Bollywood film stars. Radio Arman on 98.1FM is pumping out Western, Indian, Iranian and Afghan music across the city. The radio station sometimes gets 400 letters and 1,500 phone calls a day. Radio TV Afghanistan has criticised the station for lowering standards. But the whole city is listening to Arman, which means 'Hope'. The letters people write to the DJs are usually accompanied by a postcard of an Indian star with a message such as "I don't know who she is but please play a song by her".

In February last year the Faisal Guesthouse in Wazir Akbar Khan had a steady diet of soup, chicken, chips and rice, seven days a week. The houseboy Najibullah was always proud to announce "dinner tonight: soup,

chicken, chips and rice." But now it's possible to eat anything you want in the city. In June 2002 the curfew was still at 10pm, and the Golden Lotus restaurant had just reopened. Foreign agency cars were always outside the Herat and Marco Polo restaurants. Now they're never seen there. The Lai Thai and German restaurants have stolen the market.

Shahr-e-Naw is buzzing. Thursday night is like a Friday night west of Suez. Pizzeria Milano and Chief Burger are packed. Parties rage across the city. The Afghans are the busiest partygoers. Weddings and birthdays are celebrated enthusiastically, complete with dancing and alcohol. And of course, the Lambada.

Even last October, TV Afghanistan was showing music videos after the news. At the same time the debate raged over women appearing on television and whether Indian films should be broadcast. But everybody has seen the blockbuster film Titanic several times, though the Cinema Park didn't screen it last year for being too erotic. Leonardo di Caprio hairstyles are popular, the market in the Kabul River is known as the Titanic market (for being flooded, when it rains), buses are called Titanic. A Mullah once told his Friday gathering that they would all end up like the passengers on the Titanic if they didn't behave properly.

All this was impossible under Taliban rule. The changes, the music, the cars, the Lambaba, show you something about the ability of the Afghans to change, and fast. Some people tell you to take things a step at a time, "this is Afghanistan." But ordinary people seem to be voting with their feet and moving their city forward themselves. That speed can be embarrassing. The road outside the old UN headquarters was only repaired when they vacated the compound. Reconstruction has been slow, except in Wazir Akbar Khan, where private houses were quickly spruced up in time for US$10,000 a month rents. But the roads in WAK are just as bad. Kabul may yet regain its cosmopolitan past. The Hotel Kabul is being renovated into a five star hotel, with plans for a pedestrian area from Pushtunistan Square, past Da Afghanistan Bank up to the hotel. Café culture might just return.

Security is always a concern, but perhaps too hyped up. There are so many security gurus. Most seem to think it's better to be locked down in guesthouse, land cruiser and office rather than venture out. Yes, there have been serious attacks. Thirty people were killed outside the Hotel Spinzar in September 2002; four Germans with ISAF were killed in June 2003. There are always reports of bombs coming into the city. Perhaps it is still too early for international staff to venture out en masse, but there have never been reports of drive-by shootings of internationals. One criticism of internationals in Kabul from the Afghans is that we don't

engage enough with the local population.

Outside Kabul, life is very different. People are starving and fighting is still continuing near Herat, Mazar, Kandahar and Khost. So perhaps it is too much to expect massive reconstruction in the capital when so many people are still struggling to survive. The struggle has come into the city. There are more and more beggars. People with appalling disabilities and destitute women needing baksheesh frequent traffic jams and international hangouts. City services are struggling to cope with the number of people who have returned. Tourists have been spotted. Not in planeloads but in small numbers from Japan, Australia, the UK and elsewhere. Some are remembering the happy days of the coach trip from Dusseldorf. Others are coming to get a look at this famous city for this first time.

Kabul is changing. The political change may be slow and tense. The international aid may be slow. But even without this, the Kabulis have started moving their city forward again. They've had enough of 23 years of wreckage.

...and now. Departure, Autumn 2013

By Michael Keating

"Leave, now!" I shut the computer down, for the last time, in the office that I had occupied for two years, my desk next to thick bullet proof windows looking on to a tank-resistant wall at the UN compound in Shahr-i-Naw, and followed my close protection colleagues to the vehicle. "You'll probably miss the flight."

The drive to the airport could take 15 or 45 minutes, depending upon the weather, security, visiting VIPs, the President's movements and... Kabul traffic. This obeys no discernable rules, but somehow works, like the country itself.

We drive past checkpoints and corridors of concrete hescos that surround government and international offices, disfiguring once elegant tree lined streets. Much of the city is behind walls, public spaces have shrunk and skeletal looking highrises sprout everywhere. The drivers usually know who has bribed whom to short circuit already flimsy zoning and construction regulations. An earthquake would wreak total havoc.

Impossible jams untangle themselves, as pushcarts, fruit vendors, satcheled schoolchildren, donkeys, bicyclists and pedestrians, beggars tapping on windows and whistle wielding traffic police vie with impatient and overladen taxis, buses, pick ups, armoured cars and new four wheel drives, going in both or rather all directions.

Every vehicle is bruised and dented, fights break out regularly and the

toll in clinics and hospitals is higher than deaths injuries from bullets or landmines, which, some point out, is progress of sorts.

As we drove through the centre of town, I make last minute calls from the back of my white, UN-emblazoned Land Cruiser, the smells and sounds of the city muffled through unopenable windows. I have very mixed emotions. As ever, the next six to 18 months will be critical for Afghanistan. I have a sense that this is not the right time to leave. But then, it never is.

My calls are to Afghan and international colleagues preoccupied by deadlines that need to be met, meetings I will not attend, whether on impending elections, efforts to get a peace process going, to ensure more effective use of aid and development resources before they dwindle, and to meet a growing list of humanitarian challenges. Expectations of the UN from Afghans and the international community will grow as western troops, diplomats and donor agencies draw down.

The transfer of security responsibility is going to schedule but also creating a gnawing sense of uncertainty, particularly for Afghans old enough to remember the civil war in the 1990s. Visa applications and requests for asylum are shooting up. Some are leaving the country, others getting their money out.

Young Afghans tend to be more optimistic, and many believe that any eventual accommodation with the Taliban will surely have to take into account the transformation of the country – including the millions of girls now in school, the explosion in electronic media and mobile telephony, and youthful aspirations unimaginable 17 years ago, when the Taliban were in charge. But even they are hedging; the demand for English and IT lessons is unprecedented, and the students that I have met want to travel.

It's not just Kabul and the other cities that have changed over the last decade, but the whole country – urbanizing fast, its cities connected by an impressive ringroad, electricity, schools and healthcare all far more prevalent, though a vast needs deficit remains, and half the population lives below the poverty line.

Some things will not change – and will become more apparent, including peoples' dependence upon agriculture, and the country's growing vulnerability to climate change, sudden onset disasters like droughts and floods. The promise of revenues from the country's vast mineral wealth is still some way off, and many fear will not find its way into government coffers and public services. Natural resources are being illegally exploited and her environment being degraded.

The construction and consumer goods boom is coming to an end. As the international military draws down and aid levels drop, jobs, incomes and

demand for office space and security will decline. The underlying realities of Afghanistan will again become more apparent, changed by a decade of intense foreign engagement, but in many ways, not fundamentally different.

Looking out of the window, I regret not having spend more of the last two years or more with ordinary Afghans; but moving freely among them has become much harder for foreign officials, and impossible for me. The UN has been targeted too often, and there is much debate as to how we can improve our security without cutting ourselves off from the people we are here to support.

I will catch the plane after all. My sense of remorse is tempered by the certainty that I will come back to Afghanistan, and that many of the people I know will still be around, ever resourceful and charming, no matter what happens. I vow not to 'walk away' and to stay involved, what ever I do next.

After an attack on the UN compund in Kabul, 2012

INSPIRE: Tourism in Afghanistan

By Levison Woods

(INSPIRE BOXES are supported by the Fetzer Institute as a means of highlighting exemplary initiatives or people promoting peace and reconciliation)

When most people think of Afghanistan, they don't normally consider going on a trek there. In fact, since the allied invasion 12 years ago we have heard very little from the region except stories of violence and bloodshed. Numerous opportunities for developing eco-tourism initiatives that would bring jobs to rural communities were lost during the early 2000s, when the international community failed to focus on bringing sustainable recovery to the countryside. (SEE Environment & Foresty) But there is hope. There are many areas where war appears not to have intruded. And while Afghanistan may not be ideal for mass tourism for some years to come, ***Levison Wood*** *explains his reasons for visiting parts such as the majestic Wakhan Corridor, one of the most remote valleys in the world.*

As the sun rises over the snow-capped peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains, Abdul, a local school teacher and volunteer guide, points out a mud shack that sits on the edge of the Oxus river. "This is the only school in the area," says the smiling 27-year old; an old man where the life expectancy is as low as 35 years. "We teach the local children all the subjects. They especially like history."

It isn't at all surprising when you think that this beautiful and remote valley has been host to some of Asia's most important developments for over 2000 years. Alexander the Great entered the Wakhan Corridor in his conquest of the unknown world in 329 BC, Marco Polo trekked here on his mission to reach China in the 13th century and the Pamir knot (as the convergence of the Hindu Kush, the Pamir mountains and the Himalayas is known) was the scene of great exploration and political intrigue during the days of the Great Game in the 19th century.

Abdul leads the way along a boulder-strewn valley covered with high green grass and buttercups where Yaks munch contentedly, watched over by their nomadic keepers. An antique mud fort clings to a cliff top reminding the visitor of his ancient predecessors. Little, it seems, has changed. Further up, as the mountains loom large and the river is reduced to a narrow torrent, toothless herdsmen grin from their Mongolian-style yurts and give a friendly wave. There is no violence here. The Wakhan

Corridor is so remote that it has been almost completely ignored for most of the 20th century. Apart from forcing out groups of Kirghiz tribesmen who were later re-located to Turkey, the Red Army barely bothered with the region during the Soviet war of the 1980s and the Taliban have never been here. Thirty-odd years of conflict since fighting first broke out in the summer of 1978 might as well be a million miles away. For the local nomads, their valley is virtually an autonomous region, ethnically, linguistically and even religiously distinct from the rest of the country. Their only problems are economic isolation and lack of education and healthcare.

While some individual aid workers visited during the 1990s and early 2000s, more recent returning intrepid adventurers have been enjoying the pristine remoteness of the Wakhan and the generous hospitality of the Wakhi and Kirghiz tribesmen. For the first time in over three decades, Afghanistan is open to tourists and a trek to the Wakhan is fast becoming the ultimate in remote expeditionary travel. David James, a former British officer, came here in 2009 determined to make a difference. He founded the charity Mountain Unity to support the growth of tourism in the region. "There will be no peace in the country until Afghans have other methods of generating income other than narcotics, corruption, and insurgency," explained James.

Increasing numbers of travellers are now taking advantage of the improved access and relative peace to explore this remote area. Mountaineers, climbers and ordinary hikers are all allured by the prospect of an untouched mountain paradise in an enigmatic destination. A trek in the Wakhan takes in not only some of the most incredible and untouched mountain scenery in the world but also offers a chance to visit Lake Zorkul, one of the famed sources of the Amu Darya or Oxus River. Sitting at over 4,000 metres, it is a testament to its local nam: roof of the world.

There is a good chance, too, that you will see some of the majestic wildlife- brown bear, yak, wolves and Marco Polo sheep that inhabit the crags and peaks.(See Conservation & Environment) There is even a small number of the endangered Asian snow leopard, a rare sight these days, but Abdul knows their haunts. "After the new government came to power in 2002 hunting was banned and so the leopard will grow once more. We even have wildlife rangers who track them to make sure they will survive."

But it isn't just the wildlife that needs assistance; poaching continuesas

can be ascertained bythe pelts hanging in some Kabul sidestreet shops. The Wakhan is a very deprived region that suffers from poor healthcare and high mortality rates as a result of its remoteness. The only form of income to help the subsistence lifestyle of the nomadic tribes is the prospect of tourism. Visitors can therefore rest assured that their cash is really helping out by injecting much-needed currency into the local economy and encouraging sustainable development.

I have seen a lot of Afghanistan. It is a unique and wonderful country that deserves so much more than its bad reputation. The people are some of the most friendly and hospitable in the world. So, by bringing travellers to the Wakhan, we believe that we are making a major step towards peace which will spread across the country. Abdul stops on a hillock that looks back down the breathtaking valley and smiles. “We don’t want sympathy, we just want to share this wonderful place with new visitors.”

Levison Wood i*s a former British Army Officer. He has worked and travelled in Afghanistan for more than seven years. He founded the pioneering expeditionary service Secret Compass which seeks to bring travellers into the Wakhan and other safe areas. He is also seeking volunteers to help develop this form of sustainable tourism. For more information see www.secretcompass.com*

The Northern Region

Ruins at the ancient city of Balkh

Northern Afghanistan is generally considered to be that part of the country lying to the north of the Hindu Kush mountains. Both geographically and culturally it relates more closely to Central Asia than to Persia or the Indian subcontinent. Its ethnic mix of Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen reflects the nationalities of those living over the border of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) to the north.

For nearly three millennia, the region was dominated by the city of Balkh. Zoroaster preached fire-worship here around 1000-600 BC. Alexander the Great based his army here for two years in 329 BC. In the first centuries after Christ, Buddhist pilgrims flocked to temples that thrived under the Kushan dynasty. In 663 the Chinese adventurer Hsuan-tsang remarked that Balkh had three of the most beautiful buildings in the world. With the advent of Islam in the 8th to 9th Centuries, Balkh became known as the "Mother of Cities", so numerous were its mosques and so rich its intellectual, poetical and spiritual culture. However, the destructive rampages of Genghis Khan put an end to this glorious city in 1220, and even 100 years later the famous traveller Ibn Battuta found the entire area "in ruins."

With Balkh and northern Afghanistan straddling the important trade routes to Central Asia, the city made a brief recovery in the 15th Century under the patronage of Shah Rukh, the Timurid ruler of Herat. For several centuries Kabul and Bokhara competed for influence over the

northern territories. The struggle for control ended in 1768, when Ahmed Shah Durrani, "Father of Afghanistan," finally established the frontier of his kingdom along the line of the Amu Darya.

Balkh was made the capital of Afghan Turkestan, but for health reasons the city was abandoned in 1866 in favour of a small village by the name of Mazar-e-Sharif. In a sense, taken from the lengthy perspective of Afghan history, Mazar is a gatecrasher to the party. For many centuries, famous only for its shrine to the cousin of the Prophet Mohammed, it has prospered over the last century at Balkh's expense.

The significance of northern Afghanistan did not escape the Russians. In the words of the French Central Asian specialist, Olivier Roy, "that part of Afghanistan which is of strategic importance is shaped somewhat like an hourglass in which the Salang Pass is the neck." To the north are the plains from Shibarghan to Kunduz and the land route to Termez and Central Asia. To the south lies the strategically crucial crossing of the Hindu Kush range through the Salang tunnel, and the route via Kabul and Jalalabad to India. The area is rich and well-populated, and it has the added advantage of possessing the country's main natural resources: the gas and oil fields of Shibarghan, and the copper mines at Aynak in Logar (SEE AYNAK CHINESE COPPER MINE). This, of course, was also the north-south route of the Soviet invasion in 1979, mounted from Termez and mobilized through the Salang Pass to Kabul.

Parts of the north were – and some still are - among the most heavily mined in Afghanistan especially along the old Taliban/Northern Alliance frontline between Kunduz and Taloqan. During the US "war on terror," Kunduz was heavily affected by lethal cluster bombs (SEE LANDMINES). In addition to suffering through two decades of war, the northern region was one of the hardest hit by the devastating drought of 1997-2002. Tens of thousands of families were displaced across the region, with the province of Badghis particularly affected.

Mazar-e-Sharif

Before the Soviet war, Mazar, which means "noble shrine," had become a centre of militant Muslim youth, along with Panjshir, Baghlan and Badakhshan. In the early 1980s, the influence of Rabbani's party, Jamiat-e-Islami, spread throughout the north. It was closely linked to the local reputations of three commanders. Mazar was the base for Zabiullah, who was killed in 1984, while Ismail Khan held sway in Herat to the west, and Ahmed Shah Massoud operated throughout the northeast. Jamiat managed to take root in the north partly because of the political and military astuteness of its leaders, but also because this area of

Afghanistan was far less tribal than the Pushtun south, and hence more amenable to military organization across a whole region.

From February 1992, when General Dostum mutinied against the communist regime of President Najibullah, until May 1997, when the Taliban launched their first, ill-fated assault on the city, Mazar-e-Sharif was an island of peace. For five years Dostum controlled an independent militia force, the Jumbesh-e-Melli, which numbered at least 20,000 soldiers. On the strength of this private army, he created a personal fiefdom in Mazar, complete with its own flag, currency and airline, Balkh Air. Many educated Afghans fled the factional fighting that rocked Kabul from 1992-1996 and settled in Mazar. More joined them when the ultra-conservative Taliban overran Kabul. Thus Mazar became an alternative capital, with a more liberal environment where women and children had greater access to education and work than in Taliban-controlled areas.

General Dostum enjoyed the financial and military support of Uzbekistan and Russia, both of whom saw him as the one man capable of preventing Taliban-inspired Islamic fundamentalism from spreading north into their territories. Two months after the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, Dostum's Jumbesh party and President Rabbani's Jamiat party joined forces to create the anti-Taliban United Front, based in Mazar. The two parties had previously been enemies. The new front eventually became better known as the "Northern Alliance," a term introduced by Pakistan's military Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) in a bid to divide the northern Afghans and separate them from the Pushtun south and east. Towards the end of the year, both Hazara parties Hezb-e-Wahdat and Harakat-e-Islami also joined the United Front. During 1997, Mazar became a battlefield, controlled at different periods by the Taliban, Dostum and a local warlord, Abdul Malik, who allegedly killed 3,000 Taliban in one 24-hour spree of revenge.

The Taliban soon regrouped and conquered Faryab, Jowzjan and Mazar in 1998. Residents described a "killing frenzy" on the day in August when the Taliban occupied Mazar and took swift revenge on hundreds of Hazara and Uzbek civilians. Jamiat was pushed back to its heartland in Takhar and Badakhshan. Dostum retreated to Turkey to lick his wounds. From 1999-2001, eyewitness reports told of large numbers of Arabs, Chechens and Pakistanis – including military advisors - arriving in the north to support the Taliban, who were fighting off periodic assaults by the United Front. Hazaras and Uzbeks were routinely terrorized on the streets of Mazar and, occasionally, shot by Talib troops. With the arrival of the Taliban, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan closed their borders, restricting trade and cramping the economy of the north. Meanwhile, food security in Mazar plummeted as a four-year drought took hold throughout much

of the north.

Following the 9/11 attack by al Qaeda, the United Front, by now better known as the Northern Alliance, attacked the Taliban in Mazar and took the city. The attack was heavily supported by US airpower and US Special Forces. The last of the Taliban's forces were besieged in Kunduz, where US Special Forces, much to their disgust, were told to allow hundreds of Pakistani military and a number of well-connected Arabs, to return Pakistan. The returning Pakistani soldiers had been supporting the Taliban since the mid-1990s.

A ceasefire was negotiated and thousands of Taliban were taken captive and sent to Dostum's prisons in Shibarghan and Qala-e-Jangi, outside Mazar. If the Taliban had abused members of the United Front in the past, the northerners showed that they could be equally blood thirsty when it came to dealing with their enemies. Respect for human rights has never been a strong Afghan characteristic, and Dostom, a key ally of the Americans during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, ranks as one of the worst offenders. His ruthlessness, whether as a pro-Soviet militia chief, a victorious post-1992 Jihadist or an anti-Talib militant, had been well known for years. Reports later emerged of hundreds of prisoners dying of suffocation after being transported in sealed freight containers. Thousands more were incarcerated in Shibarghan prison, where many would have starved to death had the International Committee for the Red Cross not intervened. Meanwhile, the inmates at Qala-e-Jangi, mainly foreign Talib sympathizers, attacked their guards. The US responded by launching an airstrike and killing more than 300 prisoners. Some died with their hands still tied behind their backs. A UN observer described it as one of the greatest human rights excesses committed by anti-Talib forces during the Coalition campaign in Afghanistan.

During 2002-03, the north was characterized by ongoing clashes between Dostum's Jumbesh forces and the Jamiat troops of another regional commander, Mohammed Usted Atta, who had become the governor of Balkh Province. The latter, an ethnic Tajik with close ties to Defence Minister Fahim, had previously fought with Massoud. By 2013, he was beginning to emerge as potential presidential material to replace Karzai. (SEE KEYPLAYERS) Dostum, became Karzai's special representative in the north and now serves as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Afghan Armed Forces. The eventual aim is to troops of both men's militias into one force under a single, neutral commander.

Poor security throughout the region during those early post-2001 years, aggravated by the lack of an international peacekeeping force, was seriously hampering aid operations. There were violent assaults

on ethnic minorities and on both expatriate and Afghan aid workers. In 2003, Britain dispatched a small Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT), composed of troops and civilian advisors in a bid to improve security and begin disarming the militias. German and Dutch ISAF soldiers established themselves in Kunduz. In October that same year, Karzai negotiated for 300 Kabul policemen to enter the city and appointed a new governor. By 2013, however, insecurity in the northern region was growing steadily worse.

Mazar has changed dramatically since the collapse of the Taliban. Considered Afghanistan's fourth largest city with an estimated population of 400,000, it gives the impression of being far more prosperous – and Central Asian - than other parts of the country. There is intense construction with new shops and thriving businesses. There are also five universities, including Balkh University, an increasingly respected place of learning. One often has the impression that the city looks more to the Asian republics in the north than to Kabul. As a gateway to Central Asia, and with largely untapped oil and natural gas fields nearby, Mazar is already becoming a new economic hub. The country's first significant railroad, completed in 2011, now connects the Mazar to Uzbekistan and beyond. Daily freight trains bring goods from Central Asia and Russia, to the last station near the airport, where they are transported elsewhere by plane or truck. The railroad has given Mazar an enormous economic boost.

Mazar's success, no doubt means that it will continue to be fought over. While the city boasts a strong Afghan army and police presence, and is also the headquarters for the Afghan Border Police, insecurity has been growing throughout Balkh Province. Insurgent suicide attacks, ambushes and assassinations of local elders are becoming more frequent. Much of the responsibility for these attacks is believed to be borne by Hezb-e-Islami headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose militants are particularly active in areas south of the city. In April, 2011, 10 foreign UN aid workers were lynched by angry demonstrators in retaliation for the burning of the Koran by two fundamentalist American pastors in Florida.

Getting There

By air

Mazar airport, nine kilometres from the city, has been heavily modernized and expanded since 2004. The fact that ISAF Regional Command North is based nearby has effectively turned it into Afghanistan's fourth international airport. The taxi journey from downtown takes 15-20

minutes. The flight from Kabul offers stunning views of the crumpled snowy crests of the Hindu Kush..
Current airlines operating out of Mazar. (Ariana Afghan Airlines flights have been temporarily suspended)

- Kabul: Kam Air, Safi Airways, Afghan Jet International
- Herat: Kam Air. Not always regular.
- Mashad: Kam Air., Iran Aseman. Not always regular.
- Tehran: Kam Air.

There are also UN, ICRC and PACTEC/Air Serv International flights.

Overland

The Uzbek border lies about 60km north of Mazar at Hairaton on the Amu Darya (Oxus River). The journey takes about one hour by car, mainly through semi-arid desert and scrub. Sand dunes often drift across the road, so a 4x4 is advisable. If you see children or old people trying to clear the road for you, the tradition is to toss them a few Afghanis. The border remained closed for four years while the Taliban controlled Mazar and opened again in late 2001. Check with the UNAMA office in Mazar for the latest situation. Leave plenty of time to cross as the Uzbeks are notoriously slow with formalities and both border posts close at different times for lunch breaks. You are unlikely to get into Afghanistan from Uzbekistan unless you have a letter of accreditation from an aid agency or media organization.

The crossing at 'Friendship Bridge' is quite long, so if you are on foot keep the luggage as light as possible. When the Scottish adventurer Fitzroy Maclean crossed here by boat in the 1930s, he reported riding through "jungle" a mile wide on the Afghan bank. No sign of it now. If you are travelling from Mazar to Termez in Uzbekistan, make sure before you leave that your name is on the list at the bridge, or else prepare to get very frustrated. You can contact the UN office in Termez to organize this and to provide transport from the Uzbek side of the bridge to Termez (15 minute drive). Otherwise, the walk from the border to the taxi rank is 3km. One of our colleagues did the journey by road from Moscow to Kabul with his family via Termez and Hairaton.

The journey from Bamiyan to Mazar takes about one and a half days if you have four-wheel drive. It is a superb journey through narrow river gorges and strikingly beautiful farmlands. The route from Kabul via the Salang Pass takes a full day but

is also a magnificent drive (see below). Between June and October it is possible to drive from Kabul, via the Panjshir Valley, to Faizabad and from Chitral in Pakistan (when the border is open; since 2010 foreigners are not allowed to go by road from the Pakistani side) to Faizabad but you need plenty of time and an off-road vehicle. During the Soviet occupation, journalists and aid workers operating clandestinely in the country did this by foot and by horse. A road suitable for motor vehicles was only completed during the 1990s.

If you wish to head south or east by road, you can catch a bus from the AhDeh transport centre on the eastern parts of the city. (You can also catch transport from the Uzbek border at Hairaton). Travelling by bus to Kabul takes10-13 hours; minibuses are quicker (eight hours) but a little more expensive. You can also travel to Samangan, Pul-e-Khumri, and Kunduz. Shared taxis are also an option. Jeeps will take you on the two-day journey (or a bit longer) via Maimana to Herat. This is a rough trip and check on security, but an amazing journey if you can do it. You can take public transport from Darwaza-e-Balkh near the shrine directly to Kabul (9-10 hours). Shared taxis to from Mazar to Balkh take about half an hour leaving from Charahi Haji Ayoub.

Before travelling into or out of Mazar, check on the security situation, since there have been insurgent incidents, including rivalry between certain commanders and government officials. If you travel off the beaten-track, do it in two-car convoys and, communicate by radio with base every three hours. The UNAMA office in Mazar provides excellent security reports.

From Kabul to Mazar overland (425 kilometres)

The journey from Kabul across the Hindu Kush to Mazar takes the traveller through some of the most scenic and strategically important parts of Afghanistan. Most of the length of the highway has been renovated and significantly improved since 2003. The Soviets invaded down this road, and for years the Taliban and the United Front fought over it. The road climbs slowly out of the Kabul valley, onto the Shomali plain. This was once a fiercely fought-over frontline between the Taliban and the United Front. Many of the ruined houses have been rebuilt, while the burned out tanks and minefields that still littered the area until 2005 and 2006 have gone. In 1999, when things began going badly for the northerners, the Taliban pushed back Massoud's troops and destroyed every village and vineyard in sight. Today, the comeback is encouraging. Gardens and fields flourish again. Watered by a lattice of irrigation channels from the Panjshir and Ghorband rivers, the Plains of Shomali have been transformed into an emerald sea of mulberries, willows and

vines lapping at the barren shores of the mountains fringing its northern flank. Bagram Airfield lies to the east. Formerly used by the Soviets, it is now used by Americans, British and other Coalition forces. A mini-Guantanamo has also been established here for captured Taliban, al-Qaeda and other suspected insurgents.

The first major settlement is Jabel-us-Saraj a thriving bazaar town where the road branches off up the Panjshir Valley. Several "chaikhane" (tea houses) provide excellent Afghan food, and a couple of shopkeepers will try to sell you 19th Century British muskets, stamped with VR denoting Queen Victoria. By the winter of 2004-05, adventurous expats

Storefront in Mazar e Sharif

from Kabul were using the chaikhane as a staging point for weekend skiing. The stanchions supporting the bridge across the river are made of piled up Russian APCs. On the hill are the remains of an impressive fort and two large fishing ponds complete with model 'decoy' ducks to attract live game for hunters. Afghanistan's first independent radio station, Radio Solh (Radio Peace), broadcast from a compound nearby (SEE MEDIA) during the early 2000s. Sadly, its extraordinary founder and owner, Zakia Zaki, was gunned down inside her home in June, 2007 in front of her eight-year-old son.

The road north threads through a brilliant green gorge squeezed between craggy rock walls. Glimpses of the snow-capped Hindu Kush tantalize the traveller. As the route gains height, the vegetation dies back until there is nothing but rock, scree and snow. When it opened in 1964, the Salang Tunnel was the highest in the world at 3,360 metres.

Concrete galleries protect the entrances of the tunnel from avalanches and rockfall, but they are frequently choked with snow drifts. The tunnel entrance was blocked for several years by Massoud, desperate to deny the Taliban access to the north. Blasted open in 2002 by Russian engineers, it gapes at travellers like the mouth of an enormous snake about to swallow you up. Pitch black and filled with exhaust fumes, icy pools of water and the din of diesel lorries groaning under their cargo, it's not an experience for the faint-hearted.

Nearly three kilometres later, you are spat out the tunnel's far end into a bleak mountainscape of glaciers and howling winds. Resist the temptation to wander off for a pee both sides of the road are still liable to be heavily mined. The direction of traffic through the tunnel alternates daily to avoid accidents check before you set out. During 2003, the tunnel

Artist's sketrch of Mazar e Sharif's new airport

was shut for major repairs. It also remained closed during the harsh winter of 2004-05 because of avalanches.

The descent follows a series of rivers winding between the crumpled foothills of the Hindu Kush. At Doshi there is an attractive hotel. Emerging from the mountains, you reach a large plain and the town of Pul-e-Khumri. For the traveller only accustomed to Kabul, the streets are full of unfamiliar faces Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras.

The Zadran Hotel has a vast and efficient dining area and grubby rooms for the night. Just past the bridge over the Andarab River on the left is a holy hot spring, the Chasma-e-Shafar. Invalids come here to treat skin problems and infections. Others come just for a free hot bath. Back on the road, the route passes through fields of wheat and brilliant green paddy. The flatness of the plain is relieved by stands of poplar growing

ramrod straight. Travellers share the road with brightly-coloured nomads driving their flocks of goats, or boys riding donkeys sidesaddle.

About 13km north of Pul-e-Khumri is a small track leading left towards the foot of some low mountains lies the site of Surkh Kotal, the 1st Century AD acropolis of Kanishka, King of the Kushans. Five great terraces, carved 1,900 years ago into a spur of camel- coloured rock, overlook the fertile valley of the Andherab river. Well into the 1970s, a vast marble staircase 20 metres wide swept steeply up its lower slopes. But the stairs fell foul of factional fighting and no longer exist. Only the earth ramps connecting each terrace remain. Half a dozen massive stone pillar bases still litter the terraces. But everything smaller has gone.

Kanishka's rule, which embraced a range of religions, from Buddhism to fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, was one of the most tolerant in Afghan history. His dynasty followed that of the Bactrian Greeks, and the temple complex he created at Surkh Kotal sported Hellenistic fluted columns, pediments and an agora for displaying colossal statues. When Surkh Kotal was excavated in the 1950s, the lower half of a huge statue, thought to be of Kanishka himself, was discovered. Famously depicting the king in a pair of baggy trousers gathered at the ankle, it was the centrepiece of the Kabul Museum until 2001, when Taliban soldiers sledge-hammered it to pieces. (SEE KABUL REGION) Also smashed was a tablet of stone bearing an inscription in Greek letters one of two known examples of the Kushan script.

We met a young guard on the summit, a Hazara soldier from the Hezb-e-Wahdat faction based in Bamiyan. Supposedly there to protect the historic site from further looting, he told us how he had sold fragments

Entrance to the Salang Tunnel

of engraved stone to a couple of Westerners who visited the site in 1999. "I dug out these pieces of stone with writing on," he said, "but I couldn't understand what they said." We showed him a photograph of the now-smashed Kushan inscription from Kabul Museum. "Yes the letters were like that," he said. "I found 32 fragments, each the size of my hand," he added. "I sold them for 12 lakh Afghanis each." That adds up to more than US$ 1,000 for the entire haul equivalent to three years' earnings for the average Afghan. Little wonder that the treasures of Afghanistan are being looted mercilessly.

On north, the road sweeps across bare brown plains, past an old battlefield littered with military debris and skirts the attractive oasis town of Aybak (also known as Samangan). Tongas drawn by horses decked in multicoloured tassels stand ready to take travellers into town from the main road. The town is full of men with Central Asian features wearing turbans wrapped around embroidered pill box hats with a tail of silk hanging over one shoulder. The women flit about like phantoms in the all-encompassing white or blue burqa. A massive invasion of locusts destroyed a third of this area's crops in 2002. There is an ancient Buddhist site hidden in the hills nearby, but you'll need a local guide.

Further on, the road weaves through the deeply fissured, rust-red gorges of the Koh-e-Baba mountains. On their far flank lies the oasis town of Tashkurgan, also known as Khulm the last stop before Mazar. The Khulm river irrigates the valley, filled with mulberry, almond, apple and peach trees. King Amanullah was so taken with the place that he built a small palace on the hill. The fortress here commands a magnificent view.

To the south, a wall of mountains cuts off all memory of Kabul. To the north, the vast plains of Central Asia melt into the horizon. In the 1820s, the intrepid British traveller, William Moorcroft, and his companions were incarcerated here for six months by the dreaded Chief of Kunduz, Murad Beg. They later escaped, only to be poisoned while prospecting for Central Asia's finest ponies. For a more detailed, pre-war account of this journey and sights along the way, read The Road to Balkh, by Nancy Dupree (Kabul, 1967)

Lala Gul

By Jonathan Walters

Lala Gul looked like a rogue the kind of man who'd been in too many fights. The right side of his dark, tanned face was heavily scarred. A chequered turban hung down the back of his neck. He grinned like a cartoon pirate with teeth stained brown by years of chewing naswar tobacco. He hunched over his steering wheel possessively, staring at the road with steady, expressionless eyes. But at least he had a four-wheel drive van and a few spare days to drive us to Panjshir and Mazar. And he had a great ear for music. For every town we drove through, Lala Gul had a song which sang of its charms the heavy-boughed orchards of Tashkurgan, the fearless buzkashi players of Shibarghan.

After a few days on the road, Lala Gul told us his story. "I was driving from Bamiyan to Kabul with six passengers. The Americans had just started bombing (October, 2001). There were three other cars on the road too. My passengers were a bride, her new husband and members of her family. They had just got married and were on their way to Paktia." He swerved to avoid several large potholes. We were making the switchback, snowdrifted descent from the Salang tunnel. On either verge were lines of stones painted red minefields.

"Suddenly, I saw a jetfighter in the sky", continued Gul. "I thought it was going to bomb Bamiyan, which was still held by the Taliban. I saw a bright flash. The next thing I remember was opening my eyes in the Red Cross hospital in Kabul. I realised I was seriously injured." Lala Gul gestured to the scars on his face, arms and feet. "I heard that all the other people in my car were killed. I was the only one alive. I heard my car was completely smashed to pieces. The people following were amazed anyone survived. I spent four months in hospital recovering. I wrap my head in this turban to cover the scars."

Was he angry with the Americans, I asked. "Because the Taliban are overturned, I am happy even though I was injured. Of course I am sad my passengers died. But no, I am not angry. I just want America to pay for my new car."

Orientation & Getting Around

Mazar is named after the large turquoise-tiled Shrine of Hazrat Ali, which dominates the central square of the city, and is a useful reference point for getting around. The main road leading off the north side of the square contains a cluster of UN offices. There are no mines in the immediate vicinity, but check with UNAMA if you are planning to visit areas further afield. Taxis are a reasonable way to get around, if you don't have access to your own vehicle but travel in pairs.

Agencies

The fighting of 1997-98 and again in late 2001 seriously affected the work of aid organizations in Mazar. Compounds and warehouses were looted of vehicles, electronics and food supplies several times over. Expatriate personnel became used to sheltering in underground bunkers before being airlifted to safety. But for most Afghan staff and inhabitants, evacuation is not an option. In 2005, ACBAR listed about a score of NGOs in Mazar a far cry from the hundreds in Kabul. For a briefing on UN activities, visit the UNAMA office, about 1.5km down the road leading off the south side of Hazrat Ali square.

Mazar A-Z

Accommodation and Food

Accommodation possibilities in Mazar have improved since 2002, but still remain fairly limited. The **UNICA guesthouse** is located some distance from the centre of town, but has the twin attractions of a large garden and a cash bar. However, only UN and World Bank staff are permitted to stay (US$ 65/night). For journalists and itinerant travellers, the best bet is the **Bharat Hotel,** a 7-story modern red building on the northeast corner of Hazrat Ali square. Rooms cost US$ 25-60 per night, and some come with a balcony overlooking the shrine. Their large dining room serves up decent food and non-stop Hindi movies. Two cheaper (and grubbier) options near the Hazrat Ali shrine are the **Aria Hotel** and **Aamo**. Forget anything luxurious in **Mazar. Hotel** rooms tend to start at US$ 10. Alternatively call on one of the international NGOs, which may have a spare bed for the night.

Other hotels

- **Aira Hotel** (Darwaza-ya Shadian, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. +93 70

509 945). Simple with shared bathooms. No great shakes.
• **Amo Hotel** (Chowk-e-Shadian, Mazar-e-Sharif, Tel. 93-502-478). Right opposite the southend of the Shrine, this is a relatively cheap place with a good view of the domes. Can't complain about the price even if pretty basic.
• **Bharat Hotel** (Chowk-e-Mukharabat, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. 93-70-502-235) A clean and more modern place with carpets and decent rooms. Shared bathrooms .
• **Farhat Hotel** (Darwaza-ye-Balkh, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. 93 70 503 177). Wonderfully kitsch with over-the-top furniture, glaring carpets and plastic flowers. Rooms are clean. Internet available in the café next door.
• **Kefayat Hotel** Private company guest house with good food, nice rooms, satellite TV and internet.
• **G9 Guest House & Restaurant** Kabul and Dubai-style over the top guest house (Kamgar Intersection, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. 93-79-900-2030), but why not? Also boasts a grocery store.
• **Mazar Hotel** (Darwaza-ye-Balkh, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. 93-70-159-483 & 93-502-703). A wannabe grand hotel, the Mazar boasts an interesting if not slightly abandoned 1930s style. The en suite rooms have their own bathrooms or showers, and there is a spacious swimming pool. You have the feeling one could really do something with this place.
• **Royal Oak Hotel** (Darwaza-ye-Balkh, Mazar-e-Sharif. Tel. 93 79 9383 127. This place was certainly not around when EFG editors visited during the early days of the post-Taliban period. Aimed specifically at the international contractor with high walls and security awareness, this is a relatively well-run guest house with a good coffee shop-style restaurant. Definitely the place to go if you want comfort.

Restaurants

Eating out in Mazar is fairly limited, but there are now lots of outdoor food stalls with kebabs on the west side of Hazrat Ali square. **The Kefayat Hotel** has a large restaurant serving tasty meals. Then there is the **Delhi Darbar** (similar to the one in Kabul) with good Indian food and alcohol (beer and wine) available to non-Afghans. You can sit inside or out in the walled compound garden. **The Bahaar Restaurant** (Khebyaban-e-Nasir Khusrau) serves good but not great Afghan food.

The Ibn Sina Restaurant near the Royal Oak Hotel makes an effort and serves good meals. The **G9 Guesthouse** also has a restaurant. You can go to the more expensive **UNICA guesthouse.** One excellent local eatery goes by the name of the **Titanic Restaurant,** its décor features a large painting of the doomed passenger liner perfectly afloat on a calm sea. Cuisine is distinctly Central Asian. Try the mantu (meaning 'me you' pasta stuffed with minced meat), burani (fried eggplant), bollogne (potato/leek fried in batter) or the usual pilaw (rice/mutton). In the streets to the south of the shrine are some markets selling succulent melons in summer and apples or oranges in winter. Avoid salads and unpeeled fruits, and only drink bottled or filtered water.

Embassies & Visas

A number of foreign consulates are located in Mazar, including the missions of Iran, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. You can renew your Afghan visa here in one day, but for Pakistani visas you need to go to Kabul. A 3-month Afghan or Turkmen visa will cost around US$ 100-150.

Emergencies

During 2002, the UN and NGOs came very close to evacuating expatriate staff due to security problems. Check with coordinating bodies before abandoning the city during times of unrest. Leaving Mazar at such times is both difficult and since UN/NGO departures can be seen as a signal of loss of control may be opposed by the local authorities. If you're here for any length of time, it's worth registering with the UN. With the presence of NATO/ISAF, efforts to resolve armed squabbling and Dostom's support of the Kabul government, security had improved significantly by 2005. Overland evacuation into Uzbekistan may be possible, depending on whether the border bridge over the Amu Darya remains open. Otherwise, both the UN and ICRC have organized airlifts in the past to evacuate key personnel, but this is dependent on negotiating a ceasefire with local commanders to enable the planes to land. If you decide to try your luck with the UN or ICRC in an emergency situation, make sure you obey orders, because UN evacuation convoys in the past have been kept waiting by journalists keen to get one last shot. Any large collection of expatriates and expensive jeeps is a conspicuous target, so it is best not to hang around or force other people to (SEE SECURITY

TIPS).

Information

Call in at UNAMA or ICRC for the latest security information. The Department of Foreign Affairs is the first stop for information on work permits. Their staff can be very helpful on security issues and in organizing ministerial meetings and introductions to other government departments. For internet updates, check:
http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com (online chat room see Asia/ Central Asia section)

Local Rules

Despite the departure of the Taliban, the dress code remains conservative, especially for women. Loose clothing covering most of the body is recommended. Foreign women are given more concessions than local ones when it comes to dress and behaviour, but appropriate clothing goes a long way towards avoiding problems. Do not stare down the men staring at you it only makes them more interested; nor walk around alone at night. It is inappropriate to touch the opposite sex in public, so only shake hands if they are offered. However, women embracing women is as normal as men embracing men. On Wednesday mornings ladies can visit the precincts of the Hazrat Ali shrine, but you won't be allowed into the inner rooms unless you are a Muslim. As a foreign man in northern Afghanistan, there are fewer restrictions, but remember not to wear shorts or stare at local women (SEE CLOTHING & KIT).

Medical

The main health risk is from dehydration or water-borne bugs leading to diarrhoea, hepatitis and typhoid. Take precautions against malaria and leishmaniasis-carrying sandflies. There are numerous local pharmacies and medical NGOs provide backup for most problems. However, any serious treatment should be carried out in Kabul or Dubai. The dusty environment may be irritable to contact lens wearers. There are now a number of good pharmacies plus opticians. ISAF at Mazar airport offers medical care to foreigners and has a fully supplied pharmacy. The hospital run by Samaritan's Purse in Khulm, 30 minutes from Mazar, is also recommended (SEE PERSONAL HEALTH).

Money

A huge three-story money market, known as the Kefayat, is located on the west side of the Hazrat Ali shrine in the centre of Mazar. The old currency, known as the Dostum Dollar, was replaced in late 2002 by the new national Afghani. The rate has fluctuated between 50-65 Afghanis to the dollar (SEE MONEY & BARGAINING).

Post & Telecommunications

As elsewhere in Afghanistan, postal services are improving and letters are being delivered. There are also a number of courier services such as DHL and TNT. Since the departure of the Taliban, telecommunications have developed rapidly. Mobile phones are ubiquitous and there are quite a few internet cafes. (SEE TELECOMS).

Recreation

Assuming you wish to give buzkashi a miss, there are a number of other organised sports usually on Fridays. Try volleyball and tennis at the UNICA guesthouse, volleyball at the NGO Solidarités, soccer at the Turkish consulate, or basketball at UNHCR. Some people jog in the WFP compound or around the airport, but wear long sleeves and trousers. A walk through the bazaar or through the desert to the north of the city is a less strenuous option. The desert and hills to the south of the city are unsafe. Aid workers often get together for a drink on a Thursday night, usually in one of the agency guesthouses.

Bullet to Ballot - Then and Now

By Jonathan Walter

"The Taliban executed people here every week", said Mohammed Shah quietly. "Once they stoned a woman to death, because they believed she was spying for the United Front (Northern Alliance). They rounded us up in the bazaar and forced us to watch." He spoke without emotion, as though years of brutality had flattened his feelings. His moustache and hair were grey with dust; his face deeply tanned. He was a teacher, but it didn't look like he'd spent much time indoors recently.

It was 29 May 2002. We were sitting on the terraces of Mazar's sports stadium. The black, red and green national flag fluttered over the five Olympic rings painted on the stadium's wall. Local people used to play football here, and stage wrestling and gymnastics competitions. Then the Taliban made it a killing field. They executed educated people, especially Dari-speakers, said Mohammed. They used machine guns, stones or a rope suspended from a crane. Up to 20,000 people at a time were made to watch.

Now the stadium was the scene of Mazar's first vote for nearly 40 years. Fifty UN tents were lined up on the dusty pitch, each lined with Turkoman carpets and filled with candidates elected by their districts from across northern Afghanistan. Some men sported beards and turbans trailing long white tails. Uzbeks in embroidered skullcaps mingled with Tajiks in their trademark pakools, worn Massoud-style at a jaunty angle. Hazaras and Pushtuns came in smaller numbers. There were even some women huddled in the corner of the stadium in burqas.

The vote had been going on for several weeks in the provinces, to elect the 800 candidates to go to Mazar. Now, the candidates from Mazar city were selecting 12 representatives to go to Kabul for the national Loya Jirga. Of those 12, four would be women.

The late afternoon sun slanted across the dusty lilac crags of the Koh-e-Baba mountains to the south. A warm wind blew in from the northeast, across the baking plains of the Oxus river.Meaty-smelling steam rose from a dozen vast cauldrons as local chefs laid on by the UN prepared al fresco meals for a thousand mouths.

The candidates mounted the gallery where local dignitaries had once viewed the day's sport. Speeches dragged on into dusk. "Don't vote for the man who has power or money. Vote for the freedom of Afghanistan," announced one candidate over the tannoy. A large red fire truck creaked into view firing jets of water from its cannon. Dust control, not crowd control.

"Is this a chance for peace in Afghanistan?" I asked. "Maybe" replied Mohammed guardedly. "Who's being elected?" I added.
"Not commanders the people don't vote for them", he said. "To be a representative of the Loya Jirga, you should be educated, you shouldn't be a drugs trafficker or a smuggler. You shouldn't belong to any faction you should be someone helpful to the people." But the truth is less simple. The previous day, General Dostum the brutal and much feared leader of the Jumbesh-e-Melli faction had swept into town on his own election campaign. He surprised UN staff by marching straight into the stadium with his supporters and a small group of armed Turkish bodyguards and went from tent to tent explaining the virtues of voting for him. Not surprisingly, his "constituency" of Shibarghan, three hours' drive west of Mazar, returned a full house of Jumbesh candidates.

Groups of men unrolled their prayer mats and knelt in a line towards the dying sun. A three quarter moon shone overhead. Finally the time came to vote. The women were invited to cast their ballots first. A dozen blue and white burqas flitted through the half-light like phantoms, about to make a small piece of history.

Afterwards, we approached them. One confident lady with fine, Oriental features introduced herself as Homayra. She wore a long, powder green two-piece suit and headscarf no burqa. "Today is the day that wisdom will replace the gun in the decision-making of Afghanistan", she announced. "I feel delighted, because this event will finish off the warlords and make Afghanistan united.
Brothers will not kill brothers anymore." Homayra was a poet and showed us her latest book. "For 23 years," she continued, "men have been martyred on the frontlines. But we women have been martyred four times we have lost husbands and sons, fathers and brothers."

What message did Homayra have for the outside world? "I ask the international community to use all their efforts to educate Afghan women. If a man is educated he can teach one person, but if a woman is educated she can teach the entire country. The first school for our children is their mother."

The other women all in burqas were more timid. I asked one how she felt. She lifted back her veil and said quietly: "I am very happy that after a long time women have got the right to vote." It was the first time in her life that she had voted. Her face worn down by fatigue and anxiety revealed no joy. Her eyebrows were dark and brooding. The fear had not yet left her deep brown eyes.

A kindergarten teacher, she'd been elected by her district to come to the jirga in Mazar. "I am a widow with two daughters. After the death of my husband, I don't want my children to suffer. This event can bring prosperity and peace for my children." How had her husband died? "The

Taliban looted my home and martyred him", she said. "He was a reciter of the Holy Qu'ran but he was not one of them."

Was she angry with the Taliban, I asked. She replied simply: "My vote is my revenge." Since then, there have been more elections – 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010 – but with unabashed vote rigging resulting in nation-wide disillusionment with both the country's privileged elite and the international community, which had come with some many promises, prompting so many hopes. The next elections, presidential, are for 2014. These will be coupled with the pullout of most foreign troops. What then? A return of the past with the Taliban and more civil war?

Shopping

You can find carpets and handicrafts on the west side of the Hazrat Ali shrine, but they are often overpriced so it is best to bargain. Besides traditional Turco-man and Baluch carpets, you should be able to find Uzbek *gelim*, woven rugs, rather than knotted carpets. Stop by the mandawi (vegetable market) and see how the vast majority of locals pick over vegetables that foreigners might not consider edible. The cost of living has soared, so keep in mind that bargaining for essential items may deny locals the few cents they desperately need. The second-hand bazaar is full of very cheap clothes in all sizes. The *chapan*, the traditional long-sleeved coat, worn by the men of Mazar comes in both light-weight summer and quilted winter versions. Several relatively good antique shops around the city sell traditional carpet bags and jewellery.

Sights

The Shrine of Hazrat Ali

This magnificent shrine, responsible for Mazar-e-Sharif's name, which translates as "Tomb of the Exalted," still stands in the central square. It is relatively unscathed after 24 years of war. The faithful believe that Hazrat Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, and the fourth orthodox Caliph of Islam, lies buried here. In March, thousands of worshippers converge on the shrine during the festival of Nawroz to celebrate the coming of spring and a new year of hoped-for prosperity.

Although Hazrat Ali was murdered in 661 AD and buried near Baghdad, local tradition relates that his followers feared the body would be desecrated by his enemies. So they mounted the Caliph's mortal remains on a white female camel. After many weeks of wandering she

she collapsed exhausted and the body was buried here.
Genghis Khan destroyed the original shrine, and the present building dates from the 15th Century.

The shrine of Hazrat Ali

The shrine is the city's natural focal point. The air is filled with doves which roost among the minarets. Allegedly, they arrive as pigeons but within 40 days the holy atmosphere turns them white. The muezzin's piercing call to prayer pieerces the calm five times a day. The best time to visit the shrine is at dawn or dusk, when the faithful hurry barefoot across the spotless marble courtyard for prayers and the sun casts long shadows across the shrine's turquoise domes.

Balkh, "Mother of Cities"

Balkh, half an hour's drive west of Mazar, has never quite recovered from a visit by Genghis Khan in the early 13th Century. Nevertheless, the broad tree-lined streets are a welcome oasis from the hustle of Mazar. Set in a park of soaring sycamore and pine trees, the 15th Century Timurid Shrine of Khwaja Parsa sports an impressive tiled façade, flanked by a pair of corkscrew columns. Its dome is reminiscent of Gawhar Shad's mausoleum in Herat. Nearby is the tomb of the ill-

The South

--Kandahar

Kandahar Airport

Stretching from the foothills of the Hindu Kush down to the deserts of Seistan and the Baluch border, Afghanistan's southern region is dominated by the Helmand River, which rises in Hazarajat and flows southwest for 1,300 km through Uruzgan, Helmand and Nimruz provinces before vanishing into marshes that stretch into Iran. Ethnically, the south is heavily Pushtun, with pockets of Baluch and Brahui in the sparsely inhabited deserts on the borders of Iran and Pakistan. As Baluch are also found in Iran and Pakistan, there is a strong sense of a single (albeit not unified) Baluch identity in all three countries.

The main city of the south is Kandahar, the second largest in Afghanistan with an estimated population in 2013 of 530,000. Kandahar, or Qandahar, used to be the centre of the Pushtun kingdom formed in the mid-18th Century by the so-called "Father of Afghanistan" Ahmed Shah Durrani. Kandahar however has not always been the pre-eminent city in this region. From the 9th to 12th Centuries the cities of Zaranj in Seistan (modern-day Nimruz) and Bost (modern-day Lashkar Gah)

were thriving, such that "once there were so many fine buildings and palaces that one could easily walk from Bost to Zaranj on the rooftops without once touching the ground" (N. Dupree), and medieval historians referred to the area as the "garden of Asia" and the "granary of the East."

But today these ancient cities are all but consumed by the shifting sands of the Dasht-e-Margo (Desert of Death) and the Dasht-e-Jehanum (Desert of Hell), and the riverside pleasure palaces of Bost lie in ruins. The devastating four-year drought, which began in 1998 and continued at intervals in some southern provinces, wrecked the livelihoods of many farmers and kuchi nomads, whose livestock herds were decimated. Opium poppy, however, which needs less water than wheat or cotton, is thriving, especially in Helmand, one of Afghanistan's most productive poppy provinces.

For many centuries Kandahar has been of great historical and strategic significance. Located at the intersection of three key roads to Herat, Kabul and Quetta over the border in Pakistan, it has found itself astride the main route of adventurers and empire-builders from Alexander the Great to the Taliban and, more recently, the international Coalition forces. Situated at around 1,000 metres, Kandahar has been settled since antiquity. Alexander rebuilt the city in 329 BC and the name Kandahar may derive from his Eastern name 'Sikander' or 'Iskandar.' From the 7th Century onwards it was absorbed into various Islamic kingdoms; and during the 11th and 12th Centuries it was very much eclipsed in significance by the Ghaznavid winter capital of Bost. In the 1150s, Bost was destroyed by the Ghorid ruler Alauddin the "World Burner", and in the 1380s Timur razed Zaranj to the ground, after which Kandahar rose in prominence. From the 16th to 18th Centuries Persian Safavids and Indian Moghuls argued over it; and the famous Chihlzina, a rock chamber at the top of "Forty Steps" hewn out of a rock face outside the city, contains a Persian inscription recording the conquests of the Moghul emperor Babur.

Safavid influence however gained the upper hand in Kandahar, until in the early 1700s Mir Wais Hotak, the Ghilzai Pushtun chief of the city, rebelled against the decadent Persians by murdering one of their envoys during a picnic. Mir Wais died in 1715, but as Afghanistan's first great nationalist he had set in train the process which resulted in Ahmed Shah Durrani forming the last great Afghan empire in 1747. Ahmed Shah Baba – "Father

of Afghanistan" as he is popularly known – made Kandahar his capital until his death in 1772, extending his influence as far as Kashmir and Delhi.

Internecine struggles forced his second son and successor Timur Shah to move his capital to Kabul in 1776. In the 19th Century, British forces occupied Kandahar in the first two Afghan Wars and suffered one of their heavier defeats nearby at Maiwand aloft as a battle standard, fired up the Afghans to claim victory. General Roberts was sent from Kabul immediately to avenge the defeat, marching his force of 10,000 men on foot for 324 miles to Kandahar in the searing heat of August, covering the distance in just 23 days. While this appears an astonishing feat to a modern reader, it was no big deal for the average Victorian soldier; as Major Ashe writes: "… our march up to the present time has been a veritable picnic, not unaccompanied by a rubber of whist in the afternoon, and not divested of that little duck and quail slaughter which in measure consoles our youngsters for their banishment from Hurlingham…" (quoted by N. Dupree). The British defeated the Afghans the day after arriving in Kandahar, but departed after eight months and left Amir Abdur Rahman to fight his cousins for control of the city.

Apart from Red Army occupation during the 1980s, and more recently, the arrival of the Coalition forces, Kandahar has been controlled by Pushtuns ever since the British departed. Owing to its strategically significant situation, the city became one of the key points of the Soviet "Security Ring" after the 1979 invasion. The American-built airport, which was supposed to serve as a fuelling stop for long distance aircraft from Europe to India but lost out with the arrival of the Jumbo 747 at the end of the 1960s, was transformed into a major Soviet-Afghan government base for

anti-resistance operations. The Soviets launched regular MiG and helicopter gunship assaults against mujahed positions throughout the region. (The airport now serves as the regional operations base for US-led Coalition Forces, plus retains a completely renovated civilian terminal). While the Soviets occupied the centre of the city, the mujahideen controlled the surrounding area right up to the district of Dand on the southern fringe of Kandahar. This district was heavily defended and bombed. By 2013, parts were still in ruin with mine fields. The Taliban and other insurgents have also been able to penetrate close enough to the airport to launch mortars.

Following the Red Army withdrawal, Afghan infighting only added to the destruction. From 1989-1992 the mujahideen fought the Communist regime troops of President Najibullah; and from 1992-1994 five different mujahed factions all competed with each other for control. When the Taliban took Kandahar (without a shot fired) in September 1994, they found the city virtually deserted, heavily mined and with most of its citizens living as refugees in Pakistan. Through disarming the mujahideen and skilful negotiations with local commanders they managed to bring peace and security to the area for the first time since 1980.

Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, the region has seen drug production surge, while US-led Coalition Forces have conducted intensive – and often heavy-handed – operations to root out pro-Taliban and al Qaeda fighters. With the rising war, security has deteriorated across the region, as anti-government fighters continue to launch attacks against aid workers, moderate clerics and state employees.

In September 2002, President Karzai narrowly avoided being assassinated while visiting Kandahar. In March 2003, a delegate with the International Committee of the Red Cross was executed in cold blood, while on the way to a water project in neighbouring Uruzgan. The Taliban began regrouping over the Pakistan border in Quetta, just a couple of hours' drive from Kandahar, launching many hit-and-run attacks on motorbikes, killing as many as 400 people during August-October 2003. Funded by a combination of drugs trafficking and al Qaeda, their aim appears to be to discredit the US-backed Karzai administration by attacking projects and people associated with the Kabul authorities. Reconstruction of the Kabul-Kandahar trunk road, for example, was dogged by numerous attacks on engineering teams, but was

finally completed in December 2003. By early 2005, Kandahar had become a high security risk with most expatriates refraining from travelling outside their compounds.

The deployment of British, American and other Coalition troops, including major counter-insurgency offensives, since the early 2000s, has made little difference in repressing the insurgency. The region remains one of the most insecure in Afghanistan. One of these operations was the famed 2010 Marjah assault in the Helmand River Valley involving some 15,000 NATO and Afghan forces against Talib positions. Many of the insurgents buried their guns and went back to farming or headed off to other areas, where they continued their war. This is a typical guerrilla tactic, which in no way suggests that the Taliban were beaten or destroyed (A similar offensive by the Soviets in 1982 against the Panjshir Valley achieved exactly the same result).

By 2011, Kandahar itself became known as the "assassination" city of Afghanistan with numerous attacks against government officials, tribal elders, religious leaders, aid workers or others suspected of collaboration with the government or the Coalition forces. This included the killing of President Hamid Karzai's own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was renowned for his corruption and drug trafficking links, and yet worked closed with the internationals. Another prominent victim was the mayor of Kandahar, Ghulam Haider Hamidi, who was murdered in July, 2011 by a Talib suicide bomber. The overwhelming majority of those killed, however, have been civilians. In June, 2012, at least 21 civilians were killed and over 50 injured in suspected Talib suicide operation near the airport. Pakistan's ISI, which has been supporting the Quetta Shura and other insurgent groups for years, was also accused of being behind the attacks.

In 2013, the southern region remained a precarious as ever with civilian attacks on the rise. Two boys, for example, were beheaded by alleged insurgents in June, 2013, for suspected government involvement. They had been scavenging for food in the rubbish dumps near police headquarters and often accepted handouts from the officers stationed there. The Taliban denied committing such atrocities, which is what they often do with negative PR fallout. All the principal insurgent groups, including the Taliban, Haqqani Network, the Quetta Shura, Hezb-e-Islami, and outside influenced factions, such as al Qaeda, operate here. While some NGOs and private contractors dealing with humanitarian or development aid have been operating alongside the Americans,

British and other Coalition forces, most NGOs are no longer working in the southern region because of attacks and threats.

One of the biggest problems for both Kabul and outsiders is that Kandahar ranks as the most conservative and Pushtun of Afghanistan's major cities. During te 1990s, the Taliban movement preferred to base itself here rather than in the more ethnically mixed and cosmopolitan Afghan capital. Many of the Taliban's strict interpretations of shari'a law, such as untrimmed beards for men and purdah for women (which prevented them from working away from home or even leaving the house unattended by a male relative), derived from the traditional southern Pushtun customs of this region. Huge numbers of refugees returned after the Taliban brought stability to the city. One of the more notorious was the Saudi terrorist Osama Bin Laden, who built a smart new villa in the city. When the Taliban took Herat in September 1995, the opening of the main road from Central Asia to Pakistan via Kandahar boosted the city's economic trade in both legal and smuggled goods. Taxes on this trade kept the Taliban war chest topped-up, while international agencies were left to look after the city's rehabilitation.

In October 2001, Hamid Karzai – then hardly known on the world stage – was instrumental in negotiating the withdrawal of the Taliban from the city. However, the city's infrastructure has been devastated by war, and the damage caused by mines and the shelling of irrigation systems badly affected local agricultural capacity.

Lashkar Gah, capital of Helmand Province and once known as Bost, is a relatively beautiful town of some 300,000 inhabitants. Part of the town was built by the Americans during the 1950s, 60s and 70s to house contractors as part of the Helmand River Project. Sometimes referred to as "little America," parts look like Alburquerque, New Mexico with their suburban tree-lined streets and gardened villas. With the presence of a British-run Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) base on the edge of town, which has been supplied by Camp Bastion, plus the presence of private contractors and a small number of NGOs, there has been considerable recent development. Afghan entrepreneurs have also established various businesses, albeit many of them reliant on foreign contracts. Some of the projects and businesses have already begun to founder as donor support dries up.

Getting There

By Air

Since 2002, Kandahar Airport, or Airfield (KAF) as the military prefer to call it, has been under the control of the NATO-led Coalition forces. It has become a city unto its own with shops, restaurants, gyms and other facilities given that many of the troops dealing with the Southern Region operate out of the airport. Journalist embeds with the military are brought by NATO transport to KAF or to Camp Bastion. The civilian side of the airport has been totally refurbished. The other major regional air base is the British-run Camp Bastion in Helmand Province. Neither Kandahar nor Camp Bastion, however, are totally removed from vulnerability. Both have suffered from mortar or other forms of insurgent attack over the past several years.

The UN Humanitarian Air Service operates flights to Kandahar from Kabul – often flying via Herat (SEE AIR TRAVEL). So does PACTEC/Air Serv International. Both KAM Air and Arian also operate civilian flights. SEE TRAVEL BY AIR.

Overland

TRAVELLERS BEWARE! Given the growing insecurity due to insurgents and banditry in the region, there is no recommended safe way to reach Kandahar by road. The southern region of Afghanistan is also the most heavily mined in the country, with numerous unmarked anti-tank minefields near main roads. When driving always remember to avoid verges or short cuts – stick to the beaten track if you want to stay alive!

The road from Kabul to Kandahar used to be 490 km of bone-shattering potholes and corrugations, taking two days by car. It has been completely re-built and tarred. But at present, the route – particularly between Ghazni and Kandahar – is very dangerous. Both Afghans and foreigners have been assaulted and killed along this road. In November 2003, a French national working for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was shot dead in central Ghazni in the middle of the day, sending shock waves through the aid community.

By early 2005, people travelling from Kabul to Kandahar were still being strongly recommended to avoid using this road

Kandahar downtown

or to at least to check on the latest security situation. Since then, it has become worse. Driving to Kandahar from Herat, the Delaram section is also not recommended. Both thieves and insurgents are active in this area. The journey from Herat, however, is beautiful, skirting some fascinating scenery between the last remnants of the Hindu Kush mountains and the deserts to the southwest. Allow 13-14 hours to drive the 565 km from Herat to Kandahar in a sturdy car or jeep, or two days by bus.

The road to Kandahar from Pakistan, via Quetta and the border at Chaman, is currently considered unsafe for foreigners. In 'normal' circumstances, the journey should take between six and seven hours by car. From Quetta to the border at Chaman is around 120 km, while

Kandahar lies a further 110 km to the northwest. The road from Zaranj, on the Iranian frontier, is also not recommended. The best advice is to check up on the latest security situation with UN or NGO sources before making the journey overland to Kandahar.

Orientation & Getting Around

The original town laid out by Ahmed Shah Durrani in the 1760s still exists in the form of the Charsuq and its various bazaars laid out in a quartered rectangular plan. To the east of this Old Town lies the airport and the road to Kabul; to the west lies the New Town (Shahr-e-Naw), the road to Herat, and the jagged crests of some low mountains. Most of the international agencies that remain operational (given current security concerns) are located in the New Town, while to the south much of the city is still rubble and minefields.

Most of the "tourist sites" worth seeing are located in the Old Town, except for the Chihlzina which is to the west of town on the way to Herat. The UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS) has produced a street map of Kandahar showing locations of consulates, government departments and aid agencies (see above). A very clear but out-of-date street plan is contained in Nancy Dupree's book An Historical Guide to Afghanistan (2nd Edition, 1977). Call in at the UN's regional office (UNAMA) in the south-west corner of the New Town to receive a security briefing. Avoid using the verges of roads, where anti-tank mines are sometimes found, and never wander into uninhabited areas or off the beaten track. There have been a number of tragic accidents involving both local and international aid personnel in the region. There may be a chance of hitching a lift around town in a UN or aid agency vehicle.

Apart from aid agency jeeps the best way to get around is by three-wheeled tuk-tuk, or taxi if you have long legs. Always agree on a price before getting in. Local guides and interpreters can be hired through UNAMA.

Agencies

By late 2003, over 35 UN agencies and international NGOs, plus around 50 Afghan NGOs, had offices in Kandahar. For an overview of agency activities in the region and the latest humanitarian situation, check with ACBAR, AREU or the Kandahar offices of UNAMA or the ICRC. UNDP is implementing a major development initiative entitled the Reconstruction and Employment Afghanistan Programme (REAP) and by early 2005, there were some successful agricultural and other projects to show. By 2013, however, only a small number of NGOs remained active, most of them relying on Afghan staff with expats only coming in on quick trips.

Some NGOs also prefer not be listed for security purposes, so best check with AREU, which publishes the annual ***A-Z Guide***, in Kabul.

Drug control remains a major issue, with neighbouring Helmand province one of Afghanistan's most productive areas for opium poppy. Local warlords and crossborder operatives from Pakistan (and increasingly Central Asia) are heavily involved in trafficking (SEE DRUGS). Demining continues to be a major task, coordinated by the UN. For more information, contact the AMAC (Area Mine Action Centre) office.

Meanwhile, thousands of displaced Afghans, who fled the US-led bombing of the Taliban and tried to find refuge in Pakistan, have found themselves languishing in temporary camps – either on the Pakistan border at Spinboldak, or in the desert west of Kandahar at Zhar-e-Dasht. Despite numerous returns from Pakistan, but also some from Iran, many Afghans retain close links with Quetta or Peshawar for business and other purposes. Many families have some members in Afghanistan, while others remain in Pakistan – just in case. Quetta remains exceptionally important for the Taliban and other insurgents in their operations in the southern region with the Pakistani army more or less standing on the sidelines. Quite a few known Taliban have fled the tribal areas since 2010 and 2011 because of US drone attacks to the safety of Quetta. The UN has found it difficult to operate in the region ever since one of their international staff was shot dead in Ghazni in November 2003.

One of the largest government-run jails in Afghanistan is located in Kandahar. ICRC makes regular visits to ensure that sufficient food, water and sanitation are provided, to check for possible human rights abuse, and to exchange Red Cross messages. The ICRC and WHO support the regional Mir Wais Hospital, which includes a surgical unit and facilities to fit prosthetic limbs.

Education is making a slow comeback. Before the war there was co-education in towns like Lashkar Gah. Some girls' schools were established in Kandahar under the communist regime, but these were all shut when the Taliban arrived in 1994. With the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, schools re-opened, although levels of enrolment for girls (around 10 percent) are much lower than elsewhere in the country. In recent years, there has been a rise of attacks, including acid, against girls' schools causing many pupils to stop attending for fear of being killed or abused. The NGO Islamic Relief (UK) has rebuilt the Dar-ul-Malimeen Teacher Training Institute, while the government of Japan is contributing new buildings to Kandahar University, first established in 1993.

Kandahar A-Z

Accommodation and Food

Given the current security situation, the **UNICA Guesthouse** is only available for UN or World Bank guests, at the time of writing. Facilities include satellite television and satphone, air-conditioned rooms and a wide selection of drinks available most nights of the week. Non-residents may be allowed to visit UNICA for a drink on a Thursday or Friday evening. UN, World Bank and other 'official' aid workers are able to stay at the **British PRT** in Lashkar Gah, but this will no doubt change as NATO forces pull out and the PRTs wind down.

Readers: Please help us update Food and Accommodation with your comments. Check the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan website: www.efgafghan.com

Best check with friends and colleagues before coming to Kandahar as conditions are constantly changing – as is the security situation. There are a number of private guesthouses in the city. **The Continental Guest House** provides rooms from US$ 60 up. The guesthouse has 24-hour internet and cable TV. It is located in Herat Darwaza, opposite Clinic Kandahar. Yasin International is close to Continental Guesthouse and similarly priced (Mobile: 070 301042). Some journalists still stay at the **NoorJahan Hotal**. Rooms range from US$ 40-50, the more expensive rooms featuring cable TV and fridge. Both the Yasin and Noor Jahan have good restaurants.

The **MK Afghan Hotel** is a more recently established hotel with good food and accommodation, located in Kabul Darwaza. Many international NGO staff stay here. Alternatively you can find local accommodation and food at the **Khiber Hotel** located opposite the Id Gah gateway at the northern end of the Old Town.

Embassies and Visas

You can extend your Afghan visa via the Department of Foreign Affairs, who will introduce you to the police headquarters responsible for issuing visa extensions. Visas are free for Pakistani, Turkish and Indian citizens. For more information SEE VISAS. The following consulates, which also monitor the situation for their

governments, are in Kandahar.
Pakistan Consulate
Shahr-e-Naw, opposite Kandahar Hotel
Mobile: 070 300622
Open every day except national holidays and Fridays for visas. You'll need the appropriate form, plus three photos and a photocopy of your passport.
Iran Consulate
Dand district, near ICRC office
Mobile: 070 301952
The visa section is open two days per week (Mon, Sat).
India Consulate
Shahr-e-Naw, District 6
Tel: +93 (0)30 300 1856; +87 376 30 95 995
The visa section is open every day (0900-1200) except Fridays and Saturdays.

Emergencies

The Mir Wais hospital has a surgical unit supported by ICRC. Otherwise, medical emergencies are best evacuated to Kabul or Islamabad by ICRC or UN aircraft. Alternatively, UNAMA may be able to put you in contact with medical facilities at Kandahar Air Base (KAF) or Camp Bastion in Lashkar Gah. For more on personal safety, SEE SECURITY TIPS.

Information

For more information about aid agency activities, and for a security briefing, contact the regional office of UNAMA in Shahr-e-Naw. Make sure you receive some kind of landmine awareness briefing before going off the beaten track. For local information, try visiting the Department of Culture and Information (near Shahidano Chowk) or the Department of Foreign Affairs (Shahr-e-Naw).

Local Rules

Under the Taliban, photography, cinema and TV were strictly banned. Rules have relaxed somewhat since 2001, but remember that this remains one of the most conservative corners of Afghanistan. Always ask before taking pictures of people (SEE PHOTOGRAPHY). There are plenty of photography studios in Shahidano Chowk if you need to renew a visa. You can also rent

videos plus obtain the latest in computer gear. It is still difficult for Western women to go into the bazaar. However, the situation changes constantly, so ask around. Be careful while travelling through tribal agency areas if going by road between Kandahar and Quetta in Pakistan. Take a local Afghan guide or colleague who speaks Pashto, Dari and Urdu to smooth the way.

Medical

Take precautions against mosquitoes and sandflies: they carry malaria and leishmaniasis. The latter is a particularly unpleasant disfiguring disease which causes open lesions on the face and body. Hepatitis, cholera and typhoid vaccines are also recommended. At least two Western journalists and aid workers known to the EFG editors have died from hepatitis while working in the region. Diarrhoea is a major problem in Kandahar, so boil your drinking water for 10 minutes or use a good-quality filter. For medical emergencies there is always the Mir Wais hospital at the western end of the New Town which has an ICRC surgical unit. Al-Hadi Farhad is a private hospital located in Shahidano Chowk, offering 24 hour service (SEE PERSONAL HEALTH).

Money

Bring US dollars or euros for guesthouse bills. You can change your currency into Afghanis at the money changing market in the middle of the Old Town (SEE MONEY & BARGAINING).

Post & Telecommunications

As is becoming increasingly possible in other parts of the country, the Afghan Postal System actually works. Sort of. You can mail letters internationally via the main Post Office located in Id Gah Darwaza. Alternatively, and more reliable, DHL and FedEx have regular flights to Kandahar airport. Like Kabul, the mobile telephone network is functioning well. Sim and top-cards are available in many shops and in the streets from local vendors. A digital telephone system is also operational in Kandahar.

Recreation

There are around 11 cultural associations and 10 libraries in Kandahar. For more information, contact AINA in Shahr-e-Naw,

behind Zarghoona Ana secondary school.

Shopping

Baluch handicrafts are available in the bazaars of the Old Town. For embroidery and handicrafts from Kandahar and southwest Afghanistan, try Bana Hindu Sraie in Charsuq bazaar. For electronic goods, try Nikai near the Kandahar hotel. For stationery, go to Herat Darwaza. There are new markets in Kiptan Madad Chowk and in Charsuq, close to Rangraizan Dana. Kandahar is also famous for its fabulous pomegranates, considered the best in the world, as well as peaches, figs, grapes and extremely juicy melons.

Sights in Kandahar

The most comprehensive guidebook available on the historical sights of Kandahar remains Nancy Dupree's An Historical Guide to Afghanistan (2nd Edition, 1977) available through ACBAR or at various bookshops in Peshawar and Kabul. Many of the sights worth seeing are located in the **Old Town**. Laid out by Ahmed Shah Durrani in the 1760s this rectangular city was once surrounded by walls up to 30 feet thick, punctuated by six huge gateways.These fortifications were largely demolished in the 1940s.

Mausoleum of Ahmed Shah Durrani

This colourful octagonal building is dedicated to the memory of Ahmed Shah Baba, the "Father of Afghanistan," who inaugurated and ruled over the first great Pushtun Afghan dynasty from 1747-1772. It is located in the northwest quarter of the Old Town near the Id Gah gateway.

Shrine of the cloak of the Prophet

Known locally as Da Kherqa Sherif Ziarat, the shrine is located next to Ahmed Shah's mausoleum and is one of the most holy shrines in Afghanistan. The exterior decoration of the shrine is magnificent: foundations of green Lashkar Gah marble, sparkling tilework over every surface and gilded archways make the nearby mausoleum of the city's founder look somewhat pedestrian. The cloak itself cannot be seen. It was handed over to Ahmed Shah by

the Amir of Bokhara in 1768 to consolidate a treaty over territories to the north. Traditionally the cloak is only brought out during times of national crisis. It had not been seen in public since the 1930s, when in 1994 when Mullah Omar, the Supreme Leader of the Taliban, removed the cloak from its shrine and held it before a crowd of several thousand clerics and Kandaharis, claiming it as a visible symbol of his role as Mullah Al-Momineen, Leader of All Pious Muslims.

Known locally as the Jame Mui Mobarak, you will find the entrance to this mosque off the covered bazaar just to the east of the Charsuq, where the four bazaars of the Old Town converge. The Hair came from the Amir of Bokhara at the same time as the cloak, and is kept in a golden sheath in a casket under mountains of holy blankets and banners. The local mullah or caretaker will let you into the side chapel where the Hair is enshrined. The mosque itself was built in the 19th Century and a water canal flows through the spacious shady courtyard, attracting travellers and the destitute.

Sights outside Kandahar

PLEASE NOTE: Check on the security situation including land mines before proceeding outside city.

Chihlzina ("Forty Steps")

About four kilometers west of Kandahar, high above the plains on a rocky outcrop, is a cave carved out of the mountain. Known as the Chihlzina, forty steps lead to this chamber, inside which is an inscription relating the conquests of the Moghul emperor Babur and his son Humayun. After Babur's death in 1530, the struggle for succession drove his son into temporary exile in Persia. Humayun staged his return to Delhi by first occupying Kandahar in 1545 with the help of the Persians. After his own death in 1556 the city fell within the Persian sphere of influence. One of the most important battles in Afghanistan's history was fought at the foot of the Chihlzina. Here in 1881 Amir Abdur Rahman conquered the forces of his rebellious cousin Ayub Khan, making way for him to establish not just Kabul as his kingdom, but the whole nation of Afghanistan.

Zor Shahr ("Old City")

Check with the UNAMA office and local Afghans about possible minefields before exploring this site.

The original "Old City" of Kandahar – destroyed by Nadir Shah of Persia in 1738 – lies at the foot of the cliffs into which the Chihlzina is cut. Earlier this century archaeologists found Buddhist, Greek and Islamic treasures here, including two edicts of the Emperor Ashoka carved into blocks of stone in Greek and Aramaic. Dating from the 3rd Century BC, the familiar themes of piety and humility are ones which modern-day players on the Afghan stage would do well to note: "Those who praise themselves and denigrate their neighbours are self-seekers, wishing to shine in comparison with the others but in fact hurting themselves. It behoves to respect one another and to accept one another's lessons." (trans. Wheeler)

One of the most popular picnic spots for Kandahari families on Fridays is **Babawally**, to the north of Kandahar. You can swim in the river and a shrine is under construction. To get there from Shahr-e-Naw, take a taxi but best with a driver you know. To the

The East

The eastern region of Afghanistan consists of the area neighbouring the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (known until 2010 as North West Frontier Province) and tribal agencies of Pakistan, namely the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktia and Khost. It is a mountainous region traditionally dominated by various competing Pushtun tribes. The largest town in the area, and the capital of Nangarhar province, is Jalalabad which sits astride the strategically significant route from Kabul via the Khyber Pass to the Indian subcontinent. During the 1990s Nangarhar province competed with Helmand province in the far west as the country's prime producer of opium poppies. Much of the production had simply moved over from Pakistan, where it had been more or less 'eradicated' during the 1980s. Same traffickers, same heroin producers, different farmers.

One journalist reported in May 1992: "For miles around Jalalabad, 80 percent of the arable land produces nothing but poppies, UN officials say. And the farmers like it that way. Today opium brings the farmer 10 times more money than wheat and there is plenty of cheap bread for sale in town, thanks to the flow of free flour [from USAID]."

Opium is an emotive issue in this part of Afghanistan. When officials from Hamid Karzai's administration attempted to persuade Nangarhar farmers to stop growing poppies in the spring

of 2002, they were shot dead on the spot. The farmers claimed they could earn US$ 3,500 per acre of opium far more than the compensation on offer for not growing it. The assassination later that year of Nangarhar's governor, Hajji Qadir, may well have been drug-related. (During the Soviet war, Qadir – as with many other guerrilla commanders – sold opium to pay for weapons and ammunition). In 2003, Nangarhar overtook Helmand as Afghanistan's number one poppy province. A total of 19,000 hectares were under cultivation, mainly in the south of the province, producing 964 tonnes of raw opium over one quarter of

Dried opium pods

the country's entire production.

As with the rest of Afghanistan, the 2004 opium crop proved to be Nangrahar's highest ever. While opium production began to drop in 2005, it began rising significantly again after several years The 2013 opium poppy crop was expected to be the highest on record, returning Afghanistan to its position producing over 90 percent of the world's total, up from an estimated 75 percent. (SEE DRUGS)

The east of Afghanistan has suffered from widespread illegal logging in recent years. During 2003, timber smuggling reportedly shot up, due to demand in Pakistan for the high quality timber found in the forests of Kunar and Nuristan. Forest cover in 2013 is now less than one percent of the country (down from five-six percent during the 1970s) only a few straddling wooded areas

remaining in the Safed Koh region and northern Kunar and Nuristan. Water and logging conflicts have nearly become more common in the region than insurgent activities. (SEE DEFORESTATION)

Security deteriorated during 2002-03, as remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda launched crossborder raids from Pakistan's neighbouring provinces. Several rocket, grenade and gun attacks have targeted the offices and staff of UN agencies and international organizations in Jalalabad. In July 2003, a diplomatic row erupted when Afghan forces traded fire with Pakistani soldiers who had allegedly dug in positions on the Kunar side of Mohmand Agency, along the disputed Durand Line, which forms Afghanistan's eastern border. (Since then, there have been numerous incidents, several involving the deaths of soldiers from both sides). By early 2005, parts of the region were increasingly considered no-go areas by the international aid community. Nevertheless, local community leaders, anxious for outside investment, maintained that most disputes had been resolved. At the same time, they recommended that foreigners contact local authorities before travelling through the region.

In 2013, most mountainous areas along the Pakistan border, such as the Pech Valley, or Kamdesh deeper in the Hindu Kush were considered too risky for foreigners because of guerrilla infiltrations from Pakistan. Nuristan, which has always operated according to its own rules, is widely considered "no-go." In 2010, ten international and Afghan aid workers were murdered, execution-style, just inside Badakshan Province. They had just spent two weeks providing eye and dental care to Nuristani tribesemen. Despite dogged counter-insurgency operations by Coalition forces, the Americans have had only a limited impact on the guerrillas in the region. **(SEE Sebastian Younger's and Tim Hethrington's excellent documentary Ristrepo on the pointless deployment of a US army unit in the Pech Valley for one year)**. Predator drones are now ranked as the preferred weapon by the Americans against the Taliban, Hezb and Haqqani fighters operating in the area.

Jalalabad

Situated at an altitude of 569 metres in a fertile plain irrigated by the Kabul and Kunar rivers, and flanked by the mountains of the Hindu Kush to the north and the Spinghar (or Safed Koh) to

the south, Jalalabad is an oasis compared to most Afghan towns. Traditionally a warm winter retreat for royalty and wealthy urbanites, it is famous for its springtime orange-blooms, which still blossom in the centre of town. Before the war Jalalabad thrived on its orchards of citrus fruit, watered and powered by the hydroelectric dam at Darunta to the northwest of the city. However, most of these mechanized farms built by the Soviets were looted and destroyed by mujahed factions in 1989 and are only now beginning to be replanted. During the 1990s, the city became a foothold for many aid agencies keen to expand their operations crossborder into Afghanistan from nearby Peshawar. By 2013, Jalalabad had an estimated population of 900,000 with its own university. With the construction of a new cricket stadium, it is also known as the capital of Afghan cricket. The game was imported by refugees from Pakistan.

In 329 BC, Alexander the Great passed this way with 30,000 troops en route to his conquest of India. From the 2nd to 7th Centuries AD over a thousand Buddhist stupas in nearby Hadda and Basawal echoed to the chants and incantations of meditating monks, and Nangarhar was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the Buddhist world. The region was also at the centre of the remarkable Gandhara school of sculpture which represented the Buddha for the first time in human form, complete with Greco-Roman robes (SEE CULTURE). Indeed the Buddha himself is said to have visited the valley in order to slay the demon dragon Gopala, and Chinese pilgrims have written of the sacred relics once housed in Hadda's shrines: a fragment of the Buddha's skull entirely covered in gold-leaf, a tooth, some hair there was even a stupa erected where he had clipped his fingernails. The city resisted the spread of Islam until the 10th Century, when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni swept through the region on his way to Delhi.

The name Jalalabad means "Abode of Splendour," and is said to descend from Jalaluddin Akbar, Moghul Emperor of India, who founded the city in 1570. It was the Moghuls who established the Khyber Pass as the main route through to India. For many years the town was in the margins of history, but reappears in the drama of the retreat from Kabul of the 16,000 strong column of British troops and camp followers in January 1842. They were desperately seeking sanctuary in the British garrison at Jalalabad, but only the legendary Dr Brydon made it, while the remainder were hacked to death and a lucky few taken prisoner. In 1919, the British bombed Jalalabad from the air, before changing

their mind and negotiating independence for Afghanistan. The same year, Amir Habibullah was murdered while hunting near Jalalabad and is commemorated by a neo-classical mausoleum.

For most of the Soviet war Jalalabad was a bastion of the communist government regime supported by Red Army forces. Jalalabad Airfield was used for numerous Soviet offensives against guerrilla positions in the nearby Safed Koh region to the south and the Hindu Kush to the north. **(SEE account in Edward Girardet's book Killing the Cranes)** Throughout the 1980s, the mujahideen made repeated but not particularly effective attacks against government positions deliberately located on the outskirts of the city to draw fire. In March 1989, in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal, Jalalabad became the focus of an ill-conceived guerrilla assault pushed by the Pakistanis. Government forces staved off the rebels. The plan for the attack had been thrust upon the resistance alliance of Peshawar-based parties at the time, by the Americans and Pakistan's military Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI), in an attempt to force a swift mujahed victory over the communists in Kabul. It failed because of a lack of broad-based mujahed support and also due to the determined resistance by Afghan government troops whose backs were against the wall.

After the fall of the Najibullah regime in April 1992, Jalalabad was governed as a semi-autonomous province by the "Nangarhar Shura." Representatives of mujahed parties, which were fighting each other in Kabul, would hold their own meetings in Jalalabad. From 1992-1996 dozens of different local commanders controlled sections of the road between Jalalabad, Kabul and the Pakistan border, each extorting tax or loot from passing vehicles. Furthermore, thousands of refugees fleeing the fighting near Kabul poured into the city before being moved to refugee camps further up the road toward the Pakistani border.

When the Taliban captured Jalalabad without a shot being fired, in 1996, the security situation both in and around the city improved. Jalalabad and the surrounding area are predominately Pushtun so there was less anti-Taliban resentment and tension here than in Kabul or Herat. While local people were happy with the security brought by the Taliban, many resented being ruled by Kandaharis. This resentment grew when the Taliban forced numerous locals to fight against their will. Hazrat Ali, a powerful Peshai warlord based in Laghman with military ties to the United Front, resisted the Taliban and eventually threw them out of

Jalalabad in wake of US bombing in late 2001.

Following the fall of the Taliban, the region became increasingly unstable. Hajji Qadir, the governor of Nangarhar during the mujahed years, was reinstalled in the position by a locally convened shura. Ongoing US military campaigns in 2002, displaced up to 200,000 Afghan who found temporary refuge in Nangarhar and Laghman. Robbery and murder increased. In April 2002 an assassination attempt was made on Defence Minister Fahim, visiting Jalalabad to drum up support for the Loya Jirga. And following Hajji Qadir's untimely murder three months later, a power struggle emerged between Hazrat Ali, Jalalabad's pro-Jamiat Corps Commander, and the new Pushtun governor appointed by Karzai Qadir's brother, Hajji Din Mohammed. During 2003, Hazrat Ali maintained effective control over Jalalabad and the eastern provinces; but the region's majority Pushtuns appeared discontent with his rule (SEE KEY PLAYERS). By early 2005, Din Mohammed appeared to have the upper hand.

Security, however, remains precarious. In May, 2013, insurgents attacked the ICRC delegation office in the city, killing one security guard.

Getting There

By Air

Jalalabad airport is situated four kilometres east of town. It operates both in a civilian and military capacity, primarily for US forces based next door in Forward Operating Base Genty. Jalalabad serves as a launching pad for Predator drones against suspected insurgent activists inside the tribal zones of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The airport is used by UN flights from Kabul, but no regular commercial links. You can fly here with ICRC or PACTEC/Air Serv International (SEE TRAVEL BY AIR). There are plans to build a new airport. In June, 2010, a suicide bomb exploded outside enabling insurgent militants to attack the base.

Overland

Jalalabad is the first major town over the border from Pakistan. Jalalabad's thriving economy also makes it Pakistan's biggest trading partner in Afghanistan. As such, it is an important logistical staging post for truck shipments coming from Peshawar.

Jalalabad Airport control tower

Lorries take a day to reach Jalalabad, when not held up by customs or various kinds of chicanery. On occasion, Pakistan has blocked NATO shipments through the Khyber Pass in retaliation to US drone attacks on Pakistani soil. The Taliban, too, have repeatedly attack NATO convoys, supply depots in Peshawar and along the road. The Peshawar to Jalalabad highway is open again to NATO convoys, but the US has been shifting its reliance from the Khyber Pass and the Jalalabad highway to the northern routes via Hairaton and Termez.

By car, the drive from Peshawar to the border is about one and a half hours, and the same again on to Jalalabad. The road through the Khyber Pass is now fully asphalted road. Since 2010, the Pakistanis have prohibited western expats from travelling by road into Afghanistan primarily for security reasons. Afghans and Pakistanis, of course, can travel overland. Remember that the border at Torkham is shut between 1200-1300 hrs and Pakistani time is ahead of Afghan time (half an hour in winter, one and a half hours in summer) so make sure you arrive at the border in good time to cross into Pakistan. The Pakistanis close their side at 1700 hrs. A tribal areas permit (obtained from the Khyber Political Agent's office in Peshawar) is needed if you are driving from Peshawar to Jalalabad, but it is not required for the return trip to Peshawar.

From the west, Jalalabad is about three to four hours' ride by automobile (longer in winter) from Kabul (153 kilometres),

through the spectacular Tangi Gharu gorge. This road, once dangerously potholed, was graded in 2002 with major repairs begun in late 2003. By late 2004 and early 2005, however, the road seemed worse than ever. (SEE TRAVEL OVERLAND). Since then, it has been fully asphalted but parts are already deteriorating. Also check with the UN on the latest security situation for Jalalabad as well as travel to Asadabad/Chagaserai and other areas. While security remains a constant threat because of insurgent or bandit attack, your main problem is road safety. Either from rockfall or poor driving. The Kabul to Jalalabad Highway is reputed to be the most dangerous road in Afghanistan.

Orientation & getting around

Jalalabad is laid out on a grid plan, with the Kabul River and the Hindu Kush to the north, the Spinghar (Safed Koh) mountains to the south, and the main Kabul-Torkham road which runs east-west. Three-wheeled rickshaws and taxis are available. The UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS) produces street maps of Jalalabad showing the locations of most agencies and key offices.

The road to Jalalabad

Agencies

In February 2003, ACBAR listed the presence of more than 35 international NGOS, 62 national NGOS and eight UN agencies based in Jalalabad. Two years later, aid agencies and donors, including the European Union and USAID, claimed to have set up a number of rural-oriented projects in the city but the impact in the countryside remained questionable.

By 2013, however, the region had witnessed considerable change, the bulk of which was brought about by entrepreneurial Afghans themselves. Vibrant trade with Pakistan over the past few years, but also narcotics income, has helped establish numerous new businesses ranging from accountancy schools to body-building gyms. More hectares of land also have been brought under irrigation underlining the region's strong agricultural potential. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports the public hospital, which is the main health facility for eastern Afghanistan. For more information on UN activities visit the UNAMA office in Arzaq Road, two blocks west of the Spinghar Hotel.

Nuristan Land of Light

By Jonathan Walter

Nuristan is a remote and in parts, still heavily forested mountainous area – -despite relentless deforestation since the 1980s -- of the Hindu Kush northeast of Jalalabad. Its people are famous for their spirit of independence. Alexander the Great and his men donned ivy-wreaths in the mountains there, drank the local homebrew and "lost their wits in true Bacchic frenzy."

Tamerlane had a tougher time and had to be lowered down a cliff face in a basket, although history does not relate whether this was due to the moonshine or poor map-reading. Throughout the centuries the Nuristanis resisted all conquest and conversion. They became known as Kafirs, or Infidels, because they worshipped numerous nature and ancestor spirits. They left the bodies of their dead exposed to the elements for a year in wooden coffins, and then placed over the graves carved wooden effigies which the deceased spirits were believed to inhabit. A number of large carved wooden figures depicting fertility goddesses and ancestors were kept in the Kabul Museum. It was not until 1896 that Amir Abdur Rahman succeeded in subduing the Kafirs and converting them by the sword to Islam; from then on he renamed their land Nuristan, "Land of Light." Among the first pre-Soviet, anti-communist revolts occurred in Nuristan in 1978 resulting in severe bombing of the region's main town, Kamdesh.

Jalalabad A-Z

Accommodation and Food

UN guesthouses are only available for UN and World Bank staff. Otherwise, the **Afghan Hotel and Restaurant i**s a friendly guesthouse, situated opposite the TV Centre in the middle of town. Rooms are small and hot, but the food is good and they have satellite TV. Another is the **Taj Mahal Guesthouse** on the edge of the city. It offers free internet, a bar and – in the summer – a swimming pool. Otherwise the government-owned **Spinghar Hotel** (TEL: 2367) is a plusher alternative with far better management than during the first two or three years after the fall of the Taliban . Located opposite the WFP office, its luxuriant gardens are a relief from the dusty road. The restaurant serves adequate Afghan food for both residents and non-residents. There are also several recently established guest houses, so check with local aid agencies.

Embassies & Visas

By mid-2003, India, Iran and Pakistan all had diplomatic missions present in Jalalabad – and all believed to be active intelligence outposts. The Pakistan Consulate issues transit, single, double and multiple entry visas; it is situated in Zone 3 in the west of the city. For information. Call in at the local UN office. For internet updates, check out: http://www.aims.org.af (website for the UN's Management Service/AIMS) http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com (online chat room see Asia/Central Asia section)

Medical

The ICRC surgical unit at the Jalalabad Public Hospital will treat any emergency surgical cases. The city is full of malaria-bearing mosquitoes so make sure you cover up at dawn and dusk, and sleep either under a treated bednet or with the windows shut (SEE PERSONAL HEALTH).

Security

In December 2002, a curfew from 10pm-4am was re-imposed on Jalalabad after what the police chief called a 'dramatic increase'

The Masjid Jaama in Herat, Afghanistan's third largest city

The West

Historically, western Afghanistan has looked towards Persia more often than the Indian subcontinent for inspiration. Lying at the eastern fringe of the great Iranian plateau, its parched earth is baked for months on end by fifty degrees of sun and the earth is blasted by a wind which blows nonstop for one hundred and twenty days. This land is a world away from the glacial mountains of the Hindu Kush, whose remnants barely penetrate the west of the country, trailing away into low, craggy ridgelines like the tip of a crocodile's tail. The wide plains, which characterize this region, make it difficult to defend, and for much of its history Herat and western Afghanistan have been invaded and liberated by competing Russian, Persian, British and Afghan forces keen to maintain a buffer between their spheres of influence and hostile neighbours.

Herat

"Here at last is Asia without an inferiority complex."
The British travel writer, Robert Byron, wrote on his arrival in Herat in 1933

Of all the cities of Central Asia, Herat ranks as one of the richest, not only in terms of history and strategic importance, but in the overall cultural spectrums of architecture, painting, poetry and music. Capital of the province of Herat, and the largest city in western Afghanistan, Herat borders both Iran and Turkmenistan, and the city's prominent merchants make the most of border trade and smuggling opportunities. Situated at an altitude of 950 metres, Herat used to be famous for grapes, fruit and cotton crops grown with the aid of extensive irrigation. Before the Soviet war its population was around 160,000, comprising mainly Persian-speaking, non-Pushtun, Sunni Muslims, with a large minority of Shi'as. With Kabul over a thousand kilometres away by road, Herat established a reputation for both strategic and cultural independence.

Cultural Herat reached its height in the Timurid Renaissance of the 15th Century, under the rule of a dynasty of Uzbek princes who have been described as the Oriental Medici. While the

Timurid Empire reached an artistic peak in the delicate tile-mosaics and painted miniatures for which Herat is justly famous, the Empire was conceived in more violent circumstances.

In the 13th Century Herat was governed by a local Persian dynasty known as the Karts. The bronze cauldron in the Friday Mosque is all that remains of that period. However an Uzbek adventurer by the name of Timur rallied the northern tribes to his cause, took control of Balkh and then destroyed Herat in 1381. An old war wound in his right leg caused him to limp and gave rise to his nickname Timur-e-Lang, otherwise known to Western historians as "Timur the Lame" or Tamerlane. Timur's death in 1405 precipitated a series of bloody intrigues out of which his youngest son Shah Rukh emerged victorious to rule an empire stretching from Mesopotamia to the borders of China. His generous patronage of the arts, along with the patronage of his remarkable Queen, Gawhar Shad, led to a cultural renaissance which saw the flourishing of Bihzad, the miniaturist, and Jami, the poet, not to mention countless other court artists, architects and philosophers. From the portraits of these Timurid princes of pleasure we can, in Byron's words, detect: "a personal idiosyncrasy about them which tells of that rare phenomenon in Mohammedan history, an age of humanism." Judged by European standards, Byron noted that it was also a "humanism within limits. The Timurid Renaissance, like ours, took place in the fifteenth century, owed its course to the patronage of princes, and preceded the emergence of nationalist states. But in one respect, the two movements differed. While the European Renaissance was largely a reaction against faith in favour of reason, the Timurid coincided with a new consolidation of the power of faith. The Turks of Central Asia had already lost contact with Chinese materialism; and it was Timur who led them to the acceptance of Islam, not merely as a religion, for that had already been accomplished, but as a basis of social institutions."

Despite Shah Rukh's death in 1447 and the murder of his Queen a decade later, Herat continued to blossom in a golden age under the rule of their successor Sultan Husain Baiqara (1468-1506). However, decadence and personal ambition conspired to bring about the end of the Timurid Renaissance. In 1507 Herat fell to another Uzbek invader, Babur, who went on to found the Moghul Empire in India. But Herat must have made an impact on him for he did not destroy the city. Quite the opposite in fact.

The towering iwan portals of the Friday Mosque and the Shrine of Ansari near Herat surmounted by arcaded galleries and twin lantern-turrets are architectural motifs, which reappear again and again in the now world-famous mosques and mausolea which Babur and his successors created in Delhi and Agra.

Babur died in 1530. Herat soon fell under the sway of the Persian Safavid empire, which exerted control over the region for two centuries. During most of the 18th and 19th Centuries Herat was a semi-autonomous state occupied by a succession of Pushtun princes who alternately fought off Persian advances and attempted to extend their control to Kabul. In 1828 the Russians defeated Persia and began to make advances towards India. Their support for the Persian siege on Herat from November 1837 to September 1838, along with Amir Dost Mohammed's Russophile leanings, provoked the ill-fated British invasion of Afghanistan in 1839. Herat survived the siege, and was spared occupation by either the Russians or the British. It remained independent until Amir Dost Mohammed completed his unification of Afghanistan by seizing the city in 1863. He died a month after taking Herat and lies buried at Gazargah, five kilometres to the east of the city. Turbulent years of succession followed. Amir Abdur Rahman struggled to wrest Herat from a rebellious cousin in 1881, and made himself unpopular by resettling Pushtun southerners up in Badghis.

A joint Russian-British Boundary Commission formally established, the northern and western borders of Afghanistan in 1886-87, but Britain remained exceptionally sensitive to events in western Afghanistan, and especially Herat, because of the region's strategic importance as a buffer. The British were particularly concerned about Persian and Russian efforts to expand their influence into British India. During the "Panjdeh Incident" in 1885, Russian troops seized the Afghan fort of Panjdeh north of Heart. British officers stepped in to advise Afghans on the defence of Heart. One result was the destruction of the fabulous Timurid musalla complex in order to deny an army advancing on the citadel cover from fire.

Herat maintained its reputation for independence throughout much of the 20th Century. In the 1960s the city was a stronghold for the new Islamist movement. The communist reforms of 1978-1979 sparked off widespread rebellion across the country, and the first truly organized revolt against the People's Democratic

Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) began in Herat in March 1979. This followed a spontaneous uprising in Nuristan in the summer of 1978. The Herat revolt was unique in being a carefully planned, and in succeeding in gaining the cooperation of militant Islamists from the Jamiat party, local mawlawi clergy and a mutinous army garrison led by Captain Ismail Khan. Hundreds of communist officers, teachers, Russian advisors and their families were killed in Herat and the surrounding villages. A week later government troops with air support from the USSR retook the town and killed between 5,000 and 25,000 of Herat's population in the process. This was the first instance of direct Soviet military intervention prior to the invasion of December 1979. An AFP dispatch, reported much of the city destroyed by Soviet air power, but in fact, although many people were killed, the physical devastation was not as great as originally reported.

For most of the 1980s Ismail Khan extended his influence over Herat and northwest Afghanistan as far as Maimana. The region became a major supporter of Rabbani's Sunni party Jamiat-e-Islami. Along the border between Afghanistan and Iran pockets of Shi'a resistance fighters surfaced from time to time, but they had relatively little military effect. The Soviets stationed a large number of troops at Shindand, 150 kilometres south of Heart, where a major airbase could directly threaten the Persian Gulf. Throughout the early 1980s three Russian divisions, including airborne troops, were based between Herat and Kandahar, but their role was as much to contain Iranian territorial ambitions as to dislodge the Afghan resistance. Thus western Afghanistan once again became a strategic buffer zone.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, Ismail Khan (SEE KEY PLAYERS) established himself as the de facto 'Amir of Herat', ruling over a semi-autonomous region. He captured tanks, fighter aircraft, helicopters and transport planes from the retreating Soviets, and he played host to delegations from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, both of whom were afraid that weakness in Kabul might tempt Iran to try to take Herat. The Pakistanis and the Saudis considered the Iranian Shi'a Muslims to be heretics, but even more than that they were keenly interested in the potential for oil and gas exploration in northern Afghanistan, and the equally attractive option of laying a pipeline from Turkmenistan via Herat to Pakistan and the Arabian Sea. Iran stepped up the pressure by imposing a trade blockade, forcing supplies to come through Turkmenistan. Over a

million Afghan refugees had fled into Iran during the Soviet war. From 1993-94 Iran tried to destabilize Herat by forcing as many as 1,500 of these refugees a day back into western Afghanistan. However, by 1995 the flow of returnees had reduced to a trickle as the Taliban movement flexed its muscles in the region.

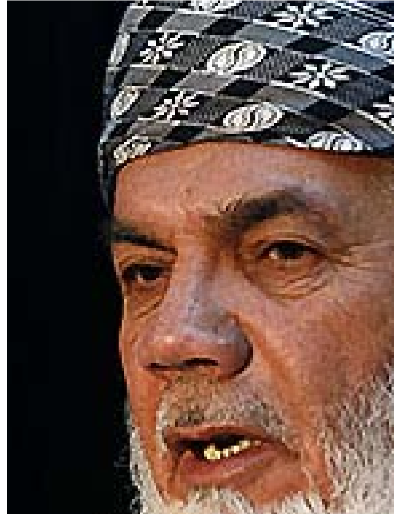
The Taliban made several attempts to take Herat in 1995, but were beaten back by forces loyal to Ismail Khan and Ahmed Shah Massoud in two battles at Girishk and Shindand. Massoud had volunteered troops from the Panjshir to reinforce his Jamiat ally. Despite Massoud's support, Ismail Khan's forces collapsed in September 1995, and the Taliban finally managed to capture the city.

During the Taliban era, the Herat's inhabitants, who had grown used to an independent and relatively liberal lifestyle, periodically rebelled. In January 1997, several hundred women clad in burqas marched through the city to protest the closure of the hamams (public baths). They were hosed down and beaten by Taliban troops. (The Hamam is particularly important to women, since it is one of the few places where women can talk – and scheme - without male interference). An effigy of Mullah Omar, the Taliban supreme leader, appeared with a hand-grenade dangling round his neck. A cassette-player attached to a bicycle parked in the middle of Herat blared out anti-Taliban propaganda until the tape ran out no-one dared stop it for fear that it might be booby-trapped. Men were rounded up and locked in cells until their beards grew to the required length; women were prevented from working for international agencies except in the health sector. Girls were officially barred from going to school, but "home-schooling" was often arranged for their daughters in secret locations. (SEE Christina Lamb's 2004 book: The Sewing Circles of Herat).

Ismail Khan regained control of Herat in late 2001, as part of the US-led campaign to oust the Taliban from power. Since then, schools have re-opened as part of UNICEF's 'Back to School' initiative (some classes were even re-established by enthusiastic parents and teachers prior to the official school year). Many women are back in the workplace. However, some local and international human rights activists consider Khan to be even more repressive than the Taliban. Styling himself once more as the Amir of Herat, Khan has established a firm regime of Jihadists (former mujahideen from the Soviet period) and has crushed political dissent through threats, beatings and, it is alleged, even killings.

Local journalists have to tread carefully. In one widely-publicized report by the US-based NGO, Human Rights Watch, in October 2002, a Herat resident said: “Ismail Khan and his followers, their hands are bloody. For them, killing a bird is the same as killing a man”.

Nevertheless, some international donors and aid agencies regard Ismail Khan as a benign dictator who gets things done. One aid worker called him the Mussolini of Afghanistan. Khan’s power as a warlord was diluted in 2005, when he was removed as governor of Herat and appointed Minister of Energy and Power in Kabul. Herat remains Afghanistan’s cleanest city. Parks and streets are well-maintained. Countless new trees have been planted and free telephones for calling within the city have been installed along the main avenues. The university is fast developing into one of the most innovative and open institutions for higher learning in the country, although it still lacks resources since most international aid has gone to support schools in Kabul.



Ismael Khan

Getting There

By Air

The most convenient and least exciting way into Herat is by air. The wreckage of half a dozen Soviet MiG fighters that used to decorate the ground next to the runways have now been removed and the airport has been spruced up, largely thanks to the administration of Ismail Khan. If you are travelling independently, arrange beforehand for someone to meet you at the airport. Taxis only show up when they’ve already brought passengers to catch an outgoing flight.

There are regular commercial flights to Herat from Kabul, Chagcharan and Mashad, notably Afghan Jet International, Safi Airways and Ariana. Iran Aseman flies from Mashad. The UN's Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) also flies between Kabul and Herat several times a week. Both ICRC and PACTEC/Airserv International have flights between Kabul and Herat. For more details, SEE TRAVEL BY AIR.

Overland

Overland routes provide access to Herat from the four points of the compass. From the west, there is the road from Mashad in Iran. From the north, a road reaches Herat from Mary in Turkmenistan. These routes are major arteries for legal merchandise as well as smuggled goods. They are also entry points into Afghanistan for intrepid overland travellers. Both the city and Kabul government receive millions of dollars in revenue from duties on imported goods at these border posts. You can also approach Herat from the south, via Kandahar, or from the east, via Hazarajat.

The overland route from Iran is a useful alternative in winter, when poor weather conditions often result in cancelled flights. A new railroad now connects to the Afghan border. This will eventually be extended to Herat and possibly Kabul. Tourist visas are reportedly available at the Afghan consulate in Mashad. From Mashad to the Afghan border at Islam Kala (Zero-Point) takes around four hours by taxi; followed by a further three hours to Herat. You can also find cheaper, albeit slower, transportation by bus or truck from Mashad. Traveling in the opposite direction, taxi drivers (mafia!) waiting on the Iranian side of the border are usually available to take you to Mashad for around US$ 50.

Getting to and from Herat from the north, via Ashkhabad in Turkmenistan (with direct flights to Frankfurt and the Gulf states) is another alternative although it takes longer and tends to be more expensive. If leaving Afghanistan, you will need to have ordered a taxi from Ashkhabad (expensive) to meet you on the Turkmen side of the border, as it is about five miles from the nearest town. From Ashkhabad to the Afghan border at Tourghondy takes around seven hours by car, then another three hours to Herat.

The journey to Herat from the south (Not recommended for foreigners for security reasons!) arrives from Kandahar via Shindand, and has been the preferred route for countless

conquerors throughout history, from the marching step of Alexander's army to the mechanical roar of Taliban tanks. The road threads a delicate path between the mountains of the Hindu Kush and the shifting sands of Dasht-e-Margo, the Desert of Death.

Its arrival in Herat is heralded by thirty-two thousand jack-pines planted in the 1940s on either side of the road by one of the city's more enlightened governors (although many have now been cut down). Allow 13-14 hours to drive from Kandahar to Herat in a jeep, or two days by bus. The Americans began rebuilding this road in mid-2003 as part of their international aid contribution, but progress has been hampered by security problems as well as delays in funding. Most of the road is now properly tarred but parts have deteriorated because of IEDs and lack of maintenance.

An exciting eastern approach to Herat is possible from Kabul via Bamiyan, Chakhcharan and Chisht-e-Sharif. During the Taliban period the route crossed a no-man's land between Taliban and Hazara forces. Although it was once mined, it is now open and is being slowly repaired by an Afghan NGO, which also seeks to keep it open during the winter months. According to lorry drivers in Bamiyan, vehicles regularly use this route, although it risks being closed by snow during the winter (November-March) and occasional landslides during the summer. One intrepid Scottish traveller, Rory Stewart, walked much of the way from Herat to Kabul through Hazarajat in winter (February 2002). Stewart, who was accompanied by his dog, encountered few problems along the way. The main reason for driving this central route, if you have a few days to spare, is that it passes through magnificent mountain scenery that also includes the Minaret of Jam (now a World Heritage Site) and the turquoise lakes of Band-e-Amir. Nancy Dupree's guide to Afghanistan describes this central route in some detail. The journey takes up to five days to complete by jeep.

Orientation & Getting Around

Herat lies in a long, fertile plain, which spreads east and west between the Paropamisus mountains, five kilometres to the north, and the Hari river (Harirud) an equal distance to the south. The Harirud, which rises in the highlands of Bamiyan and flows west into Iran, is Herat's lifeline; you cross it while driving into the city from the airport. The Old City is divided into four

quarters containing the Citadel, Friday Mosque (Masjid-e-Jami) and covered bazaar. To the north and east of the Citadel lies the New Town (Shahr-e-Naw) where most of the UN and NGO offices are located. To the northwest lies the musalla complex.

Street maps of Herat, showing locations of government offices and aid agencies, are available from the UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS) in Kabul (see above). For the latest online copy, go to www. aims.org.af. Call in at the regional offices of UNAMA (the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan) and UNMACA (the UN's mine clearance agency) to the north-west of the Governor's Office for briefings on the latest security and landmine situation. There may be a chance of hitching a lift around town in a UN or aid agency vehicle. Otherwise, the best way to get around is by taxi (US$ 10-20 for a morning's work).

Agencies

In mid-2003, around 35 UN agencies and NGOs had offices based in Herat. Being a relatively safe city in 2013, despite recent incidents involving insurgent penetrations, foreign aid workers can operate easily. For an overview of agency activities in the region and the latest humanitarian situation it is best to visit UNAMA, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) or AREU.

Agriculture is crucial for Herat's economy, and the construction of irrigation canals, seed multiplication, soil conservation and animal husbandry are all supported by DACAAR which has been in the area since 1993. (SEE AGRICULTURE) Water shortages throughout much of the year are aggravated by flash floods in February and March, which destroy irrigation channels and take away topsoil. Wheat and rice have replaced cotton and fruit as the main crops, although some opium poppy has appeared in Farah province.

ICRC supports the Herat military hospital in addition to provincial hospitals in Badghis and Ghor, along with a 40-bed orthopaedic centre for Afghans disabled by disease or war. UNICEF and partner NGOs organise immunization campaigns for preventable diseases. Key health problems in western Afghanistan are diarrhoea during summer months, cholera from June to September, and acute respiratory infections during winter. In a region as dry as this, finding safe drinking water

and maintaining proper sanitation are major problems. In terms of mine clearance, Herat city is largely free, but parts of the countryside are still heavily mined.

Herat has seen the ebb and flow of thousands of refugees and displaced Afghans in recent years. In 1993 the number of Afghan refugees returning from Iran peaked at over 600,000 persons. Many settled in Herat province. But by 1997 the refugee population had dropped to a mere 834, largely because of the Taliban presence in western Afghanistan. Many would-be returnees were put off by reports of 'ethnic-cleansing' on the border, where Taliban troops seized Tajik, Hazara and Shi'a men they suspected of being hostile and locked them up. One former UNHCR commented in 2013 that photographs from Herat taken as a student during the 1960s show a remarkable mix of ethnicity among shopkeepers and other city folk. The city is no longer a bustling melting pot to that extent. Following the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Iran, increasingly eager to repatriate its refugee caseload, began sending refugees back over the Afghan border. (SEE REFUGEES)

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Afghans in the region were 'internally displaced', first by the fighting in Badghis, Faryab and Jowzjan provinces between the Taliban and Dostum's Jumbesh forces and more recently by four years of catastrophic drought from 1998/99-2003. During 2003, the UN (especially WFP) began to pressure the estimated 60,000 IDPs who remained in camps around Herat to return home by reducing food rations despite security concerns voiced by MSF and other NGOs at the time. Many were afraid to return because of clashes between Generals Dostum and Atta to the north-east that continued throughout 2002-03.

By 2013, there were still tens of thousands of displaced persons, including recent returning refugees and migrant workers from Iran. Another reason for the current reluctance to return is the lack of jobs and the means to survive in their villages. Many no longer have livestock because of repeated droughts over the past decade and a half. Lastly, given the high proportion of Pushtuns among these IDPs, there is a well-founded fear of persecution at the hands ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north.

Herat A-Z
Accommodation and Food

Please help us keep this section up-to-date with your recommendations for places to stay and eat.
(See www.efgafghan.com)

Visitors searching for accommodations in Herat today will find that they do not have many options to agonize over. The ideal choice used to be the UNICA Guesthouse, located in a walled compound just to the northeast of the Old Town, but places are now exclusively reserved for UN or World Bank staff. The guest house was attacked by Taliban in 2010, and the UN office was assaulted by suicide bombers in March, 2013. At this time of writing, it is not known what the status, or future, of the UN compound is.

Alternatively, many NGO workers and travellers find sleeping space in the guesthouses of aid agencies based in Herat, but this is very much on an ad hoc basis. Most agencies have rooms for travellers, often for free if you're friends, or otherwise for a fee (around US$ 20 per night). Much depends on your job description. Ask for information about availability in Kabul before arriving.

Several hotels now operate in Herat. The **Moafaq Hotel** (Chowk-e Gulha, City Centre, Heart. Tel. 93 40 223503), overlooking the main roundabout downtown, offers clean rooms at moderate prices. The pool, which used to be packed with young men and boys, now apparently has no water. There is a restaurant on the first floor offering excellent chicken dishes. **The Park Hotel** (Park-e-Girdha, Herat Tel. 93-40-223010) is the city's oldest hotel dating back to the 1930s. For nostalgia buffs, this is where the British writer Robert Byron (The Road to Oxania) stayed. Very colonial and rickety but nicely situated with the famous Herati pines on all sides. **The Marco Polo Hotel** Jad-e-Badmurghan, south of the city centre. Tel. 93-40-221944) is another respectable place to stay. Simple rooms, but hot water and free internet. The staff also tries hard and they seem to be constantly making improvements. The **Green Place Guest House** (Jad-e-Mahbas, Lane 2, Herat. Tel. 93-70-405905) is a small family-run hotel. Nice garden and very clean rooms. A pleasant place to work and get away from it all. **The Jam Hotel** (Darb Khosh, Old Town, Herat. Tel. 93-40-223477). You get what you pay for; simple plus

The turquoise waters of Band-e-Amir

an Afghan restaurant with pulao, chicken and kebabs. Located near the Friday Mosque and a great location.

As for dining out, most expatriates tend to eat in their own houses or at the **UN Club**. Some occasionally go down to the bazaar in the Old Town for kebabs. Chaikhanas are plentiful. There is good food at the **Bahar Restaurant** situated one block east of the Moafaq Hotel on the road heading south to the Friday Mosque. Its menu comes in English, and their mantu and ashak specialities are worth trying. Another is the Yas Restaurant with a decent range of traditional Afghan food, including kebabs, mantu (ravioli), yoghurt and rice, with some wanna-be western dishes. **The Arghawan Restaurant** has good Afghan food and you can eat outside. Popular with the internationals and the middle class. **The Shahiste Restaurant** in Jad-e-Badmurghan is located in the Marco Polo Hotel and ranks as one of the best. **The Thousand and One Nights Restaurant** near the new US consulate on the hill overlooking the university with Afghan food and the waiters are dwarfs. **The Mohabbat Gaznavi Restaurant** offers mainly kebabs with family dining upstairs. **The Fardeen Supermarket** near Jad-e-Ghormandani is well-stocked with western and Iranian goods, such as peanut butter,

cornflakes and marmite.

Books

Good bookshops with foreign reading are nearly nonexistent in Heart, so bring your reading material with you. British-Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid was delighted to learn that his book, The Taliban, had been translated into Persian (pirated, of course) and was widely available in the bazaars. There used to be a small library at the UNICA Guesthouse (See above). For more local information check out the following:

The Sewing Circles of Herat. By Christina Lamb, Harper Collins (London, 2004)
All Our Hopes Are Crushed: Violence and Repression in Western Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch (Washington DC, November 2002)
Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan (No. 41-42, Mars 1989) contains numerous articles on Herat plus a bibliography of books, newspaper articles and video films.
Three Women of Herat, Veronica Doubleday, Jonathan Cape (London, 1988)
Music of Afghanistan: Professional musicians in the city of Herat, John Baily, Cambridge University Press (1988 incls. Audio-cassette)
A Catalogue of the Toponyms and Monuments of Timurid Herat, Terry Allen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1981)
The Road to Oxiana, Robert Byron, Macmillan (London, 1937; reprinted by Picador, 1981)
An Historical Guide to Afghanistan, Nancy Hatch Dupree, (2nd Edition, Kabul, 1977).

Embassies & Visas

Iranian and Turkmen visas, as well as extensions for your Afghan visa, can be obtained in Herat. The Iranian and Turkmenistan consulates face each other across the road a hundred meters east of the ICRC orthopedic hospital. Visas require authorization from Tehran and Ashkhabad respectively, so apply at least two weeks before your departure. As of December 2002, transit visas have been easily available (around US$ 50) for travel through Iran to Mashad and onwards to the Gulf states and Europe, even for nationals of "less desired" countries such as the US, UK and

Australia.

The Pakistani Consulate General is a relatively new arrival in the city. (House N. 2-150, Street khayabane-Wallayat – opposite the General Hospital. Tel. 93-40-231-291) Never far behind the Pakistanis, but also an indication of the growing involvement of Delhi in Afghanistan, India has also established a consulate in Herat. (Consulate of India, Herat, Tel. 93-40-221-145)

The US inaugurated a new consulate in March, 2013, which is located above the university. During its construction, the site was attacked by the Taliban in January, 2013. In addition to the consulate, the US has had diplomatic, aid and other forms of representation in Herat since 2002. US Special Forces are located near Ismail Khan's palace overlooking town, and in February 2005 Italian ISAF were deployed to oversee the construction of a new base for NATO troops.

Emergencies

In a medical emergency, seek immediate evacuation to Pakistan. There are very few expatriate doctors in Herat. An alternative is to contact the ICRC. The advantage of being evacuated by the Red Cross is that they may provide medical staff to accompany you in the air. The International Medical Corps (IMC) is also present in Herat and will attend to medical emergencies. Travelling to Mashad is likely to entail a lengthy wait for a visa, which makes it less advisable if immediate help is needed. For more details SEE SECURITY TIPS.

Information

For more information about UN activities, contact their regional representative at the UNAMA office for a briefing on the latest security situation. Make sure you receive a briefing on landmines and their likely locations, preferably from UNMACA in Kabul before you go, or from Handicap International in Herat. The UNAMA office in Herat should be able to find you an interpreter. As aid funds dry up, there is a greater supply of Afghans who are capable of translating and who are looking for work. For more details on NGO activities in Herat contact ACBAR. The best way to meet aid agency workers and resident journalists is to turn up for a drink at the UNICA Guesthouse on a Thursday or Friday night between six and eight-thirty in the evening.

Medical

Apart from the odd cholera epidemic, Herat is reasonably safe from nasty diseases; although preventive measures for malaria and hepatitis are recommended. Well-water is safe to drink, but boil and/or treat anything coming out of a tap (SEE PERSONAL HEALTH).

WARNING!
THERE ARE STILL MINEFIELDS IN
THE VICINITY OF HERAT —
DO NOT GO ANYWHERE WITHOUT A GUIDE !

Money

As with Kabul, banks have also emerged in Herat, but much of money-changing is done on the open market near Chowk Gulha and along Bagh-eAzadi, north of the Old Town. There is a Western Union near the Da Afghanistan Bank at Bagh-e-Azadi. The Afghanistan International Bank has a branch with an ATM in Bagh-e-Azadi. The Kabul Bank has a branch plus Western Union facilities. Finally, the Bank Alfaleh has a branch on the ground floor of the Chamber of Commerce in Herat Blood Bank Street. Bring US dollars, Pakistani rupees or Iranian rials (SEE MONEY & BARGAINING).

Post & Telecommunications

Many NGOs send their post with the UNHAS or ICRC flights to Kabul and Peshawar, but the postal services are also working, sort of. DHL, TNT and Fedex have courier facilities. Mobile phones are operational throughout Herat with Sim and top-up cards are available through select local shops and street vendors.

Recreation

The UNICA Guesthouse has a volleyball pitch, a hard tennis court and a swimming pool. There is an "international night" with liquid refreshment open to non-residents on Thursday evenings. ICRC opens their bar on Friday nights supplies permitting. There is a swimming pool in the ICRC compound, as well as a public pool right next to the Moafaq Hotel.

Shopping

Herat is most famous for its blue glass which is still made locally. It comes in three colours green, turquoise and royal blue and any number of shapes, from wine goblets and decanters to candlesticks and tumblers. The Aga Khan Foundation has been helping to develop this. During the Taliban years, one local entrepreneur called "Hajii Dollar" developed a line in blue glass champagne flutes, which seemed a little ambitious under the circumstances. The quality is rather poor, although the odd pieces of straw or dung which find their way into the glass lend it a certain rustic authenticity.

There is a line of shops opposite the north-eastern corner of the Friday Mosque crammed full of blue glass and numerous other objets d'art of dubious provenance. The going rate for a glass goblet is a dollar and something. Lapis jewellery, Greek coins and Buddhist earthenware will all be proffered in your direction as well but look out for fakes. There is an increasingly good selection of Baluch rugs and Turcoman carpets in the rug bazaar located at the south-western corner of the Charsuq in the Old Town. One local workshop, supported by CHA, trains local people in vocational skills they will sell you hand-knotted carpets which have been made to old Turcoman patterns and coloured with natural dyes. There are many Iranian and, to a lesser extent, Pakistani goods and products throughout the bazaars of Herat. Much of the outside produce, including vehicles, is brought up from Dubai via Iran.

Sights in Herat

Herat is one of the most rewarding cities in Afghanistan for sightseeing. Despite the ravages of modern explosives, a great deal remains which is worth seeing. Some sights, like the Friday Mosque, are actually more spectacular following restoration than they were a century ago. The Aga Khan Foundation has been seeking to renovate and protect many of the exceptional architectural gems that have remained standing. Sadly though, many beautiful structures with hand-carved latticework and stunning traditional courtyards have been destroyed, literally overnight, by ruthless developers, including corrupt city officials, with a blind eye turned by the equally corrupt local police. In their place, they have erected ugly, Dubai-style glass edifices. It is often

a losing battle, but an increasing number of Heratis who realise that this is the last of their rich cultural heritage are now trying to halt the rot. (SEE CULTRE and URBAN DEVELOPMENT)

Citadel (Qala-e-Ikhtiyaruddin) The Citadel perches atop a rocky bluff at the northern end of the Old Town and dominates the bazaar and the low plain to the north. Built in 1305 by a Kart governor, it was attacked by both Genghis Khan and Timur before becoming the centre of the Timurid Empire for the whole of the 15th Century. Timur's son Shah Rukh repaired the fortress and decorated some of its towers with blue tiles, but once the sun had set on the Timurid Renaissance in 1507 Herat and its citadel were subjected to waves of Persian and Uzbek attacks. In 1838 a British Army officer, Lieutenant Eldred Pottinger, occupied the citadel and organized its defences against the siege of a Russian-backed Persian army. In the 1980s UNESCO restored some of the citadel's walls and Timurid decoration. Today, the citadel is occupied by the military, although permission to visit may be obtained from the Department of Culture. Unfortunately no photographing of the fantastic view from the top is allowed.

Friday Mosque (Masjid-e-Jami) The Friday Mosque in Herat is undoubtedly one of the finest examples of Islamic art and architecture to be found anywhere in Afghanistan, even in all Central Asia. Yet as recently as the 1930s it was described as having "no colour; only whitewash, bad brick, and broken bits of mosaic" (Byron). Almost all of the magnificent tilework which can still be seen today was recreated according to original Timurid designs under a remarkable restoration programme which started in 1943.This work has continued, despite the conflict across the country in recent years. WFP provides boys with food in return for learning how to make the tiles and working to complete the restoration.

The mosque was laid out in 1200 by the Ghorid Sultan Ghiyas-ud-Din who established his capital at Herat after the collapse of the Ghaznavid Empire. All that remains of the Ghorid decoration is one portal to the south of the main entrance carved with floral motifs, geometric patterns and bright turquoise-blue Kufic script in high relief. Entrance to the mosque is permitted for men only, through a passageway in the eastern portal. Inside is a splendidly shining marble courtyard nearly 100 metres long, surrounded

on four sides by arcaded walls in the centres of which are four iwans, or vaulted open-fronted halls, all covered with exuberant Timurid-style tilework. A large bronze cauldron dating from the 14th Century sits in the courtyard; once it contained sherbat, a sweet drink supplied to the faithful on feast-days, but now it acts as a large donation box. The best time to visit the mosque is in the early morning, before crowds of curious Afghans appear and the intense sun bleaches the walls of colour. But try to avoid visiting during Friday morning prayers between 12 and two o'clock.

During the late-90s if you wanted to take photographs, you had to make sure no-one was in the picture and do it quickly before black-turbaned Taliban zealots caught you with a camera dangling round your neck. Nowadays, you can photograph freely here. The Ministry of Culture has an office inside the Friday Mosque and will provide you with a guide to show you around. You can also visit the on-site restoration workshop, where artisans hammeraway on intricate mosaics.

The Musalla Complex. If you look north from the ramparts of the Citadel of Herat at dusk you will see five strange towers rising from the gloom like the chimneys of a brick factory. These minarets and a badly damaged mausoleum are all that remain of Queen Gawhar Shad's musalla (place of worship), which once comprised "the most glorious productions of Mohammedan architecture in the fifteenth century" (Byron). The complex survived the collapse of the Timurid Empire and successive assaults by Uzbeks and Persians, but was largely destroyed in 1885 on the advice of British Army officers who were keen to help Amir Abdur Rahman defend the westernmost outpost of Afghanistan against Russian advances from the north. Two earthquakes and the Soviet War inflicted more damage and today only five of the original thirty minarets survive, lurching at dangerous angles and pockmarked with rocket and small-arms fire. The musalla represented the climax of Timurid decorative art tile-mosaics of ever more intense colour and intricate design which had developed from the coloured brick patterns of the 12th Century Seljuks and the geometric terracotta mouldings of the Ghorids. Today only tantalizing traces remain.

The complex originally comprised of a mosque to the north and a madrassa or theological college to the south. Queen Gawhar Shad, wife of Shah Rukh and daughter-in-law

of Timur, commissioned the madrassa in 1417 and, after being murdered 40 years later, she was buried in a mausoleum within its walls. She was a remarkable woman, not only on account of her inspired artistic taste and patronage, but also because of her religious tolerance: as a Sunni queen she was responsible for the construction of the Shi'a Imam Reza mosque of Mashad in modern-day Iran, then under her sway. The Queen's mausoleum still stands today. Look for the caretaker who will open it up, show you around inside and ask you to sign the guestbook.

By climbing up to the base of its Persian-blue ribbed dome you can look out over the whole of Herat from the Citadel in the south towards Gazargah in the east, and from the Paropamisus mountains in the north towards the setting sun. The lone leaning minaret to the east of the mausoleum was one of a pair marking the entrance to the madrassa, and by all accounts its decoration was plainer than that of the college itself. The surface of the shaft is adorned with robust diamonds of royal blue tile-mosaic filled with flowers. Within the tower local boys dare each other to scramble up the spiral staircase and wave from the top balcony where the muezzin used to cry the call to prayer for the faithful 120 feet below.

To the north of the mausoleum stand four minarets dating from the reign of Sultan Husain Baiqara (1468-1506), last of Herat's Timurid rulers. Originally marking the four corners of another madrassa, their delicate lacy decoration speaks eloquently of the decadence of empire. In 1507 Herat fell to the Uzbek adventurer Babur, the founder of the Moghul Empire. Of Baiqara's reign he writes: "what happened with his sons, the soldiers and the town was that everyone pursued vice and pleasure to excess."

Sights outside Herat

Gazargah "Everyone goes to Gazar Gah," wrote Byron in the 1930s, "Babur went. Humayun went." Today it is hardly crowded with tourists, but it is still a popular retreat for Heratis on holiday. Situated under a stand of umbrella-pines on a low hill five kilometres east of Herat, Gazargah is the Shrine of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, a famous Sufi poet and mystic philosopher who lived in Herat during the 11th Century. His shrine was rebuilt by Shah Rukh in 1428 and consists of a large rectangular walled courtyard filled with graves, a sacred well and a royal picnic

pavilion. Of Ansari himself Byron had this to say:

"Khoja Abdullah Ansari died in the year 1088 at the age of eighty-four, because some boys threw stones at him while he was at penance. One sympathises with those boys: even among saints he was a prodigious bore. He spoke in the cradle; he began to preach at fourteen; during his life he held intercourse with 1,000 sheikhs, learnt 100,000 verses by heart (some say 1,200,000) and composed as many more. He doted on cats."

Within the main courtyard is a splendid 30 metre high iwan whose Timurid decoration reveals Chinese influence, testimony perhaps to the diplomatic and cultural missions which Shah Rukh exchanged with the Chinese Emperor during the first half of the 15th Century. The tomb of the saint is enclosed in a blue cage and beside it are a superbly carved marble pillar five metres high and a holy ilex tree. Rather like Roman Catholic saints in rural Europe it seems that Ansari is believed to possess magical powers, and specifically power to cure barrenness. Women who cannot conceive choose a stone from near the saint's tomb to represent the child for which they long; they then wrap it in its cradle of linen, dangle it from a branch of the sacred ilex tree and say a prayer for their baby to Ansari.

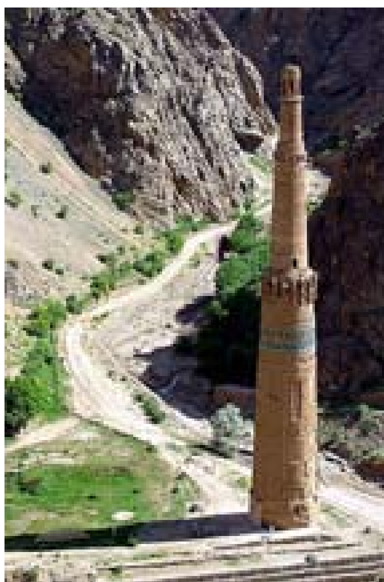
The courtyard is full of tombs. Amir Dost Mohammed, the bane of the British for much of the 19th Century, is buried here in a white marble tomb behind a balustrade. Inside a small chamber set into the north wall of the courtyard is the Haft Kalam ("seven pens"), a stunningly carved late 15th Century sarcophagus of black marble. You may need to ask the caretaker to unlock the chamber.

Khana Zarnegar Known as the "Pavilion adorned with Gold"), the site is located to the south of the main shrine. Its interior used to be painted in gold and lapis lazuli; it is currently locked. Just to the north of the shrine is the early 15th Century Hauz-e-Zamzam, a small covered reservoir whose crystal clear contents were said to have been purified by several goatskins of water from the sacred well of Zamzam in Mecca. Beneath the pine trees is the 17th Century picnic pavilion known as the Namakdan or 'Saltcellar' because of its many-sided shape. From here you can enjoy a good view of Herat, its distant minarets and the Paropamisus mountains.

Pul-e-Malan About 12 kilometres south of the city is the Pul-e-Malan ("Bridge of Riches") which was a tourist attraction 500 years ago when the Moghul Emperor Babur paid it a special visit.

Obey The road east along the Harirud valley from Herat to Obey and Chisht-e-Sharif can be a delight. Obey (107 km from Herat) used to be famous for its hot springs and wooded gorge; Chisht (173 km from Herat) was well-known for its two 12th Century gumbad or domes, and for being the home of the Chishtiya Sufi brotherhood.

Minaret of Jam Continuing along the Obey road you will reach the 800 year-old Minaret of Jam (313 km from Herat), a spectacular tower 65 metres high, tottering on the banks of the Hari river in a remote mountain valley. The tower by theside of a road was only discovered by Western archaeologists in 1957. It is the second highest minaret in the world, surpassed only by the Qutb Minar in Delhi. It is the only surviving architectural monument from the Ghorid period. For that reason, it has enormous cultural and historic significance. The Minaret and the surrounding area were granted status as a "World Heritage Site" in June 2002, but despite that fact, the area is being pillaged. Trenches in the vicinity are littered with bits of broken pottery and ceramics not valuable enough to sell to the antique dealers of Herat (SEE CULTURE). The minaret is constantly threatened by erosion, ground water infiltration and floods, particularly by the nearby Hari and Jam rivers. Not unlike Pisa, the tower has begun to lean but an internationally-supported initiative is seeking to



The minaret of Jam

stabilize the base. Driving to Jam (in summer) takes around 14 hours. From Jam to Chakhcharan (capital of Ghor) is another five hours. Continuing east along this road, Kabul is a further 575 km away via Bamiyan.

Weather

The weather in Herat is dry and hot in summer, with temperatures reaching over 30 degrees Celsius and 120 days of ripping winds from May to August. Based on average annual temperatures, it typically varies from -3 degrees to 37 degrees. It rarely reaches below minus nine degrees or 39 degrees Celsius. In January the thermometer can drop to freezing, and from February to April, it can vary from 15 to 31 degrees. The hottest months are May to September with temperatures regularly over the 30s.

the terrain around Herat

THE ESSENTIAL A-Z

The Basics

Essential tips:

Soldiers, consultants, diplomats, journalists, aid workers: Remember you are a guest. So act like one.

- **Be met at the airport:** The changes at Kabul airport since the end of 2001 have been dramatic. Things actually run quite smoothly now. Luggage arrives on a conveyor belt and there is a relatively efficient immigration service that is computerized. But don't wait outside the airport alone. Make sure your guesthouse or office has sent a car to pick you up. Or catch a ride from one of the Western aid workers or journalists on the plane.
- **When in Kabul, walk:** City traffic has become so horrendous that you're better off of foot, and it is important not to lose touch with Afghanistan, so it can make sense to stroll from the guesthouse to the bazaar or a meeting, just don't repeat the same route and vary the times of your coming and going. Potential kidnappers or terrorists are likely to scout out your routine in advance, so keep them guessing. The best protection is to be alert to anomalies in your environment. Pay attention to passersby or lingering vehicles. Remain alert and get to know Afghans in your neighborhood, such as shopkeepers and street kids. They're your best protection, so strike up conversations with them. Have a shave at the local barbershop. That's another good way to talk. On several occasions, our street friends have warned us about suspicious strangers. At night it makes sense to take a taxi. Several services in Kabul specialize in quality transportation for foreigners. They're reliable and can come in a matter of minutes. Some of us prefer to walk back at night by changing routes, and keeping in the shadows. We feel safer than traveling in a vehicle with armed guards. When you driving in a car, always make sure that the doors are locked. It will slow down any attempts at a "snatch and grab."
- **Drink tea with the locals:** Explain who you are, what you're doing, and why you wish to work with this particular village or district. Don't hesitate to overdo the greetings, in-

cluding raising your right hand to your heart, a gesture of affinity and peace. And be prepared to drink lots of tea.
Eventually, if you make a positive impact, these will be the people who will watch your back. And you will be surprised how fast word travels – both positively and negatively.

- **Don't throw money at projects.** Money isn't everything, and it doesn't necessarily imply value. The danger from careless spending lies in being perceived as both a sucker and an easy touch for extra cash. Strive to be a partner and be frugal. Too many Afghans, particularly those with privileged contacts, regard the international community as a convenient cash cow. Focus on those Afghans who are serious about helping their communities. Pay attention, to their ethnic and tribal background, and family ties. It's important to understand the people you are dealing with.
- **Road trips.** Get out and see the country, but be careful: While many foreigners prefer to fly, there's nothing like a road trip to keep in touch with one's surroundings. On the other hand, some routes are simply too dangerous to travel, such as the Kabul to Kandahar highway. If you're planning to head out on a safer route, take precautions. Never tell anyone outside your circle what time you plan to leave. Be vague, yet keep those you trust informed, and confirm safe arrival. Leave early in the morning, when there is the most traffic. Take a battered-looking vehicle. Make sure your driver is trusted and, if possible, a relative of any Afghans you work with. This places the responsibility for your security on their families. Don't linger along the way. Don't take the bus. A fellow passenger could inform on your presence by mobile phone to insurgents or potential kidnappers.
- **Use a combo mobile/satellite phone:** Mobile phones cover at least 90 percent of the country and are transforming cultural habits. For security purposes, it is worthwhile having a Thuraya satellite phone, which can switch from mobile to satellite uplinks depending on signals. You don't want to be stuck in a mountainous or desert zone without any form of phone access. Get yourself a local mobilephone. If you try to use an American or European-based phone, be prepared to pay exorbitant roaming charges. Even the poorest Afghan seems to have a phone these days. Text messaging is the

most popular form of communication because it's cheap, and to save money, many wait to be called. Nearly ever Afghan seems to have an email address.

- **Soldiers and mercenaries** take note: The sad reality is that NATO-led led Coalition troops (and increasingly aid workers) are broadly perceived as the new occupiers by Afghans, even by those who initially welcomed the US intervention in 2001. Make an effort to better understand the country. Read about the place. Try to learn a bit of Dari or Pushto. And eat their food. Try not to talk about the "enemy" or "terrorists," as if the armed opposition were all one and the same. Some are foreign-backed insurgents, but most are ordinary Afghans who oppose the international forces for diverse reasons, such as the killing of a family member. Or an insult in the street. Behave. Don't "bead" rifles on civilians while in convoy, shout verbal abuse, or aim guns at crowds while shoving forward in traffic. And lose the shades. Showing your eyes makes you more human.
- **Dress regs for women:** Particularly in urban centers, women can walk in public areas without cover, although a discreet head shawl is recommended. Nevertheless, parts of the government remain male bastions of tradition that can be more hardline than the Taliban. Don't try to be too "Afghan" or you may be treated accordingly. Dress conservatively, but look recognizably Western. Avoid tight or revealing clothes. Ordinary loose-fitting Western dresses and below-the-knee skirts can be worn with loose trousers underneath to cover legs, calves, and ankles. In public, cover your head and chest discreetly with a long shawl or chador, but don't overdo it. Rural areas tend to be more conservative than Kabul and other towns. .

(Source: This section was originally adapted for The Christian Science Monitor, http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/1205/Afghanistan-Field-Guide-Don-t-wear-sunglasses-and-eight-other-essential-tips/Be-met-at-the-airport)

CLOTHING & KIT

During the Soviet-Afghan war, most reporters and aid workers operating on a crossborder basis would dress up in shalwar kameez with a patou (brown woollen blanket) slung over their shoulders. Turbans were preferred in Pushtun areas, and pakuls, preferreed in the north.The pakul became famous after a Nuristani commander presented one to Ahmed Shah Massoud, who turned it into a trademark for anti-Soviet resistance in the Panjshir Valley. The primary reason for most westerners dressing in Afghan style was to be inconspicuous enough to slip by Pakistani control posts while avoiding informers inside Afghanistan. There was no real reason to wear Afghan clothing once inside resistance-held areas.

By the mid and late 1980s, US and European army surplus gear became de rigeur among many mujahideen and foreigners. Once inside the country, it was often easier to wear a pair of jeans or trousers, particularly if trekking through the Hindu Kush. There is nothing worse than trying to negotiate rocky terrain with a pair of loose flowing shalwars.

The Brits, some of whom were ex-military, such as veteran cameraman Peter Jouvenal, tended to be more down-to-earth by

combining the best of SAS equipment (night-sights, bivvy bags and survival belts) with solid trekking gear from mountaineering outfitters back in the UK.

Americans often arrived with the latest but not necessarily most practical gear (computers, water filters and ABC airline guides); For the TV crowd, Afghan costumes were *de rigeur* for rugged "reporters-at-the-front" on-camera reports.

One blond-haired Dutch journalist insisted on wearing the "Soviet look," a khaki shalwar kameez topped by a khaki Red Army hat, which did not exactly endear him with his colleagues, particularly when travelling in resistance-held areas.

Perhaps the most popular and useful import, quickly copied by the bazaar tailors and increasingly worn by image-conscious mujahideen, was the Banana Republic photo-vest with all its pockets. But what mattered most of all then and now if working in the field was a solid pair of boots.

Today,you will be labeled a foreigner regardless of what you wear, so dress practically. If you embed with the Coalition or Afghan military, it pays to look as unmilitary as possible, particularly if you're a journalist. You're not a soldier. Quite a few western embeds, particularly those who 'parachute' in from Washington, New York or London, like to adopt a military look, but that can be dangerous if a hostile situation erupts, and especially if you are a reporter, it undercuts any efforts at maintaining objectivity. A flak jacket and helmet may be necesaary, but they should be blue--and definitely not camouflage, to make it clear to everyone that you are not a combattant. Blue jeans are recommended. Stay away from camouflage or military-style fatigues.

Dress for non-combatant Afghans has always been traditional. The all-covering tent-like burqa was in nuse throughout Afghanistan long before the Taliban arrived. Before the war, however, rural women remained unveiled in their villages and while working in fields, and they resorted to the burqa only when strange males were present or when they were visiting towns. The crowded conditions in refugee camps changed that, and the Taliban made it an across-the-board rule to wear the burqa. Despite the retreat of the Taliban at the end of 2001 many female returnees still wear the burqa, particularly if they live in the crowded conditions on the outskirts of Kabul.

Many educated Afghan women working for westerners also cover up when going out. It is part of their culture.

Most visitors to Afghanistan today do not bother trying, to

disguise themselves. In Kabul and cities like Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghans who have official positions proudly wear pin-striped suits. For many, wering a suit signifies a return to normalcy. Even General Atta, a former United Front commander and currently the governor of Balkh Province, prefers stylish suits to battle fatigues. He also has a penchant for furry or colourful woollen caps, as if fresh from the ski slopes.

Tops, however, goes to the foreign mercenaries, particularly former American, British or South Africa soldiers, employed by private security companies, who like to sport wrap- around sun glasses with head bandanas, and flashy neck scarves as a kind of unofficial uniform., complemented with multipocketed vests, monstrous guns, pistols, knives and other support equipment. The swashbuckling paraphernalia effectively isolates them from any real contact with Afghans. The effect projects arrogance and disdain for ordinary Afghans and consequently should be avoided by anyone who actually wants to accomplish anything in the country.

DO NOT ATTRACT ATTENTION TO YOURSELF BY WEARING FLAMBOYANT CLOTHING!
AVOID WEARING SUNGLASSES WHEN WITH AFGHANS! AFGHANS NEED TO SEE YOUR EYES. IN ORDER TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOU!

Since the US-led intervention, insecurity has worsened in the eastern and southern areas, and increasingly the north, where Westerners are now being targeted. In late spring, 2013, a suicide attack against the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) compound in Jalalabad was deliberately aimed at foreign personnel. (One foreign delegate, who was severely wounded, died a month later). From the point of view of personal security, it is best to dress in a low-key way and avoid carrying conspicuous valuables. But don't fool yourself that everyone will think you're a Pushtun tribesman. While concessions have to be made, especially by Western women, it is important to "be who you are" and remain straightforward about your work so as not to arouse suspicion that you might be a spy.

The following are suggestions for suitable clothing for Western visitors. See relevant travel chapters for advice on local rules and climate at different times of year.

Women

In general, ordinary loose-fitting Western dresses and below-the-knee skirts can be worn, with loose trousers underneath to cover the legs, calves and ankles. Wear blouses with long sleeves. Avoid low bust-lines or figure-hugging outfits. One returnee Afghan woman from California with a women's rights group insisted on wearing a revealing T-shirt, maintaining that this is "who I am." It did not help her cause. Conservatism remains - and not just in Talib areas. When in public, cover your head with a shoulder-length scarf or chador. In traditional parts, notably rural areas, fuller cover may be more appropriate. In more liberal districts you may not need to wear a chador at all. Be careful when sitting on the floor in the presence of Afghan men to cover your knees and feet. If you wish to respect Afghans, there is no point making a political statement about your dress.

Men

Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts are fine. Shorts should not be worn in public except when playing sports within NGO or UN compounds. You can also wear shorts on the outside but only when you are clearly running, jogging or otherwise indulging in a sport. Particularly since the 2012 Olympics, Afghans are avid TV watchers so they know the drill. Jeans or khaki trousers with bush jackets or other forms of 'rugged' dress are fine if travelling or operating in the field. When visiting government officials or high-flying educational institutions, then jackets and ties are appropriate. Clean, presentable clothes are a sign of respect for your Afghan hosts and colleagues. There is no need for Western men to grow beards or wear head-dress.

Clothing for the frontline

If your work takes you to frontline or security areas, you must wear the right kit to protect yourself. If you embed with the military, they will have suggestions of what to wear. (In fact, as ISAF makes perfectly clear, you are responsible for your equipment, not the military). Flak jackets are essential to safeguard you against the threat of flying shrapnel and stray bullets. Make sure the jacket has removable ceramic plates front and rear. Each plate should weigh around five kilos to be effective, and fitted when

there is a threat of gunfire. Practise wearing the plates to get used to the weight before heading out. Combat helmets are essential and have saved the lives of a number of journalists or aid workers. Good walking boots, already worn in, are crucial. Wear a survival belt containing a first aid kit, shell dressing, Swiss army knife, string, space blanket, poncho, pen, notebook and your personal documents. (Make sure your documents are wrapped in plastic in case you fall in a canal or river). If you lose everything else, you've at least got this.

Another critical item is a portable shortwave radio to catch the BBC, VOA or DW, particularly in times of crisis. And, if possible a Satphone. There are zones where mobile phones do not work. Beware, too, that in conflict situations power outages can knock out mobile phone transmitters.

Essential Reading

SAS Survival Handbook: How to Survive in the Wild, in Any Climate, on Land or at Sea, John 'Lofty' Wiseman, Collins (London, 2003). A useful book if travelling in difficult terrain or war zones. There is also a very handy pocket version.

Medicine for Mountaineering and Other Wilderness Activities, Ed. James Thorkell Thorkelsson/International Federation

Festivals & holidays

Festivities in Afghanistan made a resurgence since the departure of the Taliban. (Sometimes, however, festivities such as wedding processions have been deliberately targeted). Music and kite flying, once banned by the Religious Police, are back. Even in hardline Talib areas, there is a general recognition that it was a mistake to outlaw music. Roadside hotels and chaikhane ring with the songs of Hindi movies and MTV something unimaginable during the Taliban era. Friday remains the weekly holiday, unlike Pakistan which observes a Western- style weekend. This can make liaison between agencies in both countries difficult from Thursday afternoon to Monday morning.

The following official holidays are observed:

15 February: National Survival Day. Celebrating defeat of the Soviet Union.
21 March: New Year's Day (Now-Roz), also known as Farmers' Day. Agricultural fairs and buzkashi, the Afghan version of polo.
1 May: Labour Day
19 August: Independence Day. Celebrating freedom from the British in 1919.
31 August: Pushtunistan Day.
9 September: Martyr's Day in honour of Ahmed Shah Massoud and "those who died fighting for the country." (Formerly National Assembly Day, officially changed in May, 2012)
15 October: Deliverance Day. Commemorated the victory of King Nadir Shah over Bacha Saqao in 1929.
24 October: United Nations Day

Islamic religious holidays are set according to the lunar calendar

and hence, from a Western point of view, vary in timing from year to year.

The main festivals are as follows:
Ashura: 10th day of Moharram, otherwise known as Martyrs' Day, anniversary of the death of Husain, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.
Mawlud-e-Sharif: The Prophet's Birthday
Ramazan: (also Ram'zan or Ramadan) the month of fasting
Id ul-Fitr: Three day feast at the end of Ramazan. Be sure to congratulate Afghans on Id or Eid. Similar to Christmas or Easter.
Id-e-Qurban (Azha): Day of sacrifice during the month of the Hajj (pilgrim395 Shepherd boy in Paghman J. Walter

Health and medical

"When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
An' the women come out to cut up what remains,
Jest roll to your rifle an' blow out your brains,
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier."
Rudyard Kipling, Barrack-room Ballads (1892)

The main threats to personal health in Afghanistan other than landmines and unexploded ordnance are intestinal parasytes, dysentery and infections caused by poor hygene, unclean food and drink. Malaria is also a serious problem. In general, vaccinations do not provide reliable protection from most of the diseases so be aware of the danger at all times. Take the necessary precautions and you should be able to avoid the Kipling option. Carry a basic first aid kit to cope with malaria, diarrhoea, headaches, animal bites, small cuts etc., plus sterilized needles and syringes for emergencies. Plus a small portable water filter if possible. Water purification pills are handy, but they will not be effective against parasytes. A piston-action ceramic water filter, such as the Swiss-made Katadydn filter (www.katadyn.com) or the MSR (http://www.rei.com/brand/MSR), is the most reliable option. Ticks and bedbugs can be a problem, particularly when staying in rural areas with cattle in the vicinity. Deet is the most effective insect spray and Flagyl is an extremely powerful antibiotic

against ameobic dysentery, although it requires a prescription, when purchased int he US or Europe. Try to bring all the drugs you need with you, although the quality of Pakistani- manufactured drugs has greatly improved in recent years.

HIV/AIDS is a growing problem.
Be wary of blood transfusions.

Immunization

Make sure to visit a doctor or specialist travel clinic as soon as you know you are heading to the region. Vaccination regimes can require several months. The London-based organization, MASTA (see below) will send a health brief tailored to visiting Afghanistan, with details of which diseases to avoid and how. The following immunizations are strongly recommended:

Polio: A viral disease usually transmitted via contaminated food and water. The live vaccine lasts 10 years and is given as drops on the tongue, although an injectable vaccine is available.
Hepatitis A: A virus, usually transmitted via contaminated food and water, which attacks the liver and may cause jaundice and a prolonged illness. Modern vaccines are very effective and, if boosted at 6-12 months, provide at least 10 years of protection.
Typhoid fever: Bacteria which enter through the mouth, causing high fever and even coma. An injected vaccine is available, boosted every three years, although this is less important for short-term visitors staying in clean accommodation.
Tetanus: A serious bacterial disease caused by contamination of wounds. The vaccine provides 10 years of protection and can be combined with a diphtheria vaccine.
Diphtheria: Usually transmitted by close contact with infected people. A booster vaccine lasts 10 years. There have been outbreaks in refugee camps and other areas.

Important immunizations for Afghanistan

Hepatitis B: A virus, transmitted sexually or by puncturing the skin with contaminated instruments (e.g. needles), which can cause liver damage and eventual liver failure. The vaccine is usually a 3-dose course over six months, but can be accelerated.
Rabies: Invariably fatal once symptoms begin, rabies is transmitted by

the saliva of infected animals (a scratch or lick may be sufficient). However, modern vaccines are very effective.

Tuberculosis (TB): Transmitted through close contact with infected people. The BCG vaccine is more effective in children than adults, and a booster provides no benefit.

Consult with your doctor about vaccination against Japanese encephalitis and meningitis, but at present these are not considered necessary.

Malaria and leishmaniasis

Malaria can be a killer, and exists all year round in regions below 2,000 metres. Spread by mosquitoes that bite from dusk till dawn, it is present in both rural and urban areas (especially Jalalabad, Kandahar, Pul-e-Khumri and Faizabad).

There is no vaccination available, so the best way to prevent getting malaria is to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes in the first place. Wear long-sleeved shirts, socks and long trousers, especially from early evening onwards when the mosquitoes come out. Use insect repellent (containing 35per cent or more of the active agent DEET) on all exposed skin and apply it regularly. If your skin reacts to DEET-based repellent, try a natural lemon-eucalyptus alternative. At night, try using smoke or tiger coils (outside) and plug-in "King Mat" vaporizers (inside). Spray inside rooms to kill any rogue mosquitoes and use a fan or air conditioning in your bedroom especially in summer. Finally, buy an insecticide-treated bednet before you go, obtainable from major airports and travel equipment shops, and make sure you sleep under it every night. If you follow this advice, your chances of getting malaria become much lower.

Two types of malaria are found in Afghanistan and Pakistan: 75 percent is due to vivax malaria, the non-lethal type, while 25 percent is due to falciparum malaria, which causes more severe symptoms and even death if left undiagnosed or untreated. Falciparum malaria is resistant to chloroquine in Afghanistan and must be treated with effective alternative drugs. Prophylaxis with malarone or mefloquine (Larium) will give protection against both forms of malaria. Malarone has few side effects but is expensive and has to be taken daily. Mefloquine needs only to be taken weekly but the side effects can be distressing and in extreme cases may include anxiety, depression and other psychiatric disturbances. Prophylaxis with weekly chloroquine (two tab-

lets) and daily proguanil (two tablets) will protect against vivax malaria but cannot be guaranteed to protect against resistant falciparum malaria, which is why malarone or mefloquine are favoured. These courses of drugs must be started one week prior to arrival in the malarial region, taken without a break while there, and continued until one month after departure from the malarial area.

However, no prophylaxis is perfect, so if you develop a fever (38 degrees Celsius or higher, starting at least one week after first potential exposure to malaria) visit a competent laboratory or health NGO and have a blood smear examined for malarial parasites. Other symptoms of malaria include periodic shivering, headache, body ache and possible bouts of diarrhoea. Vomiting can be a symptom of the potentially deadly falciparum malaria. For adults, curative treatment of falciparum malaria requires a single dose of three Fansidar tablets, that of vivax malaria requires 10 tablets of chloroquine taken over three days. Follow dosage instructions exactly.

Visitors should take particular precautions against malaria if intending to stay overnight in rural areas during the main transmission season from May to November. While it is mainly a rural disease in Pakistan and Afghanistan, you may be troubled by 'nuisance' mosquitoes in urban environments. Malaria is rare in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif but is common in rice-growing areas in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan, in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman and Khost, and in the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand.

BEWARE OF DRUGS PURCHASED IN AFGHAN OR PAKISTANI PHARMACIES. THEY CAN BE COUNTERFEIT AND USELESS. ONLY GO TO PHARMACIES WITH GOOD REPUTATIONS!

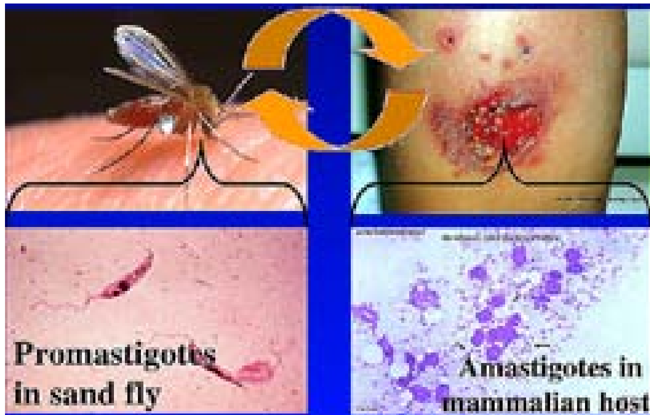
Kabul is at an altitude that is too high for malaria, but there is a serious risk of contracting cutaneous leishmaniasis. This disease is transmitted by the bite of a sandfly. Ulcerous lesions occur on the face and limbs around the bite. At the peak of the epidemic, in 1996, 12 percent of the Kabul population had active leishmaniasis. In mid-2003, there were an estimated 200,000 cases of leishmaniasis in Kabul alone. The current prevalence is around three percent.

Leishmaniasis is caused by protozoan parasites, and it is the second-largest parasitic killer in the world (after malaria), responsible for an estimated 500,000 infections each year worldwide. The parasite migrates to the internal organs such as liver, spleen (hence 'visceral'), and bone marrow, and, if left untreated, will almost always result in the death of the host. Signs and symptoms include fever, weight loss, mucosal ulcers,

fatigue, anemia, and substantial swelling of the liver and spleen. After spending time in Afghanistan, it is best to have a thorough medical check for parasytes, preferrably at a medical center specializing in tropical diseases.

The five Fs of dysentery

Dysentery (bloody diarrhoea) is usually caused by infections



The Leishmaniasis cycle

picked up from one or more of the following 'carriers':
FOOD – FINGERS – FAECES – FLIES – FOAMITES (ANTS)
You can reduce the chances of getting diarrhoea by one third simply by washing your hands before eating!

Diarrhoea and cholera

Diarrhoea is caused by careless eating and drinking. Most visitors to this region suffer from it sometime during their stay. Chances of getting diarrhoea can be reduced by one third simply by washing your hands with soap and water before handling and eating food.

Never drink tap water always boil it (for 20 minutes), add chlorine or use an iodine-resin water purifier. This is one reason for drinking tea when you travel. It will have been boiled. Use filtered water or green tea for brushing your teeth. Activated charcoal filters are OK as long asyou clean them regularly. Check bottles of "mineral water" for intact seals. Avoid ice in drinks, ice-

cream, unpasteurised milk, salads, raw vegetables and seafood (some restaurants now have it) . Yoghurt (maast) is a popular side dish with many Afghan meals and should be fine to eat, but make sure that it is fresh and has not been watered down. Avoid cold meats and sauces and make sure any meat you eat has been well-cooked. Stick to food which is piping hot. Drink tea rather than Pepsi (often locally bottled) or blended fruit juice. A good general rule is: Cook it, Peel it, or Leave it.

If you get diarrhoea you must rehydrate with large amounts of purified water and oral rehydration salts (ORS). ORS can taste pretty grim so try and buy flavoured ones and drink with cold water. Even better, buy some packets in advance and keep them with you. Don't stop eating, but stick to simple, dry, non-fatty food. Drugs such as Imodium (one dose after each loose stool, up to a maximum of eight a day) can help relieve the symptoms. Most cases of travellers' diarrhoea end within 3-4 days. A single dose of 500mg of the antibiotic ciprofloxacin (on prescription) can often reduce this to one day.

Cholera is a food/water-borne illness causing acute watery diarrhoea, vomiting and dehydration. A large outbreak was reported in Kabul during 2002, affecting over 6,500 people. However, the vaccine for cholera is inefective and the condition can be easily treated.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is increasing more rapidly in Central Asia than anywhere else in the world, producing what some specialists now refer to as a "concentrated epidemic." It is rapidly becoming Afghanistan's latest health crisis. From 1999 to 2002, the number of people infected almost tripled. While there were less than 700 confirmed cases in 2010, the number is believed to much higher with the disease spreading. A rise in opium cultivation, drug trafficking and drug use, coupled with unscreened blood used in transfusions are all leading to this increase. It is believed to be driven mainly by intravenous drug use among young men and is becoming a growing problem in the countries bordering Afghanistan, but returning refugees are helping to spread the problem. Stigma and denial are also helping contributing. Apart from the usual advice to practice safe sex, make sure you avoid contaminated needles. If travelling to remote areas, carry a set of sterilized needles and syringes to guard against possible infection. The

most common circumstances for blood transfusions are following road traffic accidents, so make sure you drive carefully and wear seatbelts at all times. The first confirmed case of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan appeared in 1989.

Emergencies

In a medical emergency the best course of action is to go to the office of the nearest international NGO specializing in health, or find a hospital supported by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), Emergency and other health organizations. The ICRC will operate on all emergency cases and can arrange air evacuations if necessary. But don't pester health NGOs with requests for pills you forgot to bring with you. Make sure your travel insurance covers you for emergency medevac (medical repatriation), as well as protecting you in the event of "war and kindred risks" (SEE INSURANCE). You can also check with your embassy and ISAF forces in Afghanistan.

Kit list

- **First aid kit:** plasters, bandages, antiseptic cream/spray, scissors, tweezers, thermometer
- **Sterilized needle & syringe kit**,
- **Emergency dental kit**
- **Medicine:** painkillers, anti-malarial drugs (including curative Fansidar dose), oral rehydration salts, Imodium or Loperamide for diarrhoea, antibiotics (e.g. ciprofloxacin)
- **Record of your blood group**,
- **Vaccination history/certificates**,
- **Travel insurance policy**
- **Emergency contact numbers**
- **Insect repellent**, impregnated bednet, plug-in insecticide vaporizer
- **Iodine resin water purifier**, water purification tablets
- **Sun block**

Disease profiles and drugs change, so always check with your doctor for the latest health advice before going to Afghanistan. We would like to thank Dr Mark Rowland of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for updating the information on malaria. Immunization advice is based on the latest MASTA

health brief for a long-term visit to rural Afghanistan. We are also grateful to Dr Antony van der Bunt and Dr Tim Winch for general health advice. Latest 2013 updates provided by the World Health Organization in Geneva and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

Essential contacts

The London Hospital for Tropical Diseases: Mortimer Market,

MSF (Doctors without Borders) hospital in Helmand

Capper Street, off Tottenham Court Road, London WC1E 6JB, UK) The Hospital has a Travel Clinic which provides advice, up-to-date information on all anti-malarials and prophylactic drugs, consultant-led clinics, screening, 24-hour healthline, fax-back service and range of travel products.
Tel: +44 (0) 2034567891.(appointments) http://www.thehtd.org/Travelclinic.aspx

Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad (MASTA): UK-based 24-hour travel healthline and website, which provides latest health news, general health advice for travellers, 'healthbriefs' tailored to particular locations and health supplies by post. To obtain these, you need to register on their website. They also have clinics in different locations. http://www.masta-travel-health.com/

International Traveler's Health: Informative site for travelers run by the US Centers for Disease Control. http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30333, USA
Tel. 800-CDC-INFO
(800-232-4636)
TTY: (888) 232-6348

Travellers' and Migration Medical Unit
This is the Geneva-based tropical institute which works closely with its French equivalents in Lyons and in Paris.
Policlinique de Médecine (Asia Dept.)
Hôpital Cantonal Universitaire
25, rue Micheli-du-Crest
1211 Geneva 14
Switzerland.
Tel: +41 (22) 372 9603

Essential reading

• ***International Travel and Health 2012 Edition*** The World Health Organization, Geneva. (http://www.who.int/ith/en/)

• ***Where There is No Doctor*** David Werner, Hesperian Foundation (revised edition, 1992)

• ***Staying Healthy in Asia, Africa and Latin America***, Moon Publications, 722 Wall St, Chico, CA 95928 USA

• ***Wilderness Medicine, Beyond First Aid,*** William Forgey, Globe Pequot Publishers (5th edition, 1999)

Insurance

As Afghanistan is still considered a conflict zone, most of the insurance companies we contacted refused to cover groups and individuals operating in the region with the current "war and kindred risks." One large Swiss company proudly declared that it did not take "risks with risks." The poor security situation in 2013 has

not helped matters. The United Nations and other organizations have their own coverage but often forbid their employees to remain in a conflict area if the security situation deteriorates. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which operates in war zones throughout the world, has special arrangements with Lloyds which are not available to NGOs and journalists. A number of travel companies, such as Cooks, have their own insurance deals for the region but you need to check. Ironically, some firms still provide coverage for Pakistan, which is arguably far more hazardous than Afghanistan, particularly in Peshawar, Quetta and even Karachi.

The difficulty of obtaining inexpensive insurance poses a serious problem for NGO aid workers, above all volunteers, and freelance journalists (often the only ones doing the real reporting on a long-term basis). Several initiatives have been proposed to major donors, such as the European Union, to develop group cover for those required to work in conflict zones rather than oblige aid groups, which can ill afford it, to spend thousands in hard-won donations on insurance. So far, this has not happened.

There are a few specialist brokers around, plus companies prepared to do deals but beware: cover does not come cheap! Prices vary widely, so it is worth shopping around. Some firms differentiate between 'active' and 'passive' war zones, so premiums will vary accordingly. You have to explain exactly the sort of work you are doing and where you expect to go. Land mine injuries or deaths are usually specifically excluded. Some provide coverage for corporal injuries, such as US$250,000 US for the loss of both legs, less for arms. However, your insurance should provide a basic minimum, notably one million dollars, plus the cost of a medivac back to Europe. (Germany is the usual option). Given the growth in NGO, media and consultancy activities in conflict or hazardous zones, there appear to be more companies willing to offer tailored coverage, but make sure they cover the key risks, and include kidnapping. After much research, EFG editors have come up with the options below based on conversations with various brokers.

Essential contacts-Insurance

ACE Insurance

Cover and Risk Management for Expatriates
Web: http://www.acegroup.com/eu-en/

ACE is an extremely helpful and not too expensive group, which covers journalists, aid workers and others in war zones. Provides variable coverage, including negotiable life insurance. They insure the French NGO Réporters sans Frontières.

AKE Group

This is specialised insurance, and the company also provides training courses for journalists and others in "hostile" regions. The five-day course – if you pass - provides one year's free hostile environment insurance coverage. The AKE Group includes offices in the United States, Australia and elsewhere.
Mortimer House, Holmer Road, Hereford, HR4 9TA, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1432 267111 Fax: +44 (0) 1432 350227
Web: http://www.akegroup.com/
(SEE SECURITY TIPS).

HMT Insurance Brokers Ltd

Old Bank House, 26 Station Approach, Esher, Surrey, KT10 0SR, UK. Email: hmt@hmtib.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)20 8398 2362 Fax: +44 (0)20 8398 4568
http://www.hmtib.co.uk/

Marsh Private Client Services/Marsh Inc.

1166 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036-2774, USA
Tel: 212 345-6000
UK: Garden House, 42 Bancroft, Hitchen, Herts, SG5 1DD, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)1462 42800 Fax: +44 (0)1462 42008
Web: http://usa.marsh.com/ProductsServices/PrivateClientServices.aspx

New York International Group

This company offers tailored insurance and features coverage for war and terrorism, accidental death and dismemberment or disability, and lump sum or annual payment options. Contact: Tel. 1-212-268-8520.
http://www.nyig.com/products/terrorism/

Safe Passage International

Includes coverage for journalists and NGOs in conflict zones.
Main Office (Colorado)
3609 S. Wadsworth Blvd.,

Suite 565
Lakewood, CO 80235
303-988-9626
Fax: 303-988-9666
Email: info@spibrokers.com
Washington, DC
1776 "I" Street NW,
9th Floor
Washington, DC 20006
800-777-7665
Fax: 303-988-9666
Email: info@spibrokers.com
Web: www.spibrokers.com

West Midland Brokers Ltd.

4A St Nicholas St, Hereford HR4 0BG, UK.
Tel: +44 (0) 1432 268301 Fax: +44 (0) 1432 355235
Web: http://www.westmidlandbrokers.co.uk/
West Midland provides tailored insurance cover for hostile environments or dangerous jobs. Premiums reflect the current level of risk and vary according to where you go and what you do. If your journey is limited to Kabul, for example, cover would be cheaper than if you go to the more dangerous parts of Afghanistan. Costs may come down if you complete a hostile environments training course. Other contacts for general medical coverage in Afghanistan but not specific war risks:
The following may or may not provide conflict coverage.

Medicare International

Tel. +44 (0) 20 3418 0470
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7118 1178
MediCare International Limited
Minster House
42 Mincing Lane
London
EC3R 7AE
UK
Email: info@medicare.co.uk
Web: http://www.medicare.co.uk/

International Health Insurance Denmark a/s

Palaengade 8, DK-12881, Copenhagen K, Denmark
Tel: +45 (33) 15 3099 Fax: +45 (33) 32 2560
Web: http://www.ihidanmark.jp/info.htm

J & M Insurance (UK) Ltd.

Peregrine House
Bakers Lane
Epping
Essex CM16 5DQ, UK
Web: http://www.jmi.co.uk/

Medibroker Independent Health Insurance Broker

Medibroker House, 17 Seatonville Road, Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear, NE25
9DA, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 191 297 2411 Fax: +44 (0) 191 251 6424
Medibroker works with key insurance companies specialised in expatriate coverage.

AXA/Private Patient Plan Healthcare

Phillips House, Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2PL, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1892 503856 Fax: +44 (0) 1892 503189
https://www.axappphealthcare.co.uk/personal/private-medical-insurance/

AXA/PPP provides good value annual cover, including £5 million for medical emergencies or repatriation. Will cover medical expenses arising from landmine injuries in Afghanistan, as long as you can prove you've taken "reasonable care." However, make sure you get confirmation of this in writing. What the brokers say may not coincide with the final contract. Does not cover risks arising in conflict situations.

REGA

GAC, PO Box 1414, 8058 Zurich Airport, Switzerland
Tel: +41 (1) 654 3222 Fax: +41 (1) 654 3590
Web: www.rega.ch
REGA is a member-supported medical air service which can fly you out of war zones and back to Europe if injured or sick.

Journalism & Reporting

News reporting in Afghanistan

During the Soviet-Afghan war, reporting in Afghanistan was much easier than it would be later during the Talib period. Ironically, the period following the American-led intervention of October 2001 also turned out to be a far more difficult time for international journalists.

Afghanistan is far more dangerous today than it was during the height of the Soviet war. This is despite the fact that journalists in the 1980s were often required to travel by foot with the mujahideen for days or weeks at a time. The portable satphone or TV satdish were still too impractical to carry and it was difficult to obtain a balanced and accurate view of the situation in the country as a whole.

Travelling 'inside' often meant relying on the access provided by a single guerrilla faction, which sought to project its own very partisan view of the war. Journalists, however, usually had a choice over "how, where and what" they sought to cover. There was a degree of healthy competition among the various mujahed parties to attract those reporters with the most influential access to the outside world (e.g. US television networks) as a means of raising their own profiles. Some guerrilla groups operated more effectively than others, and journalists tended to focus on those with proven track records. The 'when,' however, was always unpredictable as planning in Afghanistan had to be implemented on an ad hoc basis. Even the simplest arrangements or itineraries tended to change on a daily basis (SEE MEDIA).

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the takeover of Kabul by the mujahideen in 1992, media attention was limited to mainly human interest stories. These focused on the hardships of the people of Kabul who lived under an almost constant barrage of rockets and artillery. Much of the coverage remained limited, however, with Afghanistan well off the map of global attention. Nevertheless, the new Jihadist Minister of Defence, former guerrilla commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, continued with his tradition of media openness to foreign journalists. (This very openness led to his assassination by al Qa'eda assailants in September 2001. No appropriate check was made of his two Arab killers, who posed as journalists for a Middle East television network). His aides were usually on hand to explain the party line and to protect reporters from the excesses of less disciplined fighters, such as confiscating camera equipment. On the other hand, Massoud's arch rival, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

(who is making a comeback in 2013) did little to encourage good press relations. The killing in 1994 by his men of a BBC correspondent did little for his media charm. Nor did his indiscriminate shelling of the Afghan capital, which destroyed much of the city and inflicted an estimated 50,000 casualties on the civilian population.

The Talib takeover of Kabul in September 1996 sparked renewed media interest. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) alone flew 120 journalists into the city in a matter of weeks. Many reports gave the impression that Kabul had changed overnight to a version of Phnom Penh at Year Zero. Dominant themes focused on the movement's treatment of women and some of the more extreme edicts promulgated in their drive to establish the world's purist Islamic state (SEE TALIBAN). The Taliban placed restrictions on reporters, some ideological, others stemming from practical concerns, severely reducing overall coverage. For many observers, such policies turned Afghanistan into a 'closed' conflict, at least in Talib-controlled areas.

The Taliban banned photography and filming of living animals, including humans, on the grounds that the depiction of living creatures is prohibited under Islam (SEE PHOTOGRAPHY). They further prohibited reporters from talking to Afghan women, who were ordered not to have any contacts with males outside their own immediate families. It remained unclear, however, if this ban extended to female journalists. In fact, the Taliban seemed uncertain how to deal with Western women entering Afghanistan (SEE WOMEN). In the United Front areas, mainly Badakhshan province prior to September 11, 2001, it remained relatively easy for journalists to travel. In many respects, it was no different from operating in Afghan civilian areas during the Soviet war.

By 2003, the situation had changed. Journalistically, one was still dealing with many of the same problems, notably the challenge of establishing reliable facts and figures on what was going, whether in the military or recovery sectors. With the start of the US bombing in October, 2001, the Pentagon had gone out of its way to control information with the United Front, or Northern Alliance, playing along. There was, and still is, significant disinformation unloaded on journalists by the Coalition and Afghan security forces, albeit sometimes not intentionally.

Particularly during the early stages of the invasion, US on-the-ground military intelligence was considered by experienced aid workers and journalists to be generally poor. As during the 1980s, when the CIA relied heavily on the Pakistanis for guidance (usually unabashedly biased toward Islamabad's own political agenda), the American intelligence organizations in Afghanistan were once again relying heavily on compromised intelligence. Much of this was provided by pro-United Front (Northern

Alliance) warlords, commanders and other informants who often fingered rivals as 'Taliban' or 'al Qa'eda' to suit their own purposes. Even British army counterparts privately expressed dismay at the way US forces conducted their operations based on such flimsy or unreliable intel. This later raised questions among reporters as to the veracity of US assertions regarding Iraq prior to the March 2003 US invasion. (By 2013, the veracity of casualty figures in Afghanistan and the region remained a key issue, particularly when information provided by the different sides varied so drastically. Both US and insurgent claims of casualties caused – or not caused - by American drone attacks are simply not credible without independent verification. This problem is now being discussed in Geneva by donor governments, aid agencies and journalists.)
During the final days of the Taliban, the Pentagon made it difficult for journalists to operate independently in security zones by persuading the United Front to limit media access. During the Soviet War, the mujahideen would have gone out of their way to help journalists reach the frontlines. Some journalists who attempted to penetrate security zones where Coalition Forces were operating were detained by US, Australian and other foreign troops and sent back.

During the first few months of the intervention, the risks were far higher than during the Soviet war. Four journalists, for example, were executed by pro-al'Qa'eda militants along the Jalalabad to Kabul road in November 2001. Even experienced reporters with good local contacts hesitated to travel in rural areas for fear of being betrayed by villagers or attacked by roaming pro-Taliban groups and bandits. No longer could a journalist rely on the hospitality of local commanders, a situation that has grown worse in much of eastern and southern Afghanistan from early 2003 onwards. Today, most provincial zones are a risk, even with good contacts among local commanders and aid groups.

For journalists working in Afghanistan now, it is vital to cultivate one's own mix of reliable sources. Many outside reporters and TV producers tend to 'embed' with the Coalition military and make little or no effort to see the situation from the Afghan side. Embedding with the military alone is a far easier, and usually safer option, but really does not provide credible insight into what is happening nation-wide. Drawing conclusions based on a single visit to one or two places is not enough, particularly if only done with the military. Neither Kabul nor any other single region is representative of the country as a whole. Nevertheless, with so

many journalists only reporting from Helmand or Kandahar, the public-at-large tends to perceive Afghanistan as a largely desert country with IEDs along every road and snipers behind every rock or mud-stone wall.

More often than not, such reporters profile highly patriotic accounts of how the boys and girls in uniform are faring at the front, focusing on “us” against “them” stories. Such coverage tells one very little about Afghanistan itself. (SEE EMBEDDING) No Afghan civilian is going to tell a reporter what he thinks if armed soldiers are present. The end result is that the rural “recovery” story has been overwhelmingly overshadowed by security coverage. To their credit, most of the Kabul-based journalists, many of them freelancers, make pointed efforts to see the broader picture by travelling on their own. But they, too, must depend on what their editors want, notably “the war.”

As before, the Afghan capital remains the centre of media attention. News agencies, newspapers and broadcasters, many of whom came in force to cover the war against the Taliban, still maintain offices, guest houses and other forms of representation. But even this is waning with much of burden now resting on the shoulders of poorly paid freelancers. Growing insecurity is also making it far more dangerous both for reporters and aid workers. There are numerous “no-go” areas where it would be madness for a foreigner to travel, even with good contacts. And certainly, too, seeking to operate with the armed opposition remains a highly dodgy business. Some Western journalists have managed this, usually only for extremely brief periods, and this is not recommended. Several have placed themselves in extremely precarious situations, including being kidnapped.

The trouble is that one never knows who or what is really behind such attacks. This ranges from legitimate insurgent operations to political intrigue within the different Afghan ministries and pure financially-inspired banditry. Kidnapping has become a lucrative business in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both the BBC and Al Jazeera rely largely on Pakistani or Afghan journalists to provide their behind-the-lines reporting. Pakistan, too, continues to play a subversive role despite repeated denials by the Islamabad government. A number of well-informed humanitarian sources point the fingers directly at ISI for orchestrating recent attacks in 2012 and 2013 against international aid agencies, such as the ICRC.

Today, expatriate aid workers and journalists tend to restrict

their trips to Kabul with only the odd sortie into the countryside, such as the Panjshir Valley or the Plains of Shomali. Or to the north and west. Kabul, however, is not Afghanistan. Over 70 percent of the country's population live in rural areas, where a far different picture exists. This is where international recovery has only had limited impact. The urban-rural divide remains almost as pronounced today as it did at the beginning of the war. The educated urban elite, with whom Westerners have contact, tend to live in the Afghan capital and other cities and work for international aid agencies, within government ministries or, increasingly, for private enterprise. Even they are removed from many of the current realities.

Up to 80 themes ranging from landmine awareness, cultural heritage and drug production to personal hygiene, safe birthing practices and environmental issues have been addressed through the medium of an entertaining radio drama. Topics are discussed at monthly consultations with aid agency representatives. Each three episodes are repeated three times, including an omnibus edition specially aimed at women and timed to coincide with Friday prayers when their husbands are at the mosque.

The broadcasts are reinforced by a monthly cartoon magazine which includes a section entitled "Where there is no school", aimed at teaching basic reading and writing skills.

Field-based partnerships with local NGOs reinforce the messages of the radio drama by compiling topical individual storylines and producing educational songs. A listener from Khost wrote in to say: "We have learnt lessons from the drama. For example, if someone is killed, then giving a girl away to atone for the deed is wrong. Before, when we saw a mine we diffused it ourselves, but now we inform the demining office.

If sometimes there is a dispute now we settle conflicts by discussion [jirga]." Throughout much of Afghanistan "New Home, New Life" has become compulsory listening, and provokes considerable village discussion and uncannily realistic reactions. When one of its most popular characters, Khair Mohammed,was killed by a stray bullet, people in Chaman held condolence meetings to mourn his death.

Some of the international aid agencies, whether UN organizations such as UNHCR or UNICEF or NGOs ranging from the Swedish Committee to Afghanistan to Save the Children can still help journalists get out into the "real" Afghanistan. Depending on the story (e.g. women's health in rural areas or environmental

devastation), there are scores of local and international aid groups capable and willing to assist serious journalists, particularly if their reporting relates to the organization's own particular activities.

Good publicity is good for funding. Aid agencies also have a responsibility to be transparent to their donors and the public-at-large, including Afghans themselves, so this is where a journalist can play a role. Certain organizations, however, have developed extremely arrogant "holier-than-thou" attitudes, arguing that they have no responsibility via the media to their funding constituents (e.g. taxpayers and private contributors). At the same time, some organizations simply have not got the means to help because they are overstretched or lack the resources. Or they fail to grasp the importance of public outreach and are at a loss with how to deal with journalists.

A few, too, have burned by the media (e.g. reporters who treat aid organizations as a means for free travel, lodging and food, or who have shown little sensitivity when dealing with patients in clinics or photographing women) and this has left a bad taste. So there needs to be a degree of understanding and give-and-take from both sides.

Embedding

Ever since the ability of reporters, photographers and cameramen to operate on their own in Vietnam, the Americans, British and other Coalition forces have made a pointed effort to control the access of the press.

The British were the first to take the plunge by stringently corralling journalists during the 1982 Falklands War. The Americans and their allies followed suit with the first Iraq war and then with Afghanistan and the second Iraq war.

The concept of having journalists embed has proven one of the most successful initiatives by the US because it fulfils the Pentagon's obligation to be relatively transparent, that is, on its own terms, while granting the media access to military operations. Nevertheless, for journalists who only operate with the military, the approach has been much criticized for encouraging bias with the reporting one-sided. Even if journalists conduct interviews with local populations during their embeds, they always have to do so in the presence of their military minders. No civilian is going to talk openly with armed soldiers present.

Basically, journalists are only allowed to embed on the condition that they sign a contract with the military, and abide by its rules. So you live, sleep, eat, travel and otherwise operate with the troops, but cannot simply take off on their own. The military argue that this is for the journalist's protection. (In 2009, British troops had to rescue a New York Times

reporter after he was taken by the armed opposition in northern Afghanistan. A British soldier was killed in the operation, which did not particularly endear the press with NATO forces). To a point, the military are right – the last thing they want is for a journalist to be killed on their watch - but it also hampers open coverage.

Furthermore, while TV networks operating in government-controlled Libya were always quick to point out that their coverage was not independent, or that the videos produced by 'citizen' journalists in Syria could be not vouched for, few have bothered to point out the constraints of being embedded with NATO in Iraq or Afghanistan. So it really is up to the individual journalists to be transparent and make the effort to put together a balanced picture of the situation.

Remember: Whether dealing with the international and Afghan security forces, or aid agencies, they all have their jobs to do. While the reporter has a job to do, this does not mean that all are obliged to help the media. Be considerate and respectful. It's basic courtesy. It could also save your life.

How to embed with ISAF

Check with the special ISAF Media Registration website: http://www.isaf.nato.int/media-visit-information.html

This will enable you to fill out an embed request form plus a media registration form. You must agree to a media ground rules and "hold harmless" agreement. And the list does run on. You have to bring along all your own equipment, including helmet, flak jacket and so on, and not expect the military to provide this for you. You have to agree to ISAF's terms as to when the reporting you have done can be made public, particularly if there is a sensitive operation in the process. Journalists are not allowed to visit military installations on their own without appropriate clearance by ISAF in Kabul. The ISAF site also offers options on which regional commands are willing to accept embeds. ISAF, however, does not offer transportation to and from Afghanistan, although some journalists, such as the British and Italians, are able to cadge rides off their military.

You need to provide the following:

- Copy of your passport or ID.
- Copy of current press card.

- Letter of accreditation or intent to publish if a freelancer.
- Recent photo.
- Copy of your Afghan visa. (You need to obtain a press visa with the Afghan consulate in your country plus a copy of your registration with the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs once in Kabul)
- Proof of health insurance. This does not have to be a war insurance, but you need to be covered healthwise, including an eventual medevac.

Only after journalists has been accepted for an embed, should they make travel arrangement to Kabul or other points around the country. Remember: travel light as you have to carry your own equipment. Embed registration requests can be emailed directly to the Media Support Center Coordination Team: IJC.EMBEDS@afghan.swa.army.mil

Further contact information:

ISAF Joint Command Kabul, Afghanistan
Duty Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Afghanistan local time

Office Numbers

- Within Afghanistan: 0799-51-3999, then 688-4209 or 4218
- From Europe: 0093-799-51-3999, then 688-4209 or 4218
- From the U.S.: 011-93-799-51-3999, then 688-4209 or 4218
- DSN NIPR: 318-449-9171
- DSN SIPR: 318-449-9049
- Off-Duty Cell (Emergency Only): +93 (0) 794013643

Communications & Information in Afghanistan

International communications have improved dramatically since the start of reconstruction in 2002. If you have not got a satphone, then you can buy or rent a mobile telephone from the AWCC in Kabul with a local sim card. Up to 90 percent of Afghanistan has mobile phone coverage. Before travelling to Afghanistan, journalists can call or email the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) to arrange a briefing by the Public Affairs Officer, who can also put you in touch with other Public Affairs Officers from UN agencies working in Afghanistan, and can help plan itineraries.

Helpful points for working with aid agencies:

- Contact aid agencies in advance: If possible, get in touch with relevant organizations (either their headquarters or their Afghan offices) prior to leaving on assignment (SEE CONTACTS). Let them know when you plan to pass through, which stories you hope to explore and what sort of assistance you are looking for. A good UN or NGO communications officer may have useful ideas on how to develop a story and may be able to provide relevant background materials in advance. Some may also suggest other key sources. Serious aid agencies tend to recognize the need to promote issues (e.g. mother-child health education or human rights) rather than their own activities and are more than willing to help coordinate coverage with other groups.

- Don't abuse your privileges as a journalist: If an aid organization is willing to help organize a trip by providing transport or offering to put you up at one of its field operations, be considerate. For security or funding reasons, only small numbers of aid organizations actually work in places like Herat, Mazar, Kandahar or Faizabad, so check to see who is operating where before heading out from Kabul.
- Both the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR - www.acbar.org) and the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU - www.areu.org) in Kabul have the most up-to-date information on aid groups in the field. Make it clear that you are willing to participate in costs or make a donation. Most aid agencies will probably refuse, but the gesture will be appreciated. It demonstrates your seriousness. Sometimes a small gift, such as chocolate or a bottle or two, can make all the difference to field workers with few luxuries other than a tin of Nescafé or the occasional Mars bar. If the aid agency provides you with a driver and/or a translator, check to see whether you should cover their fees (particularly if someone is hired in) or at least offer a tip.
- In-kind collaboration: For photographers and camera teams, particularly freelance, some aid agencies are willing to provide free on-the-ground logistics in return for courtesy photograph or file footage that they can use for their own public information or promotional purposes.
- Do not take aid workers for granted: They have their own jobs to do. Make sure that your reporting activities (particularly television) do not undermine their work in the field. In the end, it is your personal relationship with aid workers that will determine how effectively you can collaborate with each other. And whether you can work with them again in the future, not just in Afghanistan but conflict and humanitarian crisis zones elsewhere. The aid world is a small one.
- What you can expect inside Afghanistan: UN officials in Afghanistan

are happy to help journalists within reason. They will readily demonstrate the work they are doing and talk about it. Many of them have considerable experience in Afghanistan and are very knowledgeable, but will not talk on record about other issues. They can advise you on how to get the permits you need, but will not be able to do this for you.

- Respect security and other concerns: As a journalist, you can come and go, but the aid agencies need to continue working. Sometimes, it may prove compromising if not dangerous to quote an aid worker, whether an international or a local. There have been incidents whereby aid workers have spoken out against local warlords and have suffered repercussions. Either double-check or use your common sense.

Rules & regulations

From the government point of view, journalists are meant to register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as soon as they arrive, or at least within several days. Many journalists, particularly those coming in on short trips, never bother with this or come in on tourist visas. But government permits and letters-of-introduction often help for passing checkpoints or setting up meetings with commanders in the field. In Kabul, journalists should go to the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with two photographs and a letter of introduction from your organization or a press card for registration. You will need an official exit stamp to leave the country. If you are covering military, you also need to accredit yourself with the ISAF press office.

Travelling to Afghanistan and getting around

Most journalists travel into Afghanistan on regular commercial flights. The UN and PACTEC also have charter flights available, if there are free seats. (SEE KABUL AND REGIONS) Taxis are generally safe and good value. Be careful, however, of the Panjshiri Mafia cartel working with the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation who seek to charge you anywhere from US$ 20 to US$ 50 to drive you into town with an “officially approved” vehicle. Some are no more than thugs who have even threatened potential passengers (or other drivers) with violence unless their vehicles are used. The government has sought to crack down on this following complaints, but it still happens. Either arrange to be picked up or catch a ride with one of the aid agencies. Or simply walk out

of the airport and pick up a regular cab at the gate for a couple of dollars, but this is no longer advisable given the current security situation. Take special care when travelling in the countryside.

Check with the UN on the latest security reports. The southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan have become extremely volatile with the upsurge of attacks against foreigners.

Taxis are available for long trips, as are buses. In many cases, you can also fly between Afghan cities (SEE TRAVEL BY AIR, TRAVEL OVERLAND , SECURITY TIPS).

Visas

Most major Afghan embassies or missions (Paris, Geneva, Brussels, London, Washington, etc.) issue tourist, journalism and aid worker visas.

Maps

Since September 11th 2001, many excellent and highly detailed maps of Afghanistan and the region have become available. It wasn't always this way... One EFG editor used a combination of tactical air pilotage charts, a CIA satellite map and a British 1893 map torn out of a book to travel through northeastern Afghanistan during the early 1980s. The aerial maps covered topography with a few select locations some completely wrong while the old map of the British Raj had more accurate names of villages and rivers albeit with curious spellings. Commercially available maps are detailed below.

For aid workers or those with a specific interest in humanitarian, development or security issues, the first port of call is the Afghanistan Information Management Service (www.aims.org.af). AIMS is part of the UN system, based in Kabul. Its map products, which are being constantly updated and expanded, are available in pdf format and include detailed city plans. AIMS works with the Afghan government's Central Statistics Office and Geodesy and Cartography Office to create computerized maps. This enables a number of different layers to be built up, each with its accompanying database of information sitting 'behind' the visual image. The process is known as GIS (Geographic Information Systems), whereby existing maps are scanned into a computer in a digitized format and then linked to a database of information, ultimately enabling the map to be 'questioned.' The first layer is the baseline map detailing topography, roads and buildings; sub-

sequent layers could cover anything from minefield locations to water resources. Layers are created by a combination of remote-sensed satellite imagery and ground reconnaissance. To view GIS data, see: http://www.aims.org.af/sroot.aspx?seckeyo=44

- The UN's online information resource, ReliefWeb, has an extensive list of maps on Afghanistan which includes maps from government offices and UN agencies. See: http://reliefweb.int/
- The Afghanistan Centre at the University of Kabul currently holds over 500 different maps going right down to a scale of 1:50,000. A full bibliography of ARIC's materials, plus thousands of books, articles and other documents, is available through: http://dupreefoundation.org/acku.htm
- Probably the only available source for maps of smaller Afghan towns and cultural sites is Nancy Hatch Dupree's An Historical Guide to Afghanistan (2nd Edition, 1977) which can be found in bookshops in Peshawar and Kabul.In a wallet at the back of the book is a very clear but rather out of date street map of Kabul which is still useful for general orientation.

US military maps, produced from remote satellite imaging, of the entire region can be tracked down at Stanford's in London. Tactical Air Pilotage Charts (1:500,000) and Operational Navigational Charts (1:1,000,000) give detailed if out-of-date coverage of the whole country.

One of the largest private map collections in the world is held at the Royal Geographical Society in London. It contains one million sheets of maps and charts, 2,600 atlases, 40 globes and 700 gazetteers. It has numerous maps of Afghanistan, and those out of copyright may be photocopied. The Map Room is normally open for consultation by any "serious enquirer.For more details visit: www.rgs.org

The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection of the University of Texas at Austin also has an exceptional selection of maps available online: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/

Also worth mentioning is an unusual atlas, the NATIONAL ATLAS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN Geokart. This represents a joint Afghan-Polish mapping effort, started in 1977. It is the first original collection of thematic maps of the country and includes: 63 colour maps on 36 pages, showing Afghanistan's physical, social and economic geography. Data is from the period 1975-1981. When the Pentagon announced in 2010 that Afghanistan's natural resources could top three trillion dollars, it

acted as if no one knew what this country has to offer. This atlas makes it quite clear – and well before the Pentagon announcement.

Other map suppliers

• Edward Stanford Ltd. (UK), 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9LP, UK. Web: www.stanfords.co.uk

• International Map Trade Association, 2629 Manhattan Avenue, PMB 281, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254-2447, USA. Web: www.maptrade.org

• National Geographic Society (US), 1145 17th Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036-4688, USA. Web: www.nationalgeographic.com

• Map Room, Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers), 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR, UK.

Money & bargaining

Afghanistan once again has a functioning banking system., despite banking scandals. In September 2003, President Karzai approved a law permitting foreign banks to operate in Afghanistan. There are now at least 16 banks operating in the country. US dollar, euro and other accounts are available both to Afghans and foreigners. ATMS are also increasingly common. Although credit cards, mainly VISA, are accepted increasingly by some hotels and guest houses as well as Afghan entrepreneurs, many of whom have transferred their operations from Pakistan or have come from abroad, make sure that you bring enough cash. US dollars, euros and Pakistani rupees are the best. Go for new rather than old or creased notes to avoid fakes or being summarily rejected by the dealer. Larger denomination notes will fetch better rates of exchange. The market in Afghanistan is open rather than black, and currency trading is one of the few 'industries' thriving in the country (SEE ECONOMICS).

Changing money

Ask around for the current exchange rate and the best places to change money. Some dealers (if they trust you) take personal cheques from European and North American banks. The local currency is the Afghani. Prior to the December 2002 currency reform, there were three versions of the Afghani in operation. At early 1998 rates of exchange, you could buy 20,000-25,000 Afghanis for

a dollar. By March 2005, the new currency changed hands for just under 50 Afghanis per dollar. It was more or less the same (50-55 Afghanis per dollar in 2013. If you are travelling via Pakistan, there are international banks in Peshawar and Islamabad which can give you Pak rupees in exchange for travellers' cheques or credit card cash advances.

Bear in mind that if you intend to stay in UN and other guesthouses while in Afghanistan, they will only accept cash payments in dollars, but higher value Euros are increasingly in demand. Select money dealers also function as 'banks' for currency transfers to and from abroad, much like Western Union; but they are costly, often demanding 10-15 percent. Known as the hawala system, transfers can be made immediately and in most major currencies. Your contact must pay US dollars, pounds sterling or euros to a currency representative abroad (a recent example was an Afghan fish 'n' chip shop in Islington), and the same amount, minus the commission, is made available to you in Kabul or Jalalabad.

Bargaining

As a foreigner, it is worth bargaining over luxury items such as carpets, glass or jewellery. Try the usual tricks initial enthusiasm, mock horror at the exorbitant price, feigned disinterest, walkout and reluctant return, large amounts of green tea and good humour and you should be able to knock between a third and two thirds off the asking price, depending how ruthless you are feeling. Blue glass sellers in Herat will demand two dollars per glass or vase but will come down to one dollar or 50 cents if pushed.

Even with the 2002 currency reform, most entrepreneurs, particularly those dealing with artefacts, still prefer to be paid in dollars or euros. Most ordinary Afghans shopkeepers, however, will accept local currency. Overall, the cost of living in Kabul and other cities is high and many support large families, often as the sole money earner. So when it comes to buying non-luxury goods, be generous and pay the asking price rather than arguing over a few cents which local traders need far more than you do. If you feel it is a matter of pride to bargain hard, pay the price agreed and but then, graciously with a knowing wink, offer a small baksheesh or tip for their good services. It is all part of cultivating good local relations.

Begging

The giving of alms to beggars is an acceptable and necessary facet of the Muslim faith. However, the combination of urban drift, unemployment, disability and poverty which has arisen from nearly 35 years of war has given rise to many more beggars on the streets. There is now extreme poverty with slums on the outskirts of most towns. This is aggravated in cities such as Kabul and Herat where numerous returnees have now migrated. Many widows, too, are dependent on their own meagre resources for survival, resulting in women begging for money in burqas. Lack of work and poor schooling force mothers to send their children out onto the streets to beg, especially in the NGO and UN quarters of town, such as Wazir Akbar Khan in Kabul. Some children will make an effort to sell you something or perform a service, such as shoe-cleaning or guarding your vehicle, in return for a few Afghanis. Prostitution is on the rise involving both women and children. (SEE CHILDREN). Numerous children, too, sell newspapers and magazines, but many tend to be orphans operating in a coordinated manner with the Terre des Hommes orphanage in Kabul, so they are receiving a monetary return as well as food, shelter and education provided by the NGO.

Whether you should or should not give money to beggars is a difficult question, for which each visitor must make a personal decision. Some feel that to give money only encourages dependency on handouts precisely the situation that most aid agencies are trying to get away from in their programmes. They say that Westerners who hand out cash only encourage more and more aggressive begging. Others argue that a handful of Afghanis mean nothing to an expatriate but a great deal to an Afghan, although this itself sounds patronizing. One solution is to give money to women or handicapped individuals but not to children. Some experienced aid workers have suggested that time and attention are more important than money. If the coast is clear, speak to the women who beg and let them know that you understand their plight. Remind them why you are there and what you are doing to help. Banter and joke with the children who beg, and they will often forget about asking for money. Or donate to NGOs dealing with street children and widows. You can probably help these people more by supporting aid groups that provide appropriate assistance to children, widows and handicapped. Job-creation and food-for-work programmes can help alleviate begging and aid dependency.

Baksheesh

As in many developing countries, baksheesh can be regarded as a tip to a hotel porter or a taxi driver. But in Afghanistan, baksheesh is also the word for bribery (or extortion) to people in positions of influence such as a government official, policeman or a fighter cradling a kalashnikov. It is not advisable to palm government officials. Nevertheless, most Afghans are not averse to receiving some Afghanis or dollars in return for 'services' rendered. Many have to survive on less than 40-50 US dollars a month. Baksheesh, however, is definitely on the rise and in an increasingly ugly manner that is undermining recovery. There used to be a taxi mafia operating at the airport, but this appears to have been cleared. Nevertheless, drivers will still try and hit newcomers with absurd charges of US$ 50 or more into town, a trip that normally costs 5-6 dollars with an ordinary taxi. Passport officials also regularly push for bribes from travellers, coming and going, often claiming visa discrepancies. The Ministry of Interior, notably the police, are also openly corrupt demanding bribes for not giving a traffic ticket, questioning one's papers or safe passage.

Overall, baksheesh is up to you. As a form of bribery, however, it is not necessary. It can even be insulting to people with a deep tradition of hospitality even given that so many people are without jobs. You may be able to get round a stubborn or obstructive official by reminding him that you are a guest in their country! Patience, banter and studied ignorance of what is being suggested are often the best ways of getting things done. Numerous experienced journalists and aid workers who have worked in Afghanistan since the early days of the war have never been obliged to pay bribes, despite sometimes determined demands by corrupt individuals. More often than not, the matter was turned into a joke (amid slight embarrassment) when it was realized that no bribes would be forthcoming.

Of course, there are always bad eggs, usually the higher up the ladder you go. The Peshawar-based resistance parties during the Soviet-Afghan war were notoriously corrupt as were many commanders, Pakistani government officials and others benefiting from the aid bandwagon. Even the humanitarian agencies were sometimes forced to pay for the honour of dispatching relief caravans into Afghanistan. Prior to the Taliban, numerous ad hoc checkpoints demanding 'tolls' (normally not from foreigners) used to abound along the main roads leading to Kabul and other

main towns. These came to an end under the Taliban in their zones of control.

Today, corruption is rampant once again in the government with some ministers and their cohorts deeply involved in using their positions to aid and abet their own business activities. The same goes for various warlords, police chiefs and others. Offices, such as the Ministry of Interior, whose intimidation and thuggishness have become a serious problem, particularly for Afghans, but also foreigners. Other ministries demand hefty bribes from companies seeking to set up business. Judges, too, are renowned for their corrupton, hence the preference for ordinary Afghans, including those working for the government, to seek out Taliban-sanctioned Sharia judges. The justice is usually quick and fair, even if sometimes brutal. And it is not as costly. Despite current efforts to reform the judiciary, criminals cases and civil disputes are usually resolved according to he who pays most, wins.

Since the end of the Taliban era, however, local and regional warlords in the provinces, as well as police in the Afghan capital, are once again imposing roadblocks and checkpoints as a means of obtaining quick cash. This resurgence of unofficial road tolls is one reason why increasing numbers of Afghans are openly voicing a longing for the security imposed by the Taliban where such thieving was not permitted at risk of dire punishment.

Having said all this…the fatal mistake the British made, prior to their disastrous retreat from Kabul in January 1842, was to stop paying off the local tribal commanders between the capital and the British garrison at Jalalabad. Is there a difference between a payment for loyalty and a bribe? Best bear in mind the old adage: "You can always rent an Afghan but you can never buy one."

Photography & video

Taking photographs or filming in Afghanistan has never proved the easiest of tasks, but that is no reason to be put off. The arrival of the Taliban made matters far more difficult but not impossible. Since their departure in the autumn of 2001, things have become a lot easier. Most Afghan men and children seem quite happy to have their photographs taken. During one tea stop at a chaikhana at Sarobi along the road from Kabul to Jalalabad, where insurgent – and bandit - influences remain strong, patrons enthusiastically asked for their photographs to be taken. Photoshops have

sprung up left and right (particularly near Passport Lane in Kabul) and the photographing and videoing of weddings and other occasions have now become the norm again. The ubiquitous use of mobile phones with cameras has also revolutionized the approach toward photography. Even if many still not associate a phone as being the same thing as a professional camera.
Nevertheless, as before, working with a camera requires a combination of persistence, wit, imagination and inordinate amounts of patience (SEE JOURNALISM, MEDIA).

An extraordinary array of photo-essays and television documentaries have emerged over the past 35 years of war about Afghanistan, many of them produced under extremely hazardous conditions, and not just in frontline war zones. And many excellent reportages and films, including fiction, are being shot and produced by highly professional Afghans, resulting in the gradual emergence of the country's own cinema industry. Multi-media projects are also increasingly becoming the norm. (SEE KABUL AT WORK)

So, how to take photographs… Afghan males enjoy their vanity and we have encountered few, particularly among the fighters (including the Taliban), who dislike having their photographs taken. "Ax, ax" ("picture, picture") is often the most common request when a camera is produced, particularly if there is a gun to show off, or a beautiful park setting at hand. For many Afghans, there is nothing like a portrait of friends with flowers or at a picnic.

When the Taliban first came onto the scene in 1994, they immediately banned films and television. They also forbade the photographing of living creatures. Film teams encountered similar obstacles during the 1980s and early 1990s in areas where fundamentalist groups operated, such as those backed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami or Arab Wahhabi. Journalists have been threatened, shot at and murdered because of their efforts to film. Photographers have also encountered problems in Hazara areas in the central highlands, where Iranian Shi'a influences are strong. However, if you travel with one of their people, such as Hazara guide, they can be extremely friendly and hospitable. Arriving with an aid vehicle accompanied by a Tajik or Pushtun guide may cause suspicion. During the Taliban era, news organizations, such as the BBC, were still able to film in heavily Talib areas.

Most photographers and cameramen we interviewed say film-

ing is only a problem in certain areas where local people are suspicious or conservative, such as the southern or eastern border regions, including Nuristan. Even Afghan cameramen have had boys throwing stones or men threatening to get their guns if they felt that their women are being filmed. As one leading journalist noted, while the Taliban of the 1990s may have been difficult, they were not invariably hostile. Nor were their rules always hard and fast; out of the capital, one could always find some reasonable individuals among their ranks. In one encounter with by a British journalist with a a Talib official, it was explained that the notion of creating an idolatrous graven image related only to the face. If one pictured him down to the waist, this would not constitute a "graven image" (SEE BOX).

Today, many Pushtuns from the south, where the Taliban today have their principal support, are still very sensitive to the intrusion of the camera, but experiences vary widely. It helps to have local contacts, such as respected aid agencies, to break the ice. Many organizations have established their own friendly relations with local people who are ready to help or who realize the importance of some good television footage over the international airwaves. Filming farming activities, for example, is one way of way of breaking the barrier. Someone farms, including women, working in the fields do not constitute an intrusion. The same goes for rural clinics or local entrepreneurial activities. Afghans are proud of what they have achieved, so they are all the more delighted to show off. And if a zealous Islamist appears on the scene, as they inevitably do, wait till he leaves or get someone to distract him. But even then, it doesn't always quite work that way.

As one veteran cameraman, who has filmed in most parts of the country, notes: "You just play it by ear. If they look hostile, then you talk with them and explain what you're doing. Usually they're quite sympathetic. But then the problem is that they all want to be filmed." It also helps to address rural Pushtuns in Pashto rather than Dari. One possible rule of thumb is that it is often easier to film in the non-Pushtun areas, such as among Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north, than in the eastern border zones with Pakistan, where Pushtun tribesmen dominate.

Perhaps one of the biggest frustrations is filming where children are present, such as in refugee camps or villages. Hordes of shouting, squealing youngsters will suddenly appear out of nowhere jostling for position in front of the camera lens. More often than not, it becomes impossible to work. Good luck to anyone

trying to hold them back. Usually the best approach is simply to photograph as quickly and as surreptitiously as you can. One camera team filming in Kabul during the fighting in 1994 had armed soldiers keep the children back so that the cameraman could film normal "life under siege" in the bazaar. Unfortunately, when the shopkeepers saw armed men chasing the children, they thought a new attack was in the offing and immediately closed their shops producing instantly abandoned streets. By 2013, the small size of professional quality cameras has made it relatively easy to sneak shots. Just pretend to be doing something else or pointedly look in the other direction while filming.

Women and photography

It is a different situation among Afghan women. It is best to avoid openly photographing women as this may be considered highly offensive and un- Islamic, particularly in the more conservative Pushtun areas. Usually, it is the men who object the most. If you fail to ask their consent and try filming women working in the fields or gliding through the bazaars in their chadors, they will immediately berate you and an ugly situation could ensue. Filming women is particularly difficult at close quarters for male cameramen. In 1994 one EFG editor had little problem, as a male journalist, in photographing widows in Kabul and Pakistani refugee camps, once permission had been obtained. In 2003, foreign journalists visiting central Hazarajat a normally conservative Shi'a area were surprised by one particular woman washing dishes by the Helmand River calling out to them to join her family for tea and then quite happily having her picture taken while her husband looked on. By 2010, both Afghan and expatriate photographers said they were able to shoot women much more easily, but usually only inside compounds or in areas where they were not too public. And usually, too, only if part of an activity, such as weaving or attending training classes. Some of the women even insisted on it.

Over the years, a number of foreign women photographers and filmmakers have managed to produce some excellent footage of Afghan women and their surroundings. To do so, they infiltrated circles of Afghan women and obtained their trust. Female aid workers, too, have succeeded in photographing women while working with them out of the direct glare of Afghan men. It is often easier to film women in 'humanitarian' surroundings such as

clinics or food distribution centres, where they become part of the overall story and are not considered principal subjects. Some camera teams have relied on hidden cameras although usually with the connivance of the Afghan women with whom they are working.

Nevertheless, discretion is crucial and asking permission helps. One CNN crew visiting Kabul in September 1997 barged into a female hospital ward and began filming without permission. This was sheer stupidity and caused an entire delegation of visiting journalists and aid representatives, including the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, Emma Bonino, to be detained at gunpoint for three hours. A more experienced crew might have got away with it by being somewhat less obtrusive. At the same time, even discretion may achieve little or nothing, so it's your call. But remember that heavy-handed behaviour often results in the Afghans accompanying you being more severely treated (and even beaten) than the Westerners. It also makes life for the resident correspondents and aid workers much more difficult after the offending journalists have gone home.

With the collapse of the Talib regime, Afghans themselves have been busy making their own films, often funded by international aid organizations to create public awareness to particular issues. The first such film (produced in 2002) was in fact supported by the World Health Organization in order to sensitize men of the need to bring their pregnant wives to a doctor as soon as the first signs of a complication became apparent, and not wait. Other films have focused on elections, human rights and constitutional issues, such as Justice at Work (2004). By 2005, at least three international production groups were in the process of developing feature films or docu-dramas to be shot in Afghanistan. (SEE THE EFG TO AFGHANISTAN WEBSITE FOR THE LATEST FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECTS. Web: www.efgafghan.com)

Advice for photographers in Afghanistan:

- Use common sense and discretion when photographing. Try and gauge what the mood is.
- If you can't be discreet (or surreptitious as the case may be), ask the permission of people you would like to photograph. Get them into conversation first and explain what you are doing. Then see if it is all right to take photographs.
- Avoid photographing military installations and potential targets (airports, bridges, government buildings etc.) unless you are accompanied by Afghans who know the area – or you are with ISAF - and are aware

of what is or is not acceptable. In Pakistan, for example, it is strictly forbidden to photograph anything strategic, be it a hydroelectric dam or an historic Moghul fort. Ancient fortresses may be documented in full detail in the museums, but they still seem to be considered military secrets.

• Learn to shoot from the hip if you can't point your camera directly at what you want. Or pretend to be doing something else. Small digital or video cameras are being used increasingly by professionals because they are discreet and produce good quality coverage. Many people do not take such small cameras seriously, so you can be discreet and film to your heart's content.

• Cover your red recording light if filming clandestinely. Many Afghans, particularly in towns, are aware of how video-cams work.

• If you are with a fellow journalist or companion, have one of you do all the talking while the other quietly gets on with filming or taking photographs.

• Carry an instant printing Polaroid-style camera to give away photographs on the spot. An alternative is a mini Polaroid "Zinc" printer. Or show your digital screen to those you are photographing. This is the best way of breaking down barriers. Even the most hardened, anti-camera fundamentalist or conservative farmer may soften if he can see his portrait immediately.

Polaroid's miniature "PoGo"printer uses instant "zinc" paper and works from a cell phone

Taliban logic: the Pushtun psyche

By Jonathan Walter

“Photography is impossible in this city”, assured the Kandahar field director of Médecins Sans Frontières. It was 1997 and, with the roads awash with black-turbaned Taliban, I could understand his point. But why should it matter if I just stuck to inanimate objects like mosques and mausoleums? My local Afghan guide recommended that we visit the Department of Foreign Affairs to get a permit. I needed to renew my visa anyway so I agreed to go along. We were ushered into a small office where a delicate young Taliban official sat behind a desk, beside a much older, burlier man. The former dealt with photo permits, the latter with visas.

The Taliban wore a shimmering white shalwar kameez with gold trimming and an embroidered waistcoat. Beneath a neat little cap peeped a carefully coiffured bob-style haircut, and he was sporting both wispy beard and black eyeliner. He looked more like an haute couture fashion model than a fundamentalist fighter. But his indoctrination shone through as he signed and stamped the permit: “Make sure you do not snap any living creatures,” he said vacantly. Meanwhile the burly Afghan obviously an official who had worked in the office long before the Taliban movement was ever heard of looked on with a mixture of disdain and disbelief.

“For your visa renewal,” he barked, “we require two passport size photographs.” I looked astonished, but couldn’t resist a quick smirk in the direction of the talib. He grinned back at me the grin of a man on whom logic has only the most tenuous hold. “You may have your photo taken here in Kandahar,” added the burly one, “there are plenty of studios in the bazaar.”

"New home, new life"
By Jonathan Walter

The BBC World Service first began broadcasting educational dramas in Persian and Pashto in the late 1980s. The success of these led to the formation of the BBC Afghan Education Drama Project (AED) and the launching in 1994 of its radio soap opera "New Home, New Life", which now enjoys an enormous listenership. According to an independent survey on behalf of the BBC in 2010, the programme was reaching 39 percent of Afghan adults. During the days prior to television, it was estimated at between 70-80 percent. Probably the best known radio show in Afghanistan today, New Home, New Life is broadcast three times a week in Dari and three times a week in Pushto on the BBC World Service and on partner stations via the Internews Tanin network and Government Education Radio and Television (ERTV). The programme became known for reflecting real life and was based on the BBC's most successful British radio programme, The Archers, which was originally an agricultural show and still runs today with a broad and highly loyal audience.

Up to 80 themes ranging from landmine awareness, cultural heritage and drug production to personal hygiene, safe birthing practices and environmental issues have been addressed through the medium of an entertaining radio drama. Topics are discussed at monthly consultations with aid agency representatives. Each three episodes are repeated three times, including an omnibus edition specially aimed at women and timed to coincide with Friday prayers when their husbands are at the mosque.

The broadcasts are reinforced by a monthly cartoon magazine which includes a section entitled "Where there is no school", aimed at teaching basic reading and writing skills.

Field-based partnerships with local NGOs reinforce the messages of the radio drama by compiling topical individual storylines and producing educational songs. A listener from Khost wrote in to say: "We have learnt lessons from the drama. For example, if someone is killed, then giving a girl away to atone for the deed is wrong. Before, when we saw a mine we diffused it ourselves, but now we inform the demining office.

If sometimes there is a dispute now we settle conflicts by discussion [jirga]." Throughout much of Afghanistan "New Home, New Life" has become compulsory listening, and provokes considerable village discussion and uncannily realistic reactions. When one of its most popular characters, Khair Mohammed,was killed by a stray bullet, people in Chaman

held condolence meetings to mourn his death.

Some of the international aid agencies, whether UN organizations such as UNHCR or UNICEF or NGOs ranging from the Swedish Committee to Afghanistan to Save the Children can still help journalists get out into the "real" Afghanistan. Depending on the story (e.g. women's health in rural areas or environmental devastation), there are scores of local and international aid groups capable and willing to assist serious journalists, particularly if their reporting relates to the organization's own particular activities.

Good publicity is good for funding. Aid agencies also have a responsibility to be transparent to their donors and the public-at-large, including Afghans themselves, so this is where a journalist can play a role. Certain organizations, however, have developed extremely arrogant "holier-than-thou" attitudes, arguing that they have no responsibility via the media to their funding constituents (e.g. taxpayers and private contributors). At the same time, some organizations simply have not got the means to help because they are overstretched or lack the resources. Or they fail to grasp the importance of public outreach and are at a loss with how to deal with journalists.

A few, too, have been burned by the media (e.g. reporters who treat aid organizations as a means for free travel, lodging and food, or who have shown little sensitivity when dealing with patients in clinics or photographing women) and this has left a bad taste. So there needs to be a degree of understanding and give-and-take from both sides.

SECURITY

Current Situation

Despite the expanded presence of NATO-led ISAF forces, Afghanistan became even more dangerous after the fall of the Taliban. By June 2003, one third of the country mainly in the south and east was considered too dangerous for UN aid and political personnel. In contrast, under the Taliban, aid agencies were able to operate in around 80 percent of the country. Today, however, well over 70 percent of the country is considered to be insecure, primarily because of the insurgency. But other security aspects remain, whether disputes between rival villages over resources, such as water or timber, or banditry. Drug eradication policies by the United States and Britain based heavily on military force also threatened to destabilize the country. As Coalition troops pull out leading up to 2014 and beyond, we can expect more areas to fall on insurgent control. (SEE SECURITY INFOBRIEF).

Personal security, therefore, continues to depend largely on personal alertness and behaviour. The south and east of the country remain the most dangerous since these provinces are vulnerable to hit-and-run attacks from Taliban militants or anti-government elements hiding in tribal areas astride the Pakistani/Afghan border. IEDs and suicide attacks also represent a horrendous prob-

lem. The road from Kandahar to Ghazni and the provinces of Paktia, Paktika and Khost remain notoriously dangerous.

The aid agencies find it increasingly more dangerous to operate. Tragic events in recent years remain a grim reminder of what can happen. In spring 2003, an expatriate Red Cross delegate and an Italian tourist were executed in separate incidents near Kandahar reportedly by the Taliban. Then, in November 2003, an expatriate working for UNHCR was shot at point blank range in broad daylight in Ghazni bazaar.The murder sent shock waves through the aid community, with ACBAR an umbrella organization representing over 90 national and international NGOs citing the killing as "a critical indicator of the unacceptably dangerous security situation faced by the assistance community in the south-east and south of Afghanistan." According to the director of a leading Danish NGO, the attack "indicates a change in tactics by those seeking to force us out". Combined with bomb attacks on aid offices in Kabul and Kandahar, the aim of the Taliban appears to be to force aid agencies to abandon the region, leaving the stage clear for cultivating opium and a return to hardline Islamic rule. However, attacks against aid workers are also believed to be the work of rogue elements within the government. Five MSF aid workers killed in the summer of 2004 are thought to have been the victims of a local police chief who, by 2013, had yet to be arrested. The kidnapping of three UN electoral monitors in the autumn of 2004 may have been the work of one particular ministry while the execution-style shooting of a British consultant in March, 2005, could have been an inside job involving one of the ministries. Several months earlier, he had had a run-in with the Ministry of Interior and was warned to leave. He quit the country, but later returned only to be murdered. In late spring, 2013, a suicide bomber attacked the ICRC office in Jalalabad resulting in the death of a female expatriate aid worker. Across the country, robbery, murder and persecution of Afghan ethnic minorities are commonplace.

Aid agency staff became increasingly concerned that the boundaries between impartial humanitarian workers and military belligerents were becoming dangerously blurred. This was aggravated by the trend from 2003 onwards of establishing civil-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in key regional cities, with a mixed mandate for security and reconstruction. The humanitarian agencies saw this as undermining the neutrality and independence of aid workers and to associate them, in

the minds of Afghans, with Coalition Forces making war on the Taliban and al Qa'eda. This fear appeared to be borne out by a statement from a Taliban spokesman in Spinboldak: "Most of the foreigners working in our country are American agents and have no sympathy for Afghanistan. We will not spare them" (reported in The Times, London, 19 November 2003). By 2013, this attitude appeared not to have changed.

Another deadly legacy of the war has been the presence in Afghan soil of millions of landmines and large quantities of unexploded ordnance (UXO) left behind from so many years of war. These show no respect for faction, nationality or religious denomination. Twice, while on assignment in Afghanistan, EFG editor Edward Girardet travelled with groups where one individual inadvertently left the path only to step on a mine. What may look like an idyllic pastoral scene with gurgling irrigation canals, green pastures, and fruit-laden orchards may in fact be a minefield. While numerous landmines have been removed since the end of the 1980s, they remain a hazard, particularly in off-the-road rural areas.

Nevertheless, the great importance Afghans attach to hospitality and the protection of guests can enhance the personal security of travellers and visitors as long as you are friends with the right side! If you can learn a few words and greetings in Dari and Pashto, and pick up some of the local gestures and ways of behaving, you will feel much more secure around Afghans (SEE DARI & PASHTO PHRASEBOOK and TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS).

The following security tips are based on the personal experience of EFG editors, interviews with journalists and NGO staff, and advice provided by UN security manuals.

Before entering Afghanistan:

- Make sure you receive the correct immunizations prior to visiting Afghanistan. Maintain any antimalarial regime, and always carry oral rehydration salts (ORS) in your bag.
- Make up a survival belt containing a basic first aid kit, shell dressing, penknife, string, space blanket, poncho, biro, notebook and your personal documents. If you lose everything else, you have at least got this.
- Ensure you are sufficiently insured before travelling out to Afghanistan. Check with insurers that the threat of "war and kin-

dred risks" does not invalidate your policy. Make sure you are covered for possible loss of limb or life through landmine damage (SEE INSURANCE).

Consider going on a personal security course, for example the 'Surviving Hostile Regions' course offered by ex-SAS soldiers through UK-based company AKE (SEE INSURANCE).

On arrival in-country

- Attend a security briefings held by UNDSS officers at the UNDP's headquarters in Kabul.
- Attend a landmine and UXO awareness briefing (through the UN's Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan or Handicap International). Become familiar with different types of mines, what 'cluster bombs' look like and indicatiors and markings for minefields, as well as what to do in a mine casualty situation.
- Stay constantly alert to the threat of landmines and UXO. Do not step off main roads onto verges or into fields, either in towns or rural areas. Do not take "short-cuts" when travelling by road. Stones painted red denote mined areas.
- Do not walk off the road into the bushes for a leak!
- Never walk alone through unknown city/village streets. Find a local guide or driver.
- Minimize your time spent in bazaars and crowded areas.
- Be aware of the curfew time in each destination you visit and stick to it.
- Dress and behave in a way sensitive to the local culture and religion (SEE CLOTHING & KIT and TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS).
- Avoid asking indiscreet questions or discussing religion and politics in public. Keep well informed of events and raise your level of security awareness accordingly. Over 50per cent of security incidents occur during travel and most occur after dark. So prepare and plan your work accordingly.

REMEMBER: SECURITY IS A STATE OF MIND

- Avoid wearing or carrying valuable items in public, e.g. gold chains, cameras etc.
- Always carry a torch (flashlight), personal identification and a minimal amount of money on you at all times.
- If an incident occurs while you are away from your office or residence, radio your headquarters and move immediately to the nearest international agency building. Where possible, inform the UN Area Security Coordinator (ASC) of the situation (SEE

TELECOMMUNICATIONS & RADIO).

- If you are hijacked or robbed, do not resist. Stay calm, act confidently and cooperate (within reason).
- Remain constantly alert to any changes in the situation where you are working.
- Do not take alcohol on any mission at any time.
- Do not promise local people anything you cannot deliver.
- Do not handle or fire weapons. .
- Do not use or carry illicit drugs.
- Do not buy any obviously looted historical items which may be offered to you.
- Ensure you travel with your passport and necessary visas on you at all times.
- Be aware of the location of the nearest hospitals and medical posts.
- Always stay well-informed. Accurate information can enhance your safety, as long as you increase your security awareness accordingly.
- Be very careful where you speak to Afghan women, and take the advice of experienced aid workers.

Road travel

Check for the latest security information on travel around Afghanistan with UNDSS. The UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS) publishes maps of high-risk areas. If you are stopped at a checkpoint, it is important to defuse any tension in the situation as soon as possible.

Do not be arrogant or insistent about your "rights of passage," and do not force the guard to lose face. Listen before speaking. Try to find common ground. Bring in some humour practise your Dari or Pashto. Although you should generally stay inside your vehicle, smile and, if you have to get out, shake hands or touch the guard gently on the shoulder. Afghan men are very tactile, especially in Kandahar!

When travelling by car there are some basic rules to remember:

- Never drive off-road onto verges or along short-cuts they may be mined.
- Be vigilant about IEDs, such as broken asphalt or surfaces suggesting that the road has been tampered with.
- Never drive alone. Use a trust-worthy local driver.
- When travelling by road, take two vehicles, especially at night.

- Take an HF or VHF radio to inform your headquarters of your departure, proposed route and arrival. Also a satphone.
- Keep cameras, computers and other valuable items hidden from view at checkpoints.
- Keep the windows wound up and the doors locked, especially after dark.
- If you are travelling from one town to another, try not to leave late. Best travel before 1400 hours.
- Checkpoints: Police or local security forces sometimes collaborate with the insurgents for their own protection, particularly later during the day when traffic diminishes. Approach checkpoints, even with uniformed personnel, cautiously. Try and ascertain that they are indeed legitimate police.
- Never jump a checkpoint: slow down, turn on the cabin lights (if you are travelling at night), chat to the guard, and always be patient and cooperative if searched.
- Never raise your voice or get into an argument at a checkpoint.
- Let your Afghan colleagues or driver talk with checkpoint guards first.
- Do not get out of your vehicle at checkpoints and keep the doors locked.
- Do not overtake military convoys. They are concerned about suicide bombers and may shoot.
- Never stay out after curfew if one is imposed.
- Avoid driving after dark in rural areas.
- Log in any long journeys with the local UN/ACBAR office.
- Vary your routes to and from the office/residence as much as possible.
- Do not leave vehicles unattended.
- Keep your fuel tanks full at all times.
- Carry basic spare parts, tools, tyres, torches, fire extinguishers, water and first-aid kit in your vehicle at all times.
- Reverse your vehicle into your compound at night in case you need to make a quick exit.
- Take advice on where you may need armed escorts or unarmed guides.
- If you are being hijacked, try to radio your base station without the hijackers noticing.

WARNING: MINES AND IEDs ARE DESIGNED TO BE INVISIBLE...

• Do not attempt to rescue vehicles or goods from bandits. Notify ISAF or the Afghan security forces.

• If driving from Peshawar to the Afghan border at Torkham remember to get a tribal agencies permit. On the return journey pick up an armed escort at the Pakistani border post. (Since 2010,

Disarming an IED

foreigners have been prohibited by the Pakistani authorities to travel by road through the Khyber Pass to the Afghan border).

• Be careful of what you say in front of any Afghan drivers or passengers.

• Divide large amounts of money up between yourself and your colleagues.

• Travel in inconspicuous vehicles.

Walking and cycling

Some experienced aid workers like to get around by bicycle or on foot. If you have the time this can be extremely rewarding, but always bear in mind the security threat.

• Never walk or cycle "off the beaten track" unless accompanied by trusted locals. If they avoid certain places, so should you.

• Travel in pairs and/or take a local guide.

• If as a women you are "touched-up", or worse still beaten, in

the bazaar or on the street, then make a scene by shouting or screaming. Often the offending persons will take fright if other passers-by start noticing the commotion.

Emergencies

Emergencies involving international aid workers, such as attacks against UN guesthouses or offices are frequent occurrences. It is also common to experience a "shutdown" with UN and other aid personnel ordered to remain in their compounds because of security threats. In April, 2011, the UNAMA compound in Mazar-e-Sharif was attacked by demonstrators, who killed seven foreigners, notably three UN and four Nepalese security contractors.

In May, 2013, armed militants and suicide bombers assaulted a guesthouse of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) followed by another attack in June against the ICRC in Jalalabad.

Lessons learned are crucial for dealing with such incidents. One of the most notorious evacuations was from Mazar-e-Sharif during the fighting in May and September 1997. A BBC TV team came under heavy criticism from the UN for keeping an evacuation convoy waiting while they were out getting last-minute shots. The UN in turn was criticized for assembling such a large and obvious convoy of expensive white vehicles and international staff together in a public place, while armed factions were on the loose. In the September evacuation, many NGO personnel decided to entrust themselves to ICRC rather than the UN.

Some journalists argue that the best course of action in an emergency is to seek out the local Afghan commander who, if he takes you in as his guest, will offer you protection as a matter of honour. The point is that whatever course of action you decide on, you should make your decision early and stick by it. The UN and ICRC have different procedures for dealing with emergencies, depending on their sense of the threat level. These procedures can involve increasingly drastic action such as the evacuation of all non-essential personnel. If you want UN or ICRC protection then you must inform them ahead of time and then play by their rules. Do not count on these organizations for evacuation at the last minute, if you have not made advance arrangements.

Some basic rules in an emergency:

- In a potential emergency, check that your information is ac-

curate and do not overreact. Listen to the BBC, VOA and other international broadcasters on a regular basis. And check with local journalists.

- Consult with the ICRC Delegate and UN Regional Representative for evacuation plans. Once you have committed yourself to the care of the UN or ICRC, obey their orders.
- The UN has bunkers at Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar, designed to protect against rockets and artillery shelling. Non-UN personnel may use them in time of emergency, subject to space. Contact the local UN Area Security Coordinator for details.
- If your location is being shelled or rocketed and you cannot reach a UN bunker, take shelter under the staircase or in the basement of your house, and stay away from windows.

- If in an active war zone, sleep with your boots on and keep a small emergency pack by your side at all times with extra clothes, a space blanket, some rations, a first aid kit, a shortwave transistor radio and, if possible a satphone. You need to be able to leave on the spur of the moment.
- Do not go outside during firefights. What goes up, must come down. People have been injured or killed by stray bullets and shrapnel.
- In a medical emergency, head to the nearest ICRC, medical NGO or UN office. There are ICRC-supported hospitals with surgical units in Kabul (Karte Seh and Wazir Akbar Khan hospitals),

Jalalabad, Ghazni and Kandahar (Mirwais hospital). The ICRC treats all medical emergency cases regardless of nationality.

Loss of personal possessions

- If moving to Afghanistan to live, ensure that you provide your main office with a detailed inventory of personal possessions to facilitate reimbursement in case of loss or destruction.
- If you are robbed of your passport or any possessions, report the incident immediately to the UN, ACBAR or your diplomatic mission. Most donor governments now have embassies in Kabul.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping has been increasingly widespread in Afghanistan and Pakistan in recent years. In autumn, 2004, three expatriate UN election monitors were kidnapped in broad daylight by armed men in uniform. Ultimately freed, they may have been the victims of an inside job. To minimize the threat of kidnaping:

- Make sure that your presence in-country is known by the regional UN office, ACBAR, an NGO office or media organization, so that if you go missing someone will notice.
- Keep a low profile, especially after normal working hours.
- When entering and leaving your house and office, check for suspicious vehicles or individuals. Potential kidnappers will often watch a house for several days to check up on your movements. If in doubt, stay at home or drive past the house, and report anything suspicious to ISAF or the UN.
- Leading up to 2014 and beyond, the Afghan military and police are increasingly assuming responsibility for the security of your country. Sadly, however, this does not mean that all Afghan security personnel can be trusted. They may be working for several masters: the government, insurgents, warlords, criminal gangs and traffickers…
- Request ID of any official claiming to be Afghan police or army, even in uniform. They are required to identify themselves properly.
- Randomely alternate your route between home and office when possible.Avoid repeating patterns.
- Watch out for any vehicles which may be following you. If you think you are, to the nearest UN/NGO office, checkpost or village (if on mission). Do not let the other vehicle overtake you.
- Avoid driving or walking alone. Lone people are the easiest

targets.
• Travel in pairs or take a guide. Always carry a hand-held radio with you.
• Take advice on what sort of dress is appropriate. Do not try to disguise yourself as an Afghan, but try not to be too distinctive either.
• When answering the door or gate to your house, check who the caller is before you open the door. Look from an upstairs room if no windows are near the door/gate.
• If in the worst case kidnappers try to abduct you at gunpoint, do not resist. They may shoot you!

Suggestions if you are abducted:

• Cooperate with your captors (to the minimum extent), but do not volunteer money, information or other assistance.
• Avoid staring directly at your captors, but try to get a good mental picture of their faces and other physical attributes.
• Normally, you try and escape within 24 hours. However, do not make any attempts unless you are certain of success. If recaptured, your situation may prove far worse.
• Observe your kidnap location and routes to it, if possible.
• Talk to your captors, if appropriate. Human contact sometimes reduces the risk of violence, but do not be too friendly or submissive as this may only provoke them.
• Try to appear strong and impassive, even if you are feeling terrified.
• Do not display your emotions or react to your captors' provocations.
• Eat and drink as much as possible, even if stress takes away your appetite. You need to maintain your strength.
• Stay mentally alert by getting as much sleep as permitted, and use "mental exercises" to take your mind off the immediate situation.

Remember: Kidnappers are often ruthless and desperate people, but they have usually planned the abduction well. In the majority of cases, they will try for 'soft' or easy targets first. Your personal awareness and habits can reduce the likelihood of your being considered a 'soft' target for kidnapping.

Landmine and UXO awareness

This section is adapted from advice contained in the UN Sum-

mary of Security Procedures in Afghanistan (SSP)

Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, despite major headway over the past two decades in the removal of these devastating explosives. Several millions of landmines and unexploded ammunition may still remain concealed in fields, road verges, water canals and the rubble of ruined buildings. The best personal defence against this threat is to be able to recognize which areas are likely to be mined, and to avoid taking unnecessary risks.

Types of exploding devices

Landmines come in two types: anti-personnel and anti-tank mines.

Antipersonnel mines are designed to maim rather than to kill. Typical injuries are the loss of one or more limbs either below or above the knee/elbow.

Anti-tank mines are designed to destroy a fully-armoured battle tank and are enormously dangerous: there are numerous stories of trucks and minibuses which have been blown up by these mines while driving ‘off-road,’ with all occupants on board being killed.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) comprises any explosive devices which have not detonated, such as rockets, grenades, bombs and booby-traps. UXO is found all over Afghanistan in rural and urban areas and can be even more dangerous than mines. The cluster munitions dropped by Coalition Forces in late 2001 are particularly deadly. Most have now been cleared, but keep an eye out for their telltale yellow metal casings.

Mines and UXO come in all shapes and sizes, some are metal and some are plastic, some lie buried while others sit on the surface. Previously, mine awareness briefings concentrated on what these weapons looked like and what their technical specifications were. But since mines are designed and laid not to be seen, this approach is impractical. Far better is to identify areas where mines are likely to be laid and avoid them.Mines and UXO can be found almost anywhere. If in doubt, take local advice. Mines are normally used to defend a specific area, deny access to a position, or are randomly placed as a deadly form of harassment. UXO can land anywhere even in your back yard! Steer clear of the following areas:

- Unused footpaths, tracks and short-cuts.
- Verges of vehicle tracks and roads.
- Vehicle turnaround points.

- In and around culverts and bridge abutments.
- Alongside walls, especially damaged buildings.
- In the doorways and corners of deserted houses.
- In and around wells and water access points.
- In irrigation and drainage canals.
- Abandoned military posts and destroyed vehicles.

Telltale signs

The UN's Mine Action Programme covers rocks with RED paint to signify dangerous areas and known minefields. After an area is cleared, the rocks are repainted white. In unmarked areas, look for these telltale signs:

- Skeletons and dead animals (e.g. donkeys, cows, goats or dogs).
- Small, round but regularly spaced potholes (mine detonation points).
- Uncultivated ground in otherwise cultivated areas.
- Ammunition cases or containers (fighting and mines go together).
- Tin cans (food cans from soldiers or tin from bounding mines).
- Deserted buildings in a populated area.
- Pieces of wire and small wooden stakes (POMZ mines).
- 'Bypasses' lying on the ground (they can look like pens).
- Small piles of rocks, crossed sticks, or rocks across a track, may be used to indicate that mines or UXOs are nearby.
- Yellow metal casings denote cluster munitions.

DOs and DON'Ts

- **DO NOT** touch or move interesting or unknown objects, such as helmets or supposedly abandoned boxes.
- **DO NOT** pull or cut unknown wires.
- **DO NOT** leave well-worn paths, even for a call of nature!
- **DO NOT** throw rocks at unknown devices.
- **DO NOT** think it is safe to jump from rock to rock in mined areas.
- **DO NOT** let drivers leave the main road or track.
- **DO NOT** rush to an accident victim unless the area is cleared of mines.
- **DO NOT** walk or drive in unknown areas without a local guide.
- **DO** seek information on local mine problems before starting work.
- **DO** ask local people about mine problems and take a local guide when you travel.

- **DO** retrace your steps out of suspect areas when possible.
- **DO** have drivers and new staff take a mine awareness course.
- **DO** mark, photograph (from a distance) and report suspicious devices.
- **DO** always stay alert to the telltale signs for mines and UXO.

- **DO** trust your own judgement. Don't follow others blindly.

What do you do if you see a mine or UXO?

STOP, STAY CALM, THINK!
- Shout a warning to anyone with you.
- Turn around and retrace your steps precisely and slowly.
- Once you are safe, mark the danger area with a line of rocks.
- Report the danger area to the nearest UN representative or de-mining NGO office immediately.

IEDs and suicide bombers

The overwhelming majority of war casualties (66 percent in 2012) sustained by the mainly western Coalition forces are now caused by IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) or suicide bombers. IEDs are normally placed along roadsides or trails to "catch" passing military convoys or foot patrols, and then detonated remotely, often using a mobile phone.

Suicide bombers, on the other hand, tend to be part of armed assaults against compounds, police stations, mosques and other public places. Both are indiscriminate in their killing capacity, regardless whether military or civilian. And both are imports by outside Jihadists since the 1990s. IEDs and suicide bombers were almost never used by the Afghan mujahideen during the 1980s.

IED

This is usually a homemade bomb constructed from conventional military explosives, such as a rocket, mortar or artillery round, attached to a detonating mechanism. Fragmenting shrapnel may be added in the form of nails, pieces of metal, ball-bearing, stones and other items that can lacerate or pierce. The most common form of use is as a roadside bomb, which is now the preferred weapon of the Taliban and other insurgents.

Suicide Bombers

The advantage of a suicide bomber is that he or she can walk or run up to an emplacement, such as the gate of a police station or government office, and then detonate.

Often, the targets are not even aware that they are being penetrated. Previous cases have included women with explosives hidden on their burqas or male attackers in police uniform with a bomb vest. Some of these attackers are Afghan boys brought up in the madrassas (religious schools) in Pakistan and then dispatched to hit targets inside Afghanistan. The families are normally paid compensation for sacrificing their child. Often, too, the selected suicide bomber is mentally-handicapped and is not fully aware of what is happening. Some attackers have their bombs detonated remotely.

What to do

- IEDs are notoriously difficult to avoid.
- Good local intelligence is imperative.
- Military counter-efforts have improved enormously primarily because of the ability to monitor through cameras
- Check the roads as you drive for anything suspicious. Be aware of anything that has changed or seems out of place.
- Civilians should avoid military convoys. They are targets.
- Do not linger in public places or along convoys routes.

Essential reading and web links

AKE (Surviving Hostile Regions): www.akegroup.com
Articles on security: www.developmentgateway.org/afghanistan
British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), Monthly Review: www.baag.org.uk

Telecommunications & radio

Telecommunications have developed rapidly since the departure of the Taliban, who threatened that the use of email or websites would be punishable by death. Over 90 percent of Afghanistan is now covered by mobile phone. Domestic landlines are also being developed. Combo sat and mobile phones are still the best form of communication in remote areas.

Radio

The United Nations operates a system of radio communications in all the principal towns of Afghanistan for the benefit of both UN and NGO agencies. Mobile phones have generally replaced two-way radios for routine

conversations, but radios are still preferred for emergency purposes.

Long-distance communication usually relies on High Frequency (HF) radios. The range of these radios is hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres. Short-distance communication is usually by Very High Frequency (VHF) radios, typically in the form of hand-held walkie-talkies. Their range is very short unless used with a frequency 'repeater' which extends the range to 40-50 km. Radios are not like telephones. There are a limited number of channels available which have to be shared among everyone. Hence radio traffic and conversations should be kept to a minimum. Many organizations maintain radio contact for security or emergency reasons. The prospect for renewed emergencies is far from over in Afghanistan. No one knows how post-2014 will unfold.

Rules for radio use

- Keep your radio in the battery charger at night and keep it turned on to enable emergency contact.
- Before calling, listen to be sure the channel you are using is free.
- Most duty stations have a VHF stand-by channel to make initial contact, and then ask you to switch to another channel to continue talking.
- Press the 'call' switch firmly and hold it down for half a second before speaking. This ensures that all of your message is transmitted.
- For security, use call-signs. Don't refer to anyone by their real name. Say "your location" or "my location." Never use actual place names. Assume that someone else is listening.
- Never give UN or ICRC flight times over the radio.
- Do not talk about money over the radio. Especially don't mention movement of funds.
- Be brief. Radios are not telephones.
- Always travel with some form of radio: VHF walkie-talkie for short distances, or HF radio for longer distances.
- Report all your general movements to your base station.

Radio security

If you are in an emergency, use the phrase "BREAK, BREAK, BREAK, THIS IS…" This alerts users that you want to send an urgent message. If you hear this phrase it means that someone is in trouble! Stop your call, listen to the emergency message, and then respond appropriately. Radio communication is never secure. Anyone with a radio can listen in, so do not reveal confidential information while "on air."

Phonetic Alphabet

The phonetic alphabet is an international system used by civil, military, marine, aviation and ground organizations. It is a standard system which allows for clear communications, and should be used on all UN radio nets.

A ALPHA	B BRAVO
C CHARLIE	D DELTA
E ECHO	F FOXTROT
G GOLF	H HOTEL
I INDIA	J JULIET
K KILO	L LIMA
M MIKE	N NOVEMBER
O OSCAR	P PAPA
Q QUEBEC	R ROMEO
S SIERRA	T TANGO
U UNIFORM	V VICTOR
W WHISKEY	X X-RAY
Y YANKEE	Z ZULU

Radio and Television Broadcasters

The number of radio broadcasters in Afghanistan have mushroomed since 2002 with scores of government and independent stations of the Internews/Tanin network on air. Commercial and other TV networks, such as Tolo, have also firmly established themselves. The question now, as outside funding dries up, is whether such stations will be able to remain sustainable. (SEE MEDIA)

The main international broadcasters, which transmit programmes in English, Dari and Pashto languages, remain: BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle. Local and regional broadcasters include: Radio Kabul, Radio Free Afghanistan, Radio Iran. Many local stations also re-broadcasts some of this international programming. Obviously, too, such broadcasts are also available on internet.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

BBC World Service,
Tel: +44 (20) 7240 3456 Fax: +44 (20) 7257 8258
Email: worldservice.letters@bbc.co.uk
Web: www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice
Radio: English language service. News is broadcast every hour on the half hour in Afghanistan. FM broadcasts are also available on BFBS in Kabul and elsewhere. BBC also broadcasts in Pashto and Dari. Check website for schedules.
Television: BBC World is on free-to-view satellite as well as online on

Livestation as a subscriber. BBC Farsi/Dari television is also available in Afghanistan. Plus on smartfone, Ipad and mobile devices.

Voice of America (VOA)

300 Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20547, USA.
Fax: +1 (202)619 0211 Email: letters@voa.gov
English language plus Dari and Pashto services, including TV.

Deutsche Welle Radio and Television

50588 Cologne, North Rhein Westphalia (NRW), Germany
Tel: +49 (221) 389 2500 Fax: +49 (221) 389 2510
Email: online@dwelle.de Web: www.dwelle.de
German language service, but also English (radio and TV) as well as Farsi and Pashto services.

Suggestions for improved reception

Access to radio and television in Kabul and other towns with good communications is probably best through internet or direct satellite reception. For those still using shortwave, particularly in mountainous areas where FM signals do not reach and internet is not available, this can still serve as a lifesaver. Shortwave reception conditions change from day-to-day and sometimes from hour-to-hour, so try all available frequencies to get the best reception.

Short wave signals travel thousands of kilometres, and a simple external aerial can help improve reception. This can be a few metres of any wire (insulated or un-insulated) clamped to or coiled round your radio's whip antenna. Extend the wire aerial near to or outside a window. Be careful not to dangle the aerial above or below electric power lines, and disconnect it from your radio during electric storms. You can also improve frequency by holding your transistor at different angles or stepping outside into the open away from any engine or other interference.
Sources: BBC, VOA

Traditions & customs
Getting to know the ground

Success in your work and travels in Afghanistan depends to a large extent on how well you get on with Afghans, respect their traditions and customs, and how well you adapt your way of behaving to be in tune with this environment. From dealing with bored guards at roadblocks to stubborn government officials to tribal elders or women's groups, your understanding of the different aspects of the Afghan character is critically important, and possibly life-saving (SEE SECURITY TIPS). It is crucial to remember that drinking tea is not just a means of quenching one's thirst, but also a sign of respect, hospitality and, in some cases, political astuteness.

Even if you are not thirsty, or cannot bear the thought of yet another cup of tea, it is best not to refuse hospitality. Much has changed in Afghanistan, but tradition and respect for customs remains crucial. Nancy Dupree summarizes the importance to Afghans of correct behaviour as follows:

"By disregarding social niceties, a person brings discredit upon himself and thereby diminishes the reputation of both his immediate family as well as his extended family or group. Conversely, individuals gain respect, maintain status and enhance their standing in the community through polite behaviour. Much of etiquette, therefore, is designed to preserve zat, honour. As a consequence, Afghan society places much emphasis on correct behaviour."

Traditionally, the elder women of the Afghan household are responsible for teaching etiquette, while the male elders ensure its enforcement. However increased migration into urban areas in the 1960s, coupled with the concurrent rise of Communism in the 1960s and 1970s undermined traditional social values. Nevertheless, the disrespect which young Afghan intellectuals fired with Marxist zeal showed towards village elders and their wives and daughters during the attempted land and education reforms of 1978 led to widespread revolt across the entire country. Much of Afghanistan's history in the 20th Century was characterized by this conflict between the more Westernised intellectuals of the urban centres and the more traditional rural inhabitants. King Amanullah was forced out of office because his reforms of the 1920s including abolishing the veil for women were considered too radical. The backlash against 'modernizing' Afghan communists in 1978-1979 led to the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union.

Even the Taliban movement can be seen as a traditionalist response

to the perceived moral corruption and lawlessness of Western-backed mujahed factions. The conservative customs of rural Afghanistan should not be underestimated. On the vexed issue of girls' education, for example, in many agricultural communities long before the Taliban was ever heard of girls were never permitted to go to school by their parents. It simply was not the tradition. One of the most contentious questions facing Western assistance efforts has been the extent to which these traditions should be respected, especially when they come into conflict with principles passionately-held by the so-called "developed world." The BBC soap opera New Home, New Life (SEE BOX) has pioneered programmes aimed at gently changing social attitudes and traditions, such as the time-honoured Afghan treatment for the wound left after cutting a child's umbilical cord: rubbing in cow-dung.

But where do you draw the line between traditions and bad habits? During 2002-03, the two million refugees who returned home from Pakistan, Iran and further afield brought with them new sets of values learned in exile. Many had, for the first time, come into contact with secular primary education, modern healthcare, even satellite TV. Some Afghans who had fled as rural children returned as sophisticated, computer-literate urbanites. Their experience, skills and expectations challenge long-held traditional customs and create tensions with fellow Afghans who have never fled their homeland. At the same time, many members of the current government are former mujahideen, who adhere to strict Islamic principles.

Meanwhile, the insecurity which has persisted in this country with the US-led occupation means that most Afghan women continue to wear the burqa out of choice in order to afford themselves a degree of protection. Outside Islamic interference by radical non-Afghans, such as Arabs and Chechens, has also helped undermine traditional Afghan society. Their disdain for ordinary Afghans and their zealousness to create the "new Islamic man" led to rootless Afghans who were neither truly Afghan nor really Muslim. Conservative Pushtuns complain that young men brought up in Pakistan no longer respect Afghan customs, including the Pushtunwali, or "way of the Pathan."

Day-to-day manners

Etiquette is about more than being polite. The way you greet someone else, the firmness of a handshake, simple rituals like drinking tea or joining a communal meal, all serve to telegraph who you are, whether you are a friend or an enemy and most of all, whether you can be trusted. Body language can say as much as language. Gestures convey a mes-

sage, and it is important to keep in mind that the interpretation can be very different in different cultures. You need to be sure that you are interpreting a situation correctly and you also need to pay attention to how Afghans interpret your actions.

In terms of manners, Westerners often perceived by Afghans as crude and unpolished.

The Western way of business is brisk, no-nonsense, and 'up-front.' But for Afghans it is extremely rude to launch straight into discussion without proper greetings and a good banter over a glass or three of tea.

The advantage of the Afghan way is its civility and relaxing effect; the disadvantage is that meetings can drag on for hours and hours without reaching a definite conclusion.

Efforts to shortcut traditional greetings with a quick 'hello' will be considered rude or indifferent. Most Westerners find a balance, but just remember to observe how your hosts and colleagues behave before launching your own ideas.

One of the reasons why the Kabul to Kandahar highway has remained so insecure is because the USAID coordinators who ran the project could not be bothered to drink tea and discuss the situation with local villagers. Nor did they make any attempt to involve them in the initiative. The Americans did not have time.

"It is a matter of gauging the situation and not offending your hosts," noted one veteran observer. "Newcomers who are in a hurry often don't understand this. For Afghans, hospitality is part of their dignity. Even if they are very poor and have almost nothing to offer, it allows them to retain their own self-respect." At the same time, it is necessary to be alert and to know when an offer is being made simply because it is customary. If someone in the bazaar or in a chaikhana offers you their food, gratefully decline, even if you have to do so several times. They are simply being polite. If they still insist on sharing their meal, then sit down and eat a little with them lest they become offended. (Be careful, however, not to take the choice bits of the food.) Don't forget, they also wish to know who you are and it is their country. When you feel that you have done your bit for decorum, then place your right hand against your heart to indicate that you have had your fill and wish to thank them.

Foreigners beware!

Rural Afghan society may be traditionally hospitable. But it also has a long tradition of suspicion towards any new-fangled ideas, especially if those introducing them come from the city or from a foreign land. Traditionalist resentment and rebellion at Kabul-led communist reforms in 1978-1979 precipitated the Soviet invasion. Taliban mistrust of Western

values led to the incarceration of thousands of Afghan women.

For anyone from overseas attempting to employ alien means to achieve Western ends, it may be worth remembering what Olivier Roy has to say in his book Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan about such attempts: “The proverbial hospitality of the Afghans is also a form of defensive screen. The guest, assigned to a precise place (the hujra) which he dares not leave without offending his host, is enmeshed in a formalism in which the ceremony of greetings and the ritual of the meal leaves little place for the exercise of authority or even simple investigation... The foreigner finds himself confronted by an endless series of evasions, procrastinations and side-stepping of the issue. The person who is responsible is always somewhere else, the horses are in the mountains and the truth is in the depths of the well.”

On one occasion early during the Soviet war, an EFG editor had to indulge in at least half a dozen lunches in the Baluch region of the Chagai Hills in Helmand province as each village or camp on the way back to Pakistan was waiting with a specially prepared meal for a group of journalists who were passing through the area that morning. The situation nearly turned into a disaster, when two reporters in the group anxious to get back to Quetta to file their stories refused to stop. Only when it was made clear to them that insult might very quickly develop into injury did they agree to ceremoniously accept a few bites from each meal. Overall, the best advice is to play it by ear and to be sensitive to your hosts.

As regards Afghan women, it is best for Western men not to stare at them in the street or in rural areas, let alone touch them. This is for the women’s own protection. In private, however, it is acceptable for Western men to acknowledge Afghan women with a smile, and if they are Westernized or you know them, you can shake hands and talk with them where appropriate. In mid-2002, US soldiers manning a checkpoint in Uruzgan stopped and physically searched eight Afghan women, causing near-revolt among local residents. Subsequently the US military command had to apologise to the governor and dismantle the checkpoints. In general, Western women enjoy better access to Afghan women than do Western men.

Some basic rules:

First meeting:

- Stand up when any Afghan and especially an elder enters the room.
- Exchange greetings whenever meeting friends or strangers. For men this involves touching your heart with your right hand, shaking hands and sometimes even a ‘bear-hug’, if you are good friends. Afghans go

through this whole procedure many times a day, often with the same people.

• Never interrupt Afghans while they are praying or deep in conversation.

• The most common verbal greeting is A-salaam a-laykum ("Peace be upon you"), to which the reply is w-laykum o a-salaam ("And upon you be peace"). (SEE DARI & PASHTO PHRASEBOOK)

• Show respect for elders and superiors by referring to them by their title rather than first name. The word for 'father' is baba, 'mother' is madar, and someone who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca is hajji.

• Before embarking on any business talk, you should ask after your host's/visitor's health, life, family etc. However, men should not inquire about Afghans' wives or daughters unless you are very close friends.

• Western men should not look at, point at or shake hands with Afghan women in the streets or in rural areas.

• A Western woman should not to offer to shake hands with an Afghan man. Wait for him to offer first.

• Men and women, even married couples, should not touch each other in public.

• Never use the left hand for passing or touching anything or anyone. The left hand is meant for private toiletry.

As a guest in an Afghan home or at a meal:

Afghans across the country are renowned for their generous hospitality, and Pushtuns in particular regard the comfort and security of their guests as a matter of great honour. Even unexpected guests must be welcomed, regardless of how inconvenient their arrival may be. As a journalist covering the Soviet war, EFG editor Edward Girardet was almost always offered the most congenial hospitality in numerous villages and refugee camps. Only on two or three occasions did villagers refuse to offer tea or provide a place in the mosque or a house to sleep. When this happened, they tended to be Afghans associated with Arab or other foreign Islamic groups. Afghans travelling with Girardet sought to explain this embarrassment by saying that such people did not understand what Islam and Afghan traditions were about.

On greeting a guest to his house or tent, the host will usually offer tea and then wait for the visitor to explain why he is there. Guests are never turned away, nor asked how long they may be

staying.

More basic rules:

- Do not visit someone's house without getting prior permission from the head of the household.
- Afghans will often ask you to share a meal with them when they cannot afford it, so let them ask you several times to make sure they really mean it.
- A gift for your hosts, such as a small bag of sweets, is appropriate.
- Never enter a room or home without knocking or coughing to announce your presence. On entering, greet everyone with "A-salaam a-laykum" or "salaam alek," even if you have only been absent from the room for a few moments.
- Remove your shoes before entering the guest room. (A good tip is to wear a pair of shoes you can slip on and off easily. Laced-up boots are bad news! Or keep a pair of sandals in your pack).
- Never walk on prayer mats.
- Men and women are usually entertained separately. It is best to go along with this custom unless you are confident of behaving otherwise.
- If you are guest of honour you will be seated at the top of the room (although still on the floor) or in the middle away from the entrance. Seating is usually by precedence, with those of lowest status seated nearest the door. The head of household, however, may sit near the door if is hosting a large group and wishes to be able to respond to their needs.
- Sit cross-legged. Never stretch your legs out towards others or stick your feet up on tables or desks.
- Only serve, touch and eat food with the right hand.
- Afghans take pride in offering large amounts of food to their guests. Take less than you can eat at first so that you have room for the second and third helpings which will be offered to you.
- Eat slowly; when you finish eating then your hosts will too.
- Do not shout, laugh too loudly or sing during meal times.
- Do not interrupt others in conversation.
- Never blow your nose in public. Go outside or into a bathroom.
- Always ask before lighting up a cigarette.

For more information on beggars and baksheesh SEE MONEY; for more on dress SEE CLOTHING & KIT.

Visas

During the heady resistance days of the Soviet War, many freelance journalists entered Afghanistan clandestinely, trudging over some re-

mote frontier mountain pass at the dead of night, accompanied by armed mujahideen. Nowadays, it is essential to obtain a visa before going into the country. Foreigners attract a great deal of attention, not least because of their access to money and international media. You will be noticed, and if you do not have a visa, you will probably end up in jail, or at least detained at some police or militia post. This in turn will make you a burden to diplomats or overstretched Red Cross, UN or NGO workers who will be involved in extricating you.

You have two choices: get a visa in your country of origin (preferable), or wait until you arrive in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey or Dubai and sort it out on the spot. Officially, the following documents will be needed when you apply for a visa at any Afghan mission abroad:

- One visa application form
- Two passport photos
- Passport, valid for at least six months past end date of your trip
- A letter of introduction on letter head paper from your organization, embassy or sponsor, stating the purpose of your trip.
- Visa application fee (money order, postal order, cheque or cash in person). Check first online to determine which type of visa you need. Fees vary accordingly. Diplomatic and UN staff on mission do not have to pay. Normal visas (Geneva Afghan mission) cost 120 CHF. Prices are different at other missions.
- If you are a U.S. Alien Resident applying in the United States, a copy of your Green Card
- If applying by mail, include a pre-paid, self-addressed envelope (Certified Mail, Registered, Federal Express or UPS)

Visas available include: single entry (valid for three months for a 15-day stay), tourist (valid for three months for a 30-day stay), and multiple entry (either three or six month stay). While some embassies provide same day processing, it's best to count on two to three days. If you are applying for an Afghan visa in Pakistan, remember that not much work is done from Thursday afternoon through to Monday morning, so start your application early in the week. In Pakistan and Iran, visas are readily available from the Afghan missions in Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, Tehran and Mashad. Renewing visas within Afghanistan can normally be done while you wait.

As of 2010, the Pakistani government will not allow foreign-

ers to travel by road to the Afghan border. Previously – and if and when transit of tribal territory is allowed again - all expats travelling from Peshawar by road up to through the Khyber Pass to Landi Kotal and the border at Torkham were required to obtain a Tribal Areas Permit from the Khyber Political Agency. The application had to be accompanied by photocopies of your passport and relevant Pakistani and Afghan visas. The Political Agent's office is on Bara Road near Qayum Stadium in Saddar Bazaar. Coming back from Afghanistan by road through the Khyber Pass, you did not need a Tribal Areas permit. However, the local militia provided an armed escort to settled area and expected a tip of several dollars for their 'protection'.

Afghan embassies and consulates abroad: Check the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for countries and addresses, plus more detailed visa information. Web: www.mfa.gov.af/

Weather

Climate

Afghanistan's climate tends to extremes, but is mainly dry. Hot, dry summers reaching over 50 degrees Celsius in the deserts of the southwest are in sharp contrast to bitter winters with temperatures plunging to minus 40 or 50 degrees in the mountains of the Hindu Kush. Nevertheless, between these extremes, Afghanistan, like Europe, has four distinct seasons. From November to March, the snow-line creeps down to around 1,800 metres and snow blankets Kabul most winters. The rains last from January into spring, but increase the higher up you go. Average annual rainfall across the country is 13 inches/338mm. From March to May the warmer weather encourages fruit blossoms, wild flowers, carpets of grass and rivers full of rainfall and snowmelt. The summer months from June to August are extremely hot and dusty, unless you are in the mountains. From September to November, the fresh mornings, warm days and spectacular autumnal tints make these among the best months to travel in Afghanistan.

There is great regional variation in weather across Af-

ghanistan. Out of the five main cities, Kabul (situated at 1,800 metres) is the highest in elevation, so pack warm clothes for all times of year. Average temperatures for the capital are: January, minus 2.8°C; July, 24.4°C. However, the thermometer can drop to freezing in Mazar, Kandahar and Herat as well during winter. In summer, temperatures in these cities can reach 35-40 degrees Celsius. In Herat the heat is relieved by 120 days of tearing winds from May to August.

The baking heat in many arid or semi-arid regions also makes overland travel difficult for ill-equipped travellers, so always take water. Breakdowns are no fun. Jalalabad (elevation 700 metres) enjoys a subtropical climate and is much milder in winter than Kabul, but extremely hot in summer. The Jalalabad plains are frost-free all year, enabling the cultivation of orange and olive groves within view of the snow-covered Safed Koh and Hindu Kush ranges. Bamiyan, situated at 2,500 metres, is often blocked by snow for several months of the year.

During the 1980s, numerous refugees, particularly children and the aged (as well as their animals) died from exposure, bitterly cold blizzards and flash-floods as they sought to cross the Hindu Kush into Pakistan. Heavy snows and mud from spring thaws seriously hampered humanitarian relief operations in northern Afghanistan, following the earthquake near Rustaq in February 1998. Spring floods take a heavy toll on both people and agricultural land every year, often devastating the plains of the southwest.

From 1997-2002, the worst drought for over a century afflicted the entire region. More droughts followed with the country only returning to normality in 2011 and 2012. Around half a million rural Afghans were forced from their homes, desperate to find food in nearby cities or temporary camps. Widespread loss of crops and livestock, combined with a drop in ground water levels, added to the hardships of a country driven by so many years of war.

Women

Practical advice

Afghanistan can still be a nightmare for visiting Western women, and even more so for those who want to work there. The situation has improved with the fall of the Taliban but everything is relative. Herat is even more restrictive under the influence of the

warlord, Ismail Khan, than it was under his Talib predecessors. One European UN aid representative was forced to cover herself with a plastic sheeting in mid-2002 in order to meet with the slickly dressed (Western-suited) head of Herat Radio and Television, a known fundamentalist.

Western women also complain about being accosted or insulted in the streets of Kabul for walking either alone or without 'appropriate' clothing. In general, most Afghans, particularly in rural areas, must be considered to be 'conservative' in outlook with regard to women.

A lot of it, however, has to do with attitude. With the post-Taliban recovery effort, foreign and Afghan women are able to operate openly and uncovered in most government ministries and international aid offices. Already by late summer 2002, a straw-poll in the main Kabul bazaars indicated that as many as one in five Afghan women were doing their shopping unveiled, albeit almost all with some sort of discreet head cover. Six months earlier, one would have been hard-pushed to find more than a handful of Afghan women, primarily educated or working with aid agencies, daring to walk the streets of Kabul without proper cover.

On the whole, female aid workers and journalists generally enjoy better access to ordinary Afghans than do Western men. This is for the simple reason that foreign men cannot meet Afghan women as easily as foreign women can meet both Afghan men and women. This aspect of "gender privilege" is something often overlooked by people who assume that being female in Afghanistan is automatically bad news. In addition, as many female medical aid workers found while working inside Afghanistan during the Soviet war, women were often made 'honorary' men (or 'neutered' as one French doctor preferred to describe it) by the Afghans. This meant that they could sit, eat, drink tea and even sleep (that is, in the same room) with Afghan men without any problem. Only strict fundamentalists, often influenced by Arab Wahabi, would refuse to acknowledge foreign women or even shake hands with them.

Dress is one of the most obviously limiting factors for women working in Afghanistan. Even in today's post-Taliban period the dress code is conservative, particularly in Pushtun areas where little has changed. Many northerners, too, are rigidly conservative. One of our contributors had this to add: "Foreign women are given more concessions than local women when it comes to dress and behaviour, but dressing appropriately goes a long way

towards avoiding problems." Some Western women have gone out of their way to dress 'conservatively' by covering themselves even more than urban Afghan women, yet such conformism angers many educated women who believe that Westerners should set a standard if they are ever to get out from underneath the burqa. Probably the best approach is to simply be respectful (both of men and women) but assertive of your own identity.

Some basic guidelines:

- Do not try to look too 'Afghan' or you may be treated accordingly. Dress conservatively but look recognisably 'Western.'
- Avoid wearing figure-hugging or revealing clothes.
- Ordinary loose-fitting Western dresses and below-the-knee skirts can be worn, with loose trousers on underneath to cover the legs, calves and ankles.
- Do not walk off the road to find a bush to spring a leak behind you may walk into a minefield. Long, baggy dresses/skirts provide good cover for answering calls of nature while on the road.
- Wear blouses with long sleeves and avoid low bust-lines.
- In more conservative areas, shalwar kameez (normally for men, but acceptable for western women) may be more appropriate.
- In public, cover your head and chest discreetly with a long shawl or chador, but there is no need to overdo it.
- In more liberal areas you may not need to wear a chador at all, but check first. This now includes 'international' space in Kabul and other towns.
- In general, dress more conservatively and discreet in rural areas, including refugee camps.

There is no point in 'making a statement' by wearing provocative clothing if it is only going to be interpreted as an insult. What you do in the privacy of an international aid office or guest house is up to you, but also bear in mind the house personnel who may not be as 'aware' as their urban counterparts (SEE CLOTHING & KIT).

Security is something to be aware of but do not become paranoid. Until recently, it has been relatively rare for Western women to be threatened by Afghans; in fact, many women working or travelling in Afghanistan say that sexual harassment is far worse in Pakistan. If you are harassed in a public place, it is best to make as much of a scene as possible. The threat of shame may be the most effective way of stopping the attack. In 1997 a for-

eign woman working for an international aid agency was beaten by Taliban soldiers in Herat, despite wearing a chador. Reportedly it was not until she started screaming that the soldiers ran off. However, this type of incident is very much the exception, and Taliban authorities later apologised for the mistake. Unless recognized as foreigners, Western women wearing chadors have been roughed up by Pakistani frontier scouts at the border on the assumption that they are 'only' Afghan women. In 2002, a female aid worker was gang-raped and robbed near Mazar. However, some observers argue this was in part because of her decision to ignore security advice by travelling at night, in a single car, with large sums of money.

Many experienced female expatriates continue life nearly as normal in Afghanistan: they drive vehicles, walk or cycle through the bazaar and play very much an equal role with their male colleagues. In Kabul particularly, there is a strong community of female aid workers to give you support. However, some towns such as Kandahar are more conservative than others. So if you are a new arrival, check out the situation with someone experienced before wandering around on your own.

Some basic ground rules:

- As a Western woman it is best not to offer to shake hands with an Afghan man wait for him to offer you his hand first.
- Avoid sitting near Afghan men (choose your own small chair)
- Keep your conversations off the streets and behind closed doors.
- Women and men (even married couples) should not touch each other in public.
- Be careful to cover your knees and feet when sitting on the floor in the presence of Afghan men, .
- Do not stare down the men staring at you it only makes them more interested .
- Do not walk alone at night.

Essential reading

Security Guidelines for Women ,
UN Security Coordination Office

Key Players (A-Z)

The Quick... and the Dead

The following biographies of key players in Afghanistan include both the quick and the dead. An important characteristic of Afghan politics is that players who disappear for months and, in some cases, years, may suddenly reappear. When the northern Uzbek warlord General Abdel Rashid Dostum was forced by his one-time ally, General Malik, to flee into exile in Turkey in 1997, he returned four months later and took command of the United Front (also known as the Northern Alliance) in Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum subsequently helped the US-led Coalition overthrow the Taliban in late 2001.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pushtun Islamic extremist, was overwhelmingly supported by the Pakistanis and the American CIA during the 1980s. After several unsuccessful attempts to seize power in the 1990s, Hekmatyar fled into exile and was dismissed as a "spent force," only to reappear in 2002 and declare a jihad against his former benefactors. The Americans, who responded by branding their former ally a terrorist, were just beginning to understand what their British predecessors had learned the hard way: that you cannot buy Afghan loyalty; you can only rent it and that only when it serves specific Afghan interests.

Some key players, notably assassinated northern leader Ahmed Shah Massoud and Abdul Haq, are genuine patriots and their influence may be even greater today than when they were still alive. Since there are currently more than 100 political parties in Afghanistan, we will not list them here. For specific information on these groups, go to the EFGA web portal: www.efgafghan.com.

ABDULLAH, Abdullah (b. 1960 -)

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and presidential candidate in 2009. Abdullah did well in the elections (30.5 per cent) but refused to stand in the runoff against Karzai, maintaining that the polls had been rigged. The allegation was confirmed by international observers.

Abdullah founded the main democratic opposition body, Coalition for Change and Hope, in 2010 and he is considered a strong contender for the 2014 presidential elections. An eloquent and smartly dressed member of what was once called the "Panjshiri

Mafia", Abdullah was a close associate of Ahmed Shah Massoud. Born to a Pushtun father and an ethnic Tajik mother, he is a qualified doctor who speaks fluent English and French, as well as several other languages. While he has pro-Tajik sympathies, he identifies himself strongly as an Afghan, and he has a passion for Afghan history and culture, particularly poetry.

Abdullah joined Jamiat-e-Islami in the early 1980s as part of the anti-Soviet resistance. He spent several years in Pakistan with frequent trips abroad and became one of Massoud's principal spokesmen following the capture of Kabul in 1992. He was subsequently appointed deputy foreign minister for the United Front. In April 2001, he accompanied Massoud on his first trip to Europe, where they met with EU, US and French officials while appealing for support against the Taliban and warning of the dangers posed by the rise of al Qaeda. Following Massoud's assassination on 9 September 2001, Abdullah became the Front's official face during the US bombing of the Taliban. He was made foreign minister in the post-Taliban interim administration and re-appointed in the 2004 cabinet reshuffle. As with many Afghans, Abdullah had only one name, but when repeatedly quizzed by journalists for his full attribution, he kept telling them: "Abdullah…Abdullah". Hence his now double-barrelled identity. He lives partly in Kabul with his family still in Delhi but seeks to return often to his riverside villa in the Panjshir Valley.

AKBARI, Mohammed

Pro-Massoud Shi'a leader of the second largest of at least four factions of the fragmented Hezb-e-Wahdat, which was created in 1989 in order to unite the different political and military Hazara groups.

ALI, Hazrat (b. 1964 -)

An Afghan politician, parliamentarian and warlord from Nangrahar, Hazrat Ali was initially supported by the Americans in the hope that he could help in the battle against al Qaeda and the Taliban. A tribal Pashai from north-eastern Afghanistan, he controlled much of Jalalabad and the surrounding region during the immediate aftermath of the US-led invasion. As a result, he aroused resentment among local Pushtuns who saw Ali and his men as outsiders imposed on them by the US Special Forces. Although a powerful commander with very close ties

to the then Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim, Ali became increasingly involved in 'import-export' activities, which some well-informed aid agencies believe included drug trafficking. The UN reported that Nangarhar overtook Helmand in 2003 as Afghanistan's top opium-producing province. Appointed chief of police by Karzai in 2003, he was fired a year later following reports that he had maintained connections with the Taliban.

ARSALA, Hedayat Amin (b. 1942 -)

Senior minister to President Karzai, and a former vice-president, Hedayat Amin Arsala is an economist and former World Bank official with a long record of close involvement in Afghanistan's resistance struggle. In the 1980s, Arsala joined the National Islamic Front and became a key advisor to Gaylani. A Western-orientated Pushtun with a keen interest in education and reform, he was named Foreign Minister of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in 1992. However, Arsala resigned when Rabbani became president. One of Afghanistan's few effective technocrats, Arsala was appointed Minister of Finance under Karzai's interim administration and then one of four Vice Presidents following the June 2002 Loya Jirga. He was appointed Minister of Commerce in the cabinet shuffle of December that year. The appointment encouraged foreign donors and the business community who wanted clearer channels for investment.

ATTA, Mohammed Usted (b. 1965 -)

A northern, ethnic Tajik warlord and governor of Balkh Province, Atta is a former Jamiat-e-Islami commander who fought with Ahmed Shah Massoud. He served as former Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim's main deputy in the north. Following the fall of the Taliban, Atta was at constant loggerheads with Uzbek warlord, Abdul Rashid Dostum. Constant fighting between their two factions in 2002-03 resulted in scores of deaths, and drove thousands of civilians from the region. The skirmishing also kept many internally displaced refugees from returning to the north. Under international pressure, Atta and Dostom finally agreed to a power-sharing arrangement. Atta controls Mazar and most of Balkh, while Dostom retains his influence in other parts of northern Afghanistan. As governor, Atta is very much the 'boss' in Mazar. He runs a tight ship with a close interest in the region's politics and economy, such as the recent construction of the lu-

crative Hairaton to Mazar railway. He commands his own highly respectful cabinet of advisors, and maintains close relations with the Americans. Atta is definitely the man to see for getting things done in Balkh. In contrast to other warlords, Atta tends to appear in a formal suit rather than military uniform and has a peculiar penchant for woollen ski caps. He resents the title 'warlord', seeing himself more as an 'amir' with a strong political future. He remains popular among the local populace thanks to his efforts to attract new commerce and jobs to the region.

BAHADUR, Hafiz Gul (b. c. 1961 -)

Hafiz Gul Bahadur heads the Pakistani Taliban faction that operates from North Waziristan alongside the Haqqani Network. Bahadur previously maintained relations with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) formed in December, 2007. He became its operational chief under Baitullah Mehsud, reportedly killed by a US drone attack in August, 2009, but has since severed ties with the TTP because of factional infighting and differences concerning potential targets in Pakistan itself. Bahadur, who fought with the mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and later with the Taliban against the United Front, retains an impeccable guerrilla pedigree. He is a direct descendant of the legendary tribal chief, Mirza Ali Khan, the Fakir of Ipi, who stubbornly fought the British in North Waziristan until Partition in 1947.

BIN LADEN, Osama (1957 – 2011)

Osama bin Laden, a Saudi-Yemeni Islamic militant, who is believed to have financed the 9/11 attack against New York's World Trade Center and was subsequently killed by US Seal Team 6, while hiding out in Abottabad, Pakistan, was the public face of al Qaeda. The assassination of bin Laden on Pakistani soil, in a supposedly secure area next to Pakistan's leading military academy, had a traumatic impact on relations between the US and Pakistan. A major issue was what was seen by many Pakistanis as American lack of respect for Pakistan's sovereignty.

A strikingly tall man, Bin Laden came from a wealthy merchant family, which enjoyed intimate connections to the Saudi Royal family and equally close relations to the Bush administration. Bin Laden's father had been an adviser to the Saudi King, and the family's companies were heavily involved in major Saudi construction projects. In contrast to the rest of the bin Laden family,

Osama bin Laden violently opposed the Saudi leadership. He was particularly angry at the Saudi decision to allow American troops to be stationed inside the Kingdom, which many Saudis feel is holy land that should be forbidden to non-Muslims. Bin Laden soon declared a worldwide jihad against the United States.

During the 1980s, Bin Laden supported the mujahideen and at the same time tried to impose his vision of Afghanistan as a purist Islamic state. Bin Laden's ideas had little or no connection to Afghan culture, and he lost around 500 followers, some of them at the hands of the mujahideen, who resented the arrogance of the outsider Arabi, who constituted what amounted to an Islamic foreign legion. When the Soviets withdrew, Bin Laden became disillusioned with Afghan infighting and left for Sudan. Despite having reportedly enjoyed informal links to US intelligence during the Soviet-Afghan war, bin Laden was suspected of having ordered a truck-bomb that killed 19 American airmen in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The extent and nature of Bin Laden's purported connections to US intelligence during the Soviet period are to this day a subject of debate.

Although the tactics employed in bin Laden's elimination raised serious questions, more than a few Arab countries were more than happy to see him finally gone. Before bin Laden's assassination, both Arab and Western leaders alike had blamed his supporters for fomenting insurrections in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Forced to leave Sudan, partly as a result of pressure from the US, he returned to Afghanistan in the summer of 1994 on board an Ariana Afghan Airlines plane with the full authorization of the mujahed government in Kabul. Bin Laden stayed in Afghanistan, at first as a guest of former resistance politician Younis Khales and then, from May 1997 onwards, as an ally of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, based in Kandahar. In return for his assistance in helping to finance the Taliban's battle for control of Afghanistan, Bin Laden received protection. The main condition was that he not speak out against the Saudi government. This cleared the way for Saudi Arabia to recognize the Taliban movement in June, 1997. Despite his promise to behave himself, bin Laden was suspected of having been involved in other terror attacks, including the bomb that killed US Air Force personnel in Dharan prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

BRAHIMI, Lakhdar (b. 1934 -)

The Algerian diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi has enjoyed a varied and distinguished international career including service as the UN Special Envoy to Syria and Special Representative of the Secretary General to Afghanistan in 2001-2003. Leading up to his work for the UN, Brahimi had previously built a solid reputation for pragmatism and effectiveness as Algeria's foreign minister.

Considered the epitome of the dedicated UN official, Brahimi became involved with Afghanistan when Kofi Annan picked him as his personal envoy in July 1997. A sophisticated, but tough diplomat, he resigned in October 1999 when it became clear that Pakistan and Iran had no intention of reining in the warring factions acting as their proxies. Persuaded to return to Afghanistan in October 2001, Brahimi voiced concern over the restrictions limiting action by the UN. Brahimi was also bothered by the Afghans' seeming inability to engage in comprehensive action themselves. He was closely involved in the December 2001 Bonn Agreement and the creation of the Afghan Interim Administration. While many Afghans, international aid workers and diplomats held Brahimi in high esteem, he was heavily criticized for appearing overly ready to compromise with warlords at the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga. Much to the fury of experienced UN observers, Brahimi allowed them to participate in the negotiations despite the fact that they had not been elected. Their presence, including armed members of the United Front's secret police, intimidated delegates, creating the impression that the process had been hijacked. Brahimi was criticized even more for giving in to US pressure to sideline former Afghan King Zahir Shah in favour of Karzai. Overall, however, Brahimi fervently supported Afghanistan's recovery. He warned of the dangers of growing insecurity and the need for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to play a more assertive role outside the Afghan capital. Brahimi also pushed donors not to renege on their financial commitments and to ensure that more long-term recovery aid was directed outside Kabul to the provinces.

DAOUD, Mohammed (1909-1978)

Mohammed Daoud Khan served as president of the Republic of Afghanistan from July 1973 until his assassination in April 1978. During his term as president, he earned a reputation as an arch manipulator of the two Cold War superpowers. His assassina-

tion marked the outbreak of the Saur (April) Revolution, which brought the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power.

Born in Kabul, Daoud initially followed a military career, eventually rising through the ranks to become Commander of Afghanistan's Central Forces (1939-47) and Minister of Defence in 1946. As Prime Minister from 1953-63 he worked at turning the military into a power base. He encouraged social reforms and in 1959 permitted women to abandon the veil. He negotiated considerable military and economic aid from the USSR (and some from the US, prompting him to say "I light my American cigarettes with Russian matches"). However, he fell afoul of both Pakistan and the US when he encouraged separatist elements in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province to pursue their secessionist goals of breaking the province away from Pakistan and creating an independent Pushtunistan. His pro-Pushtun sympathies and general disregard for the King eventually led to his resignation in 1963.

In July 1973, with the support of the Army, the PDPA and the USSR, Daoud organized a coup against his cousin, King Zahir Shah, and proclaimed himself President of the new Republic of Afghanistan. At the same time he maneuvered left wing elements into suppressing the nascent Islamist movement. He then tried to limit the power of the left by establishing the National Revolution Party in 1975.

In order to consolidate and extend his personal authority, he assumed direct control over the Armed Forces. Finally, he promoted nationalism as a replacement for traditional ethnic allegiances. As part of the strategy, he launched ambitious social and economic development projects, including a yet to be built railway linking Afghanistan to Iran. Daoud's first five-year plan was considered a major success, but his republic was plagued by economic inefficiencies and a lack of skilled personnel. These weaknesses led to increasing dependence on the USSR for economic, military and political aid. Realizing the dangers inherent in relying too heavily on the Soviets, Daoud attempted to broaden his support by asking for aid from the West and Pakistan, and by negotiating financing from Iran and the Arab Gulf States. But it was too late. He was overthrown and killed in the PDPA coup of 27 April 1978.

DIN MOHAMMED, Hajji

Hajii Din Mohammed served as governor of Nangarhar Province

(2002 – 2004) and of Kabul Province (2009). He and his brother, Nasirullah Bariyan, are the only surviving male offspring from the family of assassinated former resistance leaders Abdul Haq and Abdul Qadir. Din Mohammed replaced Hajji Qadir as governor or Nangarhar in July 2002. Following Hajji Qadir's murder in July 2002, Din Mohammed became governor. He is now engaged in a power struggle with Hazrat Ali.

DOSTUM, Abdul Rashid (b. 1954 -)

Dostum is both an ethnic Uzbek warlord in his own right and the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Afghan armed forces, a largely ceremonial position. He was a militia general under the Soviets as well as the leader of Jumbesh-e-Melli Islami (National Islamic Movement). He remains a powerful figure in Afghanistan. Infamous for opportunistically changing sides as well as for his acts of brutality and crimes against humanity, he ranks as one of the most unsavoury individuals to be associated with the current Kabul regime as well as the international forces that support it. In 2001, Dostom's forces were accused of suffocating 2,000 Taliban prisoners after allegedly locking them in unventilated shipping containers. Dostum denies responsibility for that crime as well as allegations that he once punished a thief by running him over with a tank. Satellite photos eventually revealed mass graves whose contents had apparently been dug up and moved. The international community never followed through with a serious investigation about what had actually taken place.

Born in Jowzjan province of a peasant Uzbek family, Dostum only managed to receive a few years of primary schooling, and he taught himself to read and write. He picked up the informal nickname "Dostum" as a young man. "Dost" means friend, and a "dostum" is everyone's friend. A product of the former Soviet Union, he received military training in the USSR and rose through the ranks under President Najibullah's communist regime. Under Najibullah, he was entrusted with guarding the northern provinces of Jowzjan, Faryab and Sar-e-Pol, and was subsequently named Hero of the Republic of Afghanistan and made a member of the central council of the Watan (formerly PDPA) Party. During the Soviet war, he emerged as a highly effective pro-government commander of both regular and militia forces. By 1991, he had become commander of the Jowzjani "Dostum Militia," numbering some 20,000 mostly ethnic Uzbek troops. However, he sensed the

imminent downfall of Najibullah and in February 1992 switched sides to the mujahideen, thus precipitating the end of communist rule in Afghanistan. As he moved south towards Kabul with a column of armoured vehicles, to join forces with Massoud in an unsuccessful attempt to defeat their mutual enemy, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Dostum's troops became involved in numerous incidents of murder, rape and pillage, earning his forces a reputation as *gelim jam*, 'carpet-baggers'. On New Year's Day 1994, Dostum again switched sides, this time joining Hekmatyar in a combined assault that was responsible for destroying large areas of Kabul and which nearly dislodged Massoud.

Dostum later concentrated on building a fiefdom in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, replete with its own army, flag, currency and a small airline, Balkh Air. After the battle with the Taliban for Mazar-e-Sharif in May 1997, he was betrayed by his one-time ally, Abdul Malik, and was forced to flee to Turkey. That September, he re-emerged to take control of Mazar and prevent further attacks by the Taliban. With the help of Hezb-e-Wahdat and Massoud's Jamiat-e-Islami, he beat back the Taliban, ruthlessly massacring hundreds of their fighters. He then directed his wrath against Malik whom he drove into exile. A whisky drinker, ex-Communist and political chameleon, Dostum has many enemies. He nevertheless manages to survive by cultivating his contacts with the internationals and publicly supporting the Kabul government as long as it serves his purposes. Following the US-led intervention, Dostum remained at loggerheads with his rival in the northern United Front, General Atta. Dostum considered the north his domain, particularly its access to natural gas reserves. Although both Dostum and Atta spurned UN attempts to broker a ceasefire, the warring pair were finally forced to agree to a truce, thanks in part to pressure from the US. Dostom was again forced to flee to Turkey in 2008. He returned in 2009, supposedly to help with Karzai's re-election. Dostom now seems keen to shrug off his warlord image, given his frequent appearances at official gatherings dressed in a respectable suit.

FAHIM, Mohammed Qasim (b. 1957 -)

Mohammed Qasim Fahim is a former minister of defence and was appointed one of Afghanistan's two Vice-Presidents in 2009. A highly ambitious Panjshiri, he was virtually unknown before the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud on September 9,

2001. With Massoud gone, Fahim seemed most likely to assume his legacy. Until then Fahim had served as the United Front's main intelligence officer. The US considered him one of their most promising candidates to head Afghan's military forces and pushed for his appointment as Minister of Defence in 2002. Karzai ousted Fahim in a major cabinet reshuffle in December 2004. Despite support from the US, Fahim's critics had dismissed him as a semi-literate, self-appointed field marshal, and one of the principal obstacles to Afghan unity because of his alleged ruthless threats, beatings and general thuggery. Fahim insisted on maintaining his own militia with ample stocks of weapons (including tanks and armoured vehicles) in the Panjshir Valley. Part of this arsenal has now been disarmed.

An advocate of the "winner takes all" school of thought, with little favour for the Pushtuns, Fahim originally appointed his own associates to positions of power. He was forced to make concessions by replacing some of his generals with representatives from other ethnic groups. Even today, the Afghan military remains dominated by Tajiks. Fahim has sought to promote his 'respectable' side by wearing suits, giving press conferences and appearing at official receptions. He also has shown a keen interest in large scale 'import and export trade', managed by his brothers, specializing in luxury vehicles and goods brought in from Dubai. He owns considerable property in Kabul, which, some maintain, was illegally obtained through extortion if not outright theft.

GAYLANI, Fatima

President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society since 2004. One of three women advisors at the 2001 Bonn conference, Fatima Gaylani remains widely respected as a supporter of women's issues, education and health for all. A graduate of the London School of Economics, she has been an outspoken activist since the Soviet occupation and considered one of the most influential women in the country. Now living in Kabul, she regularly attends international conferences to push for more effective recovery in Afghanistan.

GAYLANI, Pir Sayed Ahmed (b. 1932 -)

Born into a prominent Sufi family, which claims descent from the Prophet, Pir Sayed Gaylani, is an elder statesman and traditionalist leader of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA). He read theology at Kabul University before fleeing the country

at the outbreak of the Saur Revolution. He later founded NIFA, the best known of the three 'moderate' mujahed parties, and one of seven parties that constituted the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) in Peshawar in 1989. Detractors often referred to his party as the Gucci Front because of the veneer of urban sophistication associated with Pir's sons and nephews as well as his commanders (SEE WARDAK).

An ethnic Pushtun, Gaylani retains a large religious base in Paktia, Kandahar and the eastern provinces. However, he was never trusted by the fundamentalists because of his pro-monarchist tendencies, and he has since lost much of his influence. He continues to play backroom politics and could still prove a pivotal figure especially in promoting a broader based government enlarged to include 'moderate' Talibans. In July 2002, he expressed disappointment at the interim government's failure to ensure a more professional and ethnically balanced cabinet. His daughter, Fatima, has played a significant role in asserting women's rights in the new Afghanistan.

GHANI, Ashraf (b. 1949 -)

Ashraf Ghani served as Minister of Finance from 2002 to 2004, and ran as a candidate for president in the 2009 elections. A principal advisor, if not creator, of the Karzai presidency during the immediate post-Taliban period, Ghani emerged as one of the government's few professional technocrats. A former professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, Ghani served as a senior anthropologist with the World Bank before returning to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. Under World Bank auspices, he became economic advisor to Karzai following the December 2001 Bonn Agreement. He was put in charge of reconstruction, and especially donor funding, and was appointed Minister of Finance in the new transitional government after the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga. An ethnic Pushtun of the Ahmadzai clan, Ghani studies focused on social theory and political economy in Afghanistan from 1747 to present. He also broadcast regularly for both the BBC and VOA. Ghani was widely regarded by the international community as a pivotal figure and partner in Afghanistan's long-term recovery. He is chairman of the Institute for State Effectiveness, an organization he founded in 2005.

HAQ, Abdul (1958-2001)

During the Soviet War, Abdul Haq was a leading urban commander of the mujahideen, and during the 1980s he proved to be one of the most effective and autonomous guerrilla leaders alongside Ahmed Shah Massoud and Ismail Khan. Formerly of the Hezb-e-Islami (Younis Khales faction), he helped lay the groundwork for US intervention, slipping into Afghanistan in late 2001. He was betrayed to the Taliban, who captured and executed him prior to their collapse in October 2001. One theory in circulation is that Pakistan's ISI was behind his betrayal, and the Americans may also have been complicit. Another theory is that Haq was killed by tribal enemies. A highly respected Pushtun of the Arsala family, Haq once told an EFG editor that he could never expect to live in a new Afghanistan because he had killed too many fellow countrymen involved with the Soviet-backed Kabul regime. He expected that their families would almost certainly seek revenge.

Haq, who was already involved in peace initiatives as a UN mediator in 1998, saw his role as that of a facilitator among the Pushtuns and the northern United Front commanders. He designed the Intra-Afghan dialogue under the auspices of US congressman Don Ritter and his Afghanistan Foundation. His efforts led tragically to the assassination of his wife and 11-year-old son in Peshawar in 1999. The assailants were never identified. Haq, whose memorial portrait is now displayed in numerous government offices and shops in Nangarhar, Kunar and Logar provinces, was one of the few commanders whose integrity remained intact and who could have played a key role in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. Together with Massoud, he sought to create a new anti-Talib alliance capable of overthrowing the Taliban politically rather than militarily. One of the great mistakes of the post-2001 Kabul administration, was its failure to take advantage of Haq and Massoud's combined reputations as national heroes in order to promote ethnic and tribal unity. Few people today are aware of the roles that commanders such as Haq played in ousting the Soviets and in trying to establish an independent Afghan identity. Portraits of Massoud and Abdul Haq are displayed side by side mostly in Nangrahar.

Haq was born into an affluent Nangrahar family and he joined the struggle against left-wing rule during the Daoud era in 1977. He became an active mujaheddin commander with the Soviet invasion in December 1979. After the overthrow of the communist Najibullah regime in April 1992, Haq was made Security Minister

in the new mujahed interim ”Islamic Council”, but soon became disillusioned with the constant infighting. Specialized in hitting Soviet targets in and around Kabul during the Red Army occupation, Haq lost his foot in a landmine incident. The injury severely curtailed his earlier ability to act as a flying urban resistance commander. Haq was a favourite of many foreign correspondents, and one reporter described him as “the English-speaking, acceptable face of Islamic fundamentalism.” He later moved to the United Arab Emirates where he became involved in business and ran an air cargo company linking the Gulf to Afghanistan. Haq’s brother, Abdul Qadir, another leading mujahed and post-Taliban minister in the Karzai government, was assassinated in July 2002.

HAQQANI, Mawlawi Jalaluddin (b. 1950 -)

Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani served as Minister of Justice during the first Jihadist government in 1992 and became Minister of Tribal Affairs during the Taliban period. He is best known for creating the infamous Haqqani Network, but has taken a back seat lately because of his age. (His elder son Sirajuddin Haqqani reportedly runs the Network’s highly lethal and often indiscriminate terrorist operations against both Coalition forces and the Kabul regime). His younger son, Mohammad Haqqani, was killed in a US drone attack in February, 2010. Bitterly opposed to foreign intervention, whether Soviet or American, Jalaluddin was well-known to journalists during the 1980s as a highly effective commander of Hezb-e-Islami (Khales faction). Like Hekmatyar’s Hezb, he received support from the Pakistanis and Americans, and also from the Saudis. During the Soviet War he became involved with the ISI and CIA, both of which considered him a crucial asset. Jalaluddin provided support to foreign Jihadists, including Osama bin Laden, who built his main base at Jagi along the Pakistan-Afghan border. As with many Afghan commanders, Jalaluddin remained his own master and used outside sourcing to his advantage. Today, the Haqqani network is based in North Waziristan in Pakistan’s tribal areas (FATA). ISI has protected and promoted the network for years. Today it is not certain to what extent it can still actually control, or even influence it.

Haqqani, an ethnic Pushtun from the Jadran tribe in Paktia, was one of the key Talib commanders who contemplated joining the new, broadly-based anti-Taliban alliance that was being

forged by Abdul Haq (a former Khales commander) and United Front leader Ahmed Shah Massoud in 2001. The highly promising initiative sought to end Afghanistan's long drawn out war by political means. US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, decided on military intervention instead. By resorting to a military approach, they successfully torpedoed any possibility for a negotiated solution. The US decision to rely on military force, convinced Haqqani to take up arms against his former backers. Operating with Arab, Chechen and other foreign Islamists, the Haqqani Network became the first insurgent group to deploy suicide bombers. At the same time, Jalaladdin remains a potentially crucial player in any future discussions on reconciliation between the United States, Kabul government and the armed opposition.

HAQQANI, Sirajuddin "Siraj" (b. early-mid 1970s -)

Sirajuddin, known informally as Siraj, is the son of Jalaluddin, and current head of the pro-Taliban Haqqani Network. Siraj, who is also known as "Khalifa," reportedly chairs the Quetta Taliban Shura in Pakistan, and is considered even more ruthless than his father. He is said to have personally ordered numerous suicide attacks against military and government installations as well as against targets with only symbolic value in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Gruesome civilian casualties do not seem to bother him. The United States has a five million dollar reward on his head. He is said to be opposed to any form of negotiation with the Kabul regime, but would be open to talking with the Americans, if and when they leave.

HEKMATYAR, Gulbuddin (b. 1947 -)

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar ranks as one of the three main leaders, along with Mullah Omar and Sirajuddin Haqqani, of the insurgency directed against the US-led Coalition forces. Head of the former mujahed party Hezb-e-Islami, Hekmatyar is a typical example of the Afghan politician who fades away only to blow back again. A wily old wolf from the past, he represents the new face of terrorism in Afghanistan. Since 2002, Hekmatyar is believed to be responsible for numerous attacks that have killed and injured hundreds of civilians, foreign troops, Afghan security forces, government officials and aid workers. A former protégée of the Paki-

stanis and the US, Hekmatyar is currently engaged in a jihad to oust the United States from Afghanistan. On 19 February 2003, the US government awarded the man they had supported so enthusiastically during the 1980s the title of "Specially Designated Global Terrorist."

A 'transplanted' Ghilzai Pushtun, born in Kunduz province, Hekmatyar studied engineering at Kabul University but fled to Pakistan after the Daoud coup of 1973. In 1975 he became a leader of Afghan radical Islamists, and subsequently founded Hezb-e-Islami.

Inside Afghanistan, he launched attacks with the covert assistance of the Pakistan's Bhutto Government and participated with Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was later to become his arch rival, in an abortive uprising in the Panjshir Valley. From December 1978, 'Enginir' Gulbuddin gathered around him a group of mainly Pushtun commanders, some sharing his Islamic fervour, others his access to weapons and money. US and ISI backing ensured that Hekmatyar's Hezb faction became the best-supported of the resistance parties.

An opportunist with few scruples, Hekmatyar aroused violent antagonism among many of his countrymen. Moderate resistance leader Sibghatullah Mujaddedi once publicly accused Hekmatyar of killing more innocent Afghans than Soviet troops. He further described Hekmatyar as a monster created and sustained by Pakistan's ISI. During the 1980s, Hekmatyar's Hezb was accused of killing hundreds of individuals not to his liking, including at least two BBC journalists and a leading Afghan intellectual, Prof. Sayed Burhanuddin Madjruh. Hekmatyar endeavoured to weaken his rivals in the resistance either through direct attack, assassination or by pulling out of anti-Soviet operations at the last minute. This increasingly unsavoury reputation, coupled with assessments by experienced journalists and aid workers that Hezb's effectiveness was highly questionable, did little to dampen the CIA's overarching support for what one experienced American humanitarian coordinator in Peshawar called "a ruthless piece of murderous garbage." Washington also appeared to like Hekmatyar for the banal reason that he spoke good English, unlike Massoud, who was a Dari speaker with only passable French.

Hezb-e-Islami was long considered the most ideologically radical of the Islamist groups before the emergence of the Taliban. For years now, Hekmatyar has sought to establish himself as the leader of an Afghan Islamic Republic, to be governed under

strict Islamic law. His alliance in the early 1990s with Shahnawaz Tanai (a general with the PDPA Khalqi faction) to stage a coup heavily backed by ISI against the Kabul Government of Dr Najibullah was a typical example of the opportunism that has long coloured his career. Unfortunately for Hekmatyar, the assault proved a complete failure. For two months between April and June 1992, his forces indiscriminately pounded the capital with artillery, mortar and rocket fire in an unsuccessful attempt to oust the interim mujahed government in Kabul. From mid-1992 to late 1994, Hekmatyar served nominally as Prime Minister of the Islamic State of Afghanistan under President Rabbani. However, he avoided travelling inside the city, terrified of being killed - a fear that was certainly justified.

During this complicated period of constantly changing alliances, Hekmatyar's troops, based in the southern parts of the city and on the slopes of Sher-e-Darwaza, inflicted heavy damage against the capital. In June 1996, he formed an anti-Taliban alliance with his previously sworn enemy, Rabbani. The sudden change in loyalty once again enabled him to become Prime Minister of Afghanistan. In an attempt to appear as zealous as the Taliban, however, he made himself highly unpopular by banning music, cinema and football in Kabul. The Pakistanis eventually dropped Hekmatyar in favour of the Taliban, who proved far more effective as proxies. Hekmatyar fled to Iran, where he bided his time, making various forays back onto the Afghan scene. In March 1998, he proposed a peace agreement between the Taliban and the United Front, which failed to materialize. In early 2002, he returned to Afghanistan, taking advantage of the collapse of the Taliban, and began operating along the Pakistan-Afghan frontier. In April 2002, the CIA tried and failed to kill him with an unmanned drone.

Since then, Hekmatyar is reportedly recruiting support in various parts of the country, despite efforts by Coalition forces to apprehend him. He is believed to have formed an alliance with the elusive head of the Taliban movement, Mullah Mohammed Omar. Reports indicate that the two men are now sharing fighters, material and intelligence in their campaign against the Coalition forces. There is also strong evidence that Hekmatyar is playing an increasingly powerful leadership role in at least half a dozen Pushtun-dominated provinces, notably Khost, Paktia, Logar, Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan. Hekmatyar is said to enjoy significant backing among pro-Taliban tribal groups on the Pakistan side of the border, particularly in Waziristan and Bajaur.

Hekmatyar is now seeking to play a double game, one political, the other military in his ongoing bid for power. While militarily attacking the Kabul government and foreign troops, his political wing has infiltrated various Afghan ministries. To make sure that all his bases are covered, he is manoeuvring to be part of any upcoming reconciliation government. Through a combination of intrigue and terror, Hekmatyar may eventually manage to insert himself into post-2014 Afghan politics, but he is unlikely to garner widespread support among ordinary Afghans. Many tribal Pushtuns regard him as an outsider, and he needs to overcome a growing sense of war fatigue, tribal friction and simmering hatred from the past.

Nevertheless, a new generation of Pushtuns, who no longer feel constrained by traditional roots and reject foreign intervention, could offer him a new support base. Numerous Pushtuns harbour increasingly bitter anti-Western attitudes, coupled with deep resentment toward the northern Tajiks within the Kabul government, once a stronghold of the Pushtun oligarchy. If Hekmatyar survives (there are many Afghans who have sworn to see him dead), this highly astute, shrewd and, at times, charming fundamentalist remains fully capable of derailing Afghanistan's long- term recovery process if he does not get a seat at head table.

IBRAHIMI, Abdul Rauf (b. 1963 -)

An ethnic Uzbek from northern Kunduz, Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi has been speaker of the lower house of Afghanistan's parliament (the Wolesi Jirga) since 2010. He joined the mujahideen in 1984, after having been twice arrested by the Soviet-backed Kabul regime. He then went to Saudi Arabia to study Arabic, but on completing his studies returned to fight in the jihad. During the civil war in the 1990s, he joined Massoud's United Front (Northern Alliance) to fight the Taliban. He participated in the 2002 Loya Jirgha and was then elected to parliament representing Kunduz, first in 2005 and then again in 2010.

KARMAL, Babrak (1929-1996)

Babrak Karmal served as Afghanistan's president under the Soviets from December 1979 to 1986. Born in Kabul, the Persian-speaking son of an army general, Karmal became intoxicated by left-wing ideas freely circulating during King Zahir Shah's rule

in the 1950s.

A founding member in 1965 of the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Karmal disputed the leadership of the party with Nur Mohammed Taraki in 1965. Karmal became the leader of the non-Pushtun Parcham ('Banner') faction until it reunited, under pressure from the Soviets, with Taraki's mainly Pushtun Khalq ('Masses') faction in 1977. On 27 April 1978 the PDPA, with backing from the Army coupled with Soviet support, staged the Saur Revolution, which killed President Daoud and established Taraki as the first PDPA President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Karmal was made Deputy Prime Minister, but in July 1978 he fell afoul of the Khalqi faction and as a consolation prize was appointed Afghanistan's ambassador to Prague. Following the murders of both Taraki and his deputy Hafizullah Amin in late 1979, the Soviets decided to shift their support to the Parcham faction in order to avoid the new Communist government being forced to give way to Islamic militants.

Karmal was brought back from Prague and appointed President of Afghanistan as of 27 December 1979, the official date of the Soviet invasion. Karmal's administration turned out to be a puppet regime, created and tightly controlled by the Soviets. It never formed any clear policies of its own. Instead, it became embroiled in political infighting, which eventually led to Karmal's replacement by Dr Mohammed Najibullah in 1986. Considered little more than a KGB agent and traitor, Karmal was dismissed by many Afghans as the man put in power at the point of a Russian bayonet. He left Afghanistan for Moscow at the height of the Soviet war and died there of liver cancer in December 1996.

KAYANI, Ashfaq Parvez

Former head of Pakistan's powerful ISI (Interservices Intelligence), Ashfaq Parvez Kayani succeeded General Pervez Musharraf as Chief of Staff for Pakistan's Army in November, 2007. He was re-appointed for another three years in July, 2010 by Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani. A four-star general, Kayani was named the 28th most powerful person in the world by Forbes magazine. Given Kayani's firsthand experience with the Taliban through ISI's support for the Islamic movement, he can be expected to do his best to ensure that Pakistan maintains influence over Afghanistan and the region.

KARZAI, Hamid (b. 1957 -)

Perceived following the collapse of the Taliban as one Afghanistan's only leaders without blood on his hands, Hamid Karzai emerged at the UN-sponsored meeting in Bonn in December 2001, as the most acceptable compromise candidate to head the country as president during the interim period. A Kandahari Pushtun with exceptional charm and fluent English, Karzai was already well-known among journalists as a pro-monarchy moderate, based in Peshawar. Former World Bank representative Ashraf Ghani and Washington's Zalmay Khalilzad readily promoted him as the best man for the presidency. (SEE NICK MILL'S PIECE ON KARZAI). He was elected president with a popular mandate in October, 2004 and then again in 2009 in an election widely considered to be heavily rigged.

Despite Karzai's reputation among the international community as the least objectionable candidate to run the country, he remains a leader with only limited control over Afghans and the overall political situation outside Kabul.

Born in Kandahar, Karzai was educated in Kabul and in India. In 1982, he became operations director for the anti-Soviet National Liberation Front of Afghanistan. Subsequently, he supported the Taliban's rise to power, but by late 1994 his support for the movement dropped off when he began to suspect that it had been infiltrated by foreigners. During October 2001, he is thought to have played a key role in negotiating the Taliban's withdrawal from Kandahar.

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Meeting Karzai

By Nick Mills

Born in 1957, Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's twelfth and current President first took office on 7 December, 2004. ***Nick Mills****, who currently teaches journalism at Boston University, but previously reported from Kabul, recalls an early encounter:*

On the days the President wanted to see me, my mobile phone would ring in mid-afternoon. A voice would tell me, in heavily accented English, "His Excellency President Karzai wishes to see you this evening." At around 7 p.m. a battered black Lada, a relic of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, would bump over the unpaved, potholed street and lurch to a stop in front of my Kabul guest house,

Chez Ana, and the gate guard would rush inside to tell me that my car had arrived.

The ancient Afghan driver, wearing a ratty karakul cap, would nod as I climbed into the car – he spoke not a single word of English – and we would set off for the Arg Palace a few blocks away. It was fall, and Kabul was dark at that hour, its few lights running off rumbling generators. The Lada would deposit me at the imposing arched gateway of the palace, and I would pass through a perfunctory security screening and start the long walk in the darkness to the Gulkhana, the President's office building. Shadows carrying large black weapons whispered into tiny headset microphones as I passed, my steps crunching on the gravel path bordered with red roses.

At the entrance to the Gukhana, I emptied my pockets, passed through a metal detector, and was escorted up the grand staircase and finally into the office of President Hamid Karzai. He would greet me warmly. We would then sit and chat, sip coffee, eat Afghan raisins and almonds, and finally get to the business at hand, filling the pages of a book I was writing about the President. Sometimes we spent only an hour together.

Other times we would leave the office and go to his residence on the palace grounds and continue talking there, and sometimes the President invited me to stay for dinner. At the long dining table, I sat at Karzai's right hand. The dozen or so other places at the table were usually filled with a variety of ministers, aides, and relatives, all of whom completely ignored my presence. Karzai would dish food onto my plate – the inevitable pulao plus a variety of other Afghan treats. "Afghan chicken!" he would pronounce. "The best!" And I would think, "The President of Afghanistan is serving me dinner. How cool is that?"

The next day at Chez Ana I would transcribe our conversation and begin drafting a chapter. This was the fall of 2005, and this is how the book, KARZAI – The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan was written.

When I first met Hamid Karzai, in Peshawar in 1987, he was just an amiable young man who spoke very good English and was thus the party spokesman and media liaison for the Afghan National Liberation Front, headed by Professor Sibghatullah Mujaddedi. The ANLF was considered one of the more moderate of the seven major Afghan resistance groups that were waging jihad against the Soviet occupation. Western journalists – and governments – liked Karzai because of his education and his fluency in English. He was often invited to parties at the U.S. Consulate or at the home of the head of the U.S. Information Service's American Center. I don't think any of us imagined Hamid Karzai, whom we often referred to as Best Dressed Afghan, as the future President

of Afghanistan, and certainly not as the emotional, erratic, blustering overseer of what Transparency International calls the second most corrupt nation on earth, after Somalia.

Karzai has been widely viewed as an American puppet, and though he has tried many times to shed that image by railing against the U.S. conduct of the war, such outbursts only underscore his presidential impotence. In efforts to solidify his power he has brought into the government many of the people who reduced Afghanistan to rubble in the wake of the 1989 Soviet pullout; his modestly-paid cabinet ministers have mysteriously enriched themselves and have built garish mansions in Kabul and Dubai; his relatives and cronies looted the Kabul Bank of hundreds of millions of dollars; his brother Wali is widely perceived as overseeing a vast criminal enterprise in Kandahar in the name of "government," and the drugs business has never been better.

In my dealings with President Karzai, I found him both au tocratic and indecisive. His palace staffers were mostly young and inexperienced, and Karzai could bully them at will. But when challenged by older and more powerful figures, such as some of his cabinet ministers, he would often change his mind and reverse himself. In 2001, after the fall of the Taliban, Hamid Karzai seemed to be the best man standing for the job of leading Afghanistan into a new era. In those early days, the vast majority of Afghans were ebullient and optimistic. But after ten years of ineffective U.S. war management and grandly corrupt Afghan governance, the early promise of Hamid Karzai and the fervent hopes of the Afghan people have faded in tandem.

Nick B. Mills *is the author of KARZAI – The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan. He teaches journalism at Boston University.*

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KHALILI, Karim (b. 1950 -)

Hazara Shi'a leader and second Vice President of the current Karzai administration, Karim Khalili has led the former Shi'a resistance party Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami (The Party of Islamic Unity) since March 1995, when the previous Hazara chief, Abdul Ali Mazar, died while a prisoner of the Taliban. Hezb-e-Wahdat was formed with Iranian backing in June 1990 to consolidate power among the eight Iran-backed Shi'a mujahed groups. Hezb-e-Wahdat eventually split into two (later four) groups, the larger of which is controlled by Khalili. Based in Bamiyan, which Wahdat forces re-captured from the Taliban in November 2001, Khalili has a high profile among the Hazara majority there. He also retains a major influence in Mazar-e-Sharif alongside northern United Front leader, General Atta. While Khalili supports the Karzai government and the US-backed military coalition, his allegiance is dependent on the Hazaras obtaining not only a fair say in the running of Afghanistan but also a share of international donor support.

KHALILI, Massoud (b. 1950 -)

Afghan Ambassador to Spain and previously to Turkey and India, Massoud Khalili was a close associate of Ahmed Shah Massoud since the late 1970s, Khalili was severely injured in the assassination attack in September 2001 that killed Massoud. Son of the renowned 20th Century Afghan poet, Khalilullah Khalili, he began his career as a highly popular teen-age heart-throb on Afghan radio. He then joined Massoud in his resistance against the communist PDPA regime in Kabul and later against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. A fluent English-speaker, well-known to journalists and aid workers, Khalili acted as Massoud's public face to the outside world in the United States, Pakistan and then India during the 1980s and 1990s. He is highly respected by Afghans, including Pushtuns, particularly because of his family's enormous stature in Afghan culture. He is often mentioned as a possible candidate in Afghanistan's future presidential elections. He is author of the book, Whispers, about his experiences during the Soviet war.

KHALILZAD, Zalmay (b. 1951 -)

Zalmay Khalilzad served as US Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, and is currently a counsellor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. He also heads Khalizad Associates, an independent consulting firm. He previously worked for the US

Rand Corporation, and was a member of the Board of Directors for Rand's Middle East Studies center. An Afghan-born American with neo-conservative views, Khalzad was brought up in Kabul, and eventually became the highest ranking Muslim American in the administration of president George W. Bush in US government service. He returned to Afghanistan in late 2001 for the first time in 30 years as US special envoy under President George W. Bush. A Columbia University political science professor, who consulted with the American oil consortium Unocal in 1997, Khalilzad was appointed to the National Security Council in Washington in June 2001. After 9/11, Khalilzad rapidly emerged as one of the key proponents for military action in Afghanistan. It is Khalilzad's involvement with Unocal, however, that persuaded some analysts to conclude that oil interests were among the principal reasons behind the US intervention. During the late 1990s, Unocal had vied with the Argentinean oil company, Bridas, for pipeline rights from the Taliban and the United Front for transporting Turkmen oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea to the Indian Ocean. At the time, Khalilzad advocated engagement of the Taliban as part of US policy, but Unocal's pipedreams eventually evaporated.

As a pro-resistance advocate during the 1980s, Khalilzad was closely involved with the Friends of Afghanistan Organization, which included anti-Soviet hardliners such as Zbigniev Brzezinski. His foreign policy expertise, including the Muslim world, made him a likely but questionable choice to represent the Bush administration in Afghanistan. Khalilzad, who manoeuvred through Afghan politics with both intrigue and exceptional political armtwisting, including the sidelining of former King Zahir Shah at the Loya Jirga, quickly became a key player in the development of the new Afghanistan. As US ambassador, he was often referred to by the international community as the 'Viceroy' because of his influence over President Karzai. The appointment of an Afghan-American to such a sensitive position was highly criticized by many as an unwise decision that showed little understanding of how the country really works. Most Afghans perceived Khalizad as a local boy, who had managed to profit from privileged connections to Washington. As a result many Afghans failed to consider him seriously as a bona fide American diplomat.

Khalilzad denies that the US was aware it was supporting Islamic fundamentalists, such as Osama Bin Laden, during the 1980s and early 1990s. He maintains that no one realized what

they were really up to. However, critics argue that individuals such as Khalilzad knew perfectly well that the United States was in the process of creating monsters, such as Hekmatyar Gulbuddin. According to Pakistan-British writer Ahmed Rashid, Khalizad advised (among others) Washington to support the Taliban with weapons and funding during the 1990s, even covering the salaries of Taliban civil servants as late as 1999. With the US war, Washington once again became involved at the behest of Khalilzad and others in propping up local warlords engaged in illegal activities, notably drug trafficking, which Washington had no way of controlling. Toward the end of his Kabul stint, Khalizad began pushing for greater professionalism within the Afghan government and a stop to supporting militia commanders and politicians involved in drug trafficking and corruption. Despite his past mistakes and failed policy initiatives, Khalizad is occasionally seen as a possible contender for the Afghan presidency.

KHALES, Mohammed Younis (1919 - 2006)

The Pushtun leader of his own Hezb-e-Islami faction, Mohammed Younis Khales was born in Gandamak, and educated in Islamic law and theology. Khales soon evolved into a radical Islamist and a fervent anti-Communist. He was forced to flee Afghanistan after the Soviet-backed Daoud coup of 1978, and then joined Hezb-e-Islami with Hekmatyar. Before long, he seceded to form his own faction. His commanders included Abdul Haq in the Kabul area, Amin Wardak in Wardak, Jalaluddin Haqqani (of the Haqqani Network) and Hajji Qadir (Abdul Haq's brother and later governor of Nangarhar province). One of the few political leaders to have taken an active part in military operations, Khales was popularly known as the "Fighting Mullah." He opposed universal suffrage and the emancipation of women. In May 1991, while serving as interior minister in the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) in Peshawar, he resigned because of his opposition to Shi'a participation. Khales is notorious for taking a teenage wife in his later years. He also provided Osama bin Laden with refuge in 1994 when the al Qaeda leader fled Sudan. Khales remained quietly sympathetic to the Taliban even though some of his key supporters, such as Abdul Haq, did not. Many of his former fighters currently work with the government and others with the Taliban. Their shared history under Khales could prove beneficial in future reconciliation talks, since these players already know and understand each other.

KHAN, Ismail (b. 1947)

Ismail Khan, the self-styled "Amir of Herat" was born into a modest Dari-speaking family in Shindand, south of Herat, and is currently Afghanistan's Minister of Water and Energy as well as an Afghan warlord in his own right. In fact, he ranks as one of Afghanistan's wealthiest – and most powerful - post-Taliban figures. Khan made his name by leading the anti-communist mutiny of March 1979, when, as a captain in the PDPA army, he disobeyed orders to fire on a mob in the Herat bazaar. Instead, his troops massacred 350 Soviet advisors and their families. Moscow retaliated by carpet-bombing the city, shattering historic mosques and mausolea and killing 5,000-25,000 civilians. The mutiny sparked open rebellion throughout the province, and Khan left Herat to join Rabbani's party Jamiat-e-Islami.

During the mid-1980s, Khan established his reputation as a key Jamiat commander, a staunch nationalist and a diehard Islamist with a healthy disrespect for Iranian and Arabian meddling. In 1993 he was quoted as saying "Nobody, not even the Iranians, can impose his will on us." He then built a palace on a hill overlooking the city and declared himself Amir. The palace later served as a base for US Special Forces and CIA operatives, following the collapse of the Taliban. As Governor of Herat, Khan exercised power over five provinces in south-western Afghanistan; but he failed to hold back the Taliban advance and in September 1995 was forced to flee to Iran. Two years later, with financial and military support from Iran, Khan returned to fight the Taliban. But in May 1997 on a trip to Faryab, he was captured by the Uzbek warlord, General Abdul Malik, and handed over to the Taliban who imprisoned him in Kandahar. Khan spent three years in Taliban custody where he was badly beaten before managing to escape to Iran once again.

During the autumn of 2001, Khan returned to Afghanistan and joined the US-led military coalition to fight the Taliban and regain control of Herat, where he re-appointed himself governor. He controlled an army of 30,000 soldiers, police and militiamen but was reluctant to downsize or integrate it as part of the national army. Khan relied for his income on highly lucrative import duties (US$7-9 million per month) on goods ranging from Japanese vehicles to Russian air conditioners brought in via Iran and Turkmenistan. In 2003, he agreed to channel some of this

tax revenue towards Kabul. In an effort to weaken his hold over Herat, Karzai appointed him Minister of Water and Energy in December, 2004, forcing him to take up residence in Kabul. While much of the international community considers Khan to be the kind of warlord who undermines Kabul's authority, they also see him as one of the country's most effective governors. Today, Herat City is well-run and clean, and Khan likes to portray himself as a benefactor of the people. On the other hand, human rights activists, and especially women's groups, charge that Khan can be even more fundamentalist and repressive than the Taliban, particularly when it comes to political opponents and the Pushtun minority. While Khan has always been a religious conservative, he appeared to be more reform-oriented and open-minded before the Taliban period. Some believe that the beatings he suffered during his incarceration may have psychologically damaged him, making him more intolerant and authoritarian.

MALIK, Abdul

One of the Uzbek Pahlawan brothers of Badghis province, Abdul Malik is an Uzbek warlord who rose to become a general in Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jumbesh-e-Melli party in northern Afghanistan. In May 1997 he allowed Taliban forces into Mazar in what appeared to be an attempt to switch sides and oust General Dostum. Two days later Malik turned against the Taliban and joined Hezb-e-Wahdat forces in massacring several hundred Taliban soldiers. Dostum, who had left Afghanistan to plot his return from the safety of Turkey, reappeared in Mazar in September 1997 and shortly afterwards defeated Malik, forcing him to flee to Iran. Following the fall of the Taliban, Malik established his own political party, Hezb-e-Azadi-ye-Afghanistan, whose military wing has clashed on a number of occasions with Dostom's Jumbesh.

MANGAL, Mohammad Gulab (b. 1958 -)

A former governor of Helmand Province sacked by Karzai in September, 2012, Mohammad Gulab Mangal is widely regarded as a highly effective administrator, especially for his efforts to reform local government. Mangal is likely to remain a key player. He is an ethnic Pushtun of the Mangal tribe from Paktia, and is considered a possible contender for Afghan leadership. His relations

with Karzai have been strained, so his removal was attributed to internal politics. Acknowledging how corrupt matters had become in Helmand with growing disillusionment among the population, Mangal took deliberate steps to "improve the lives of local Afghans." He was an active member of the PDPA during the late 1970s, before joining the anti-Soviet resistance. These days he is better known for having moved to curb opium cultivation, a strategy that left him far from loved by the traffickers, including elements protected by the Karzai regime. Mangal's predecessor, Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, a close ally of Karzai, was removed in 2005 by international pressure for alleged links to the opium trade. Since then, Sher Mohammed has campaigned for Mangal's removal.

MASSOUD, Ahmed Shah (1956-2001)

Often referred to as the "Lion of Panjshir", Ahmed Shah Massoud was a leading eading Tajik commander and one of the most influential figures in Afghanistan. He was frequently referred to as the Che Guevara or Tito of Afghanistan. As the the military head of Jamiat-e-Islami and the leading figure of the anti-Taliban United Front, also known as the Northern Alliance, he was one of the most effective commanders in the resistance to the Soviet occupation. He was assassinated in Khodja Bahauddin in Takhar province on 9 September, 2001, two days prior to the World Trade Center attack. His two Arab killers are believed to have been al Qaeda operatives seeking to eliminate the only opposition leader capable of galvanizing Afghans in the wake of the planned events of 11 September. Ironically, Massoud had repeatedly tried to warn the West of the danger that bin Laden and other foreign Islamic militants, notably to use Afghanistan as a launching pad for terrorist activities. On his first trip to Europe in April 2001, he alerted the Americans about al Qaeda preparations to attack the United States. At the time, key members of the Bush administration, most notably Condoleeza Rice, refused to listen.

Born an ethnic Tajik, Massoud not only earned respect as one of the most successful mujahed commanders, but his memory continues to enjoy enormous prestige today, nearly a decade and a half after his assassination. Based initially in the Panjshir Valley, he was renowned for instilling discipline into his troops and teaching modern tactical warfare. Massoud fought off numerous Red Army attacks. In 1983, he reached a temporary truce

with the Soviets, giving them safe passage to supply their forces elsewhere in Afghanistan. Despite his success as one of the most prominent "commanders of the interior," Massoud was largely ignored by the American CIA, who following advice from Pakistan's ISI preferred to put its support behind the Islamic fundamentalist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Following the departure of the Soviets in 1989, Massoud engaged in a bloody internecine war against Hekmatyar. Despite Massoud's popularity among many Afghans and foreigners (he was a charismatic favourite of the French media), his reputation suffered badly when he moved to Kabul following the overthrow of the Najibullah regime in 1992. Massoud was accused of human rights abuses when his victorious mujahed allies began to terrorise the Afghan capital. According to Amnesty International, some of the most serious human rights abuses were committed in Kabul against innocent civilians during 1993-94. As defence minister in the Rabbani government, Massoud was surrounded mainly by his Panjshiri clique, some of whom indulged in severe abuses of power and corruption. Massoud later maintained that this was one of his greatest mistakes, and he pledged to avoid the error in any future government. However, the so-called 'Panjshiri Mafia', has continued to occupy positions of power, largely thanks to international support, since 2001.

When the Taliban drove Massoud from Kabul in 1996, he once again demonstrated the courage and leadership qualities that made him famous. While a number of his commanders deserted, largely in return for Talib bribes, Massoud told his fighters that they could leave, or help oust the Taliban in what would probably be a long and arduous struggle. Most chose to stay. Massoud was one of the few commanders who persisted in battling the Taliban despite having seen his area of control reduced to between 10-20 percent of the country. Together with Abdul Haq and other former resistance figures, Massoud was in the process of establishing a broad-based anti-Talib coalition in 2000 and 2001. It included many Talib commanders fed up with Pakistani and Arab interference. Instead of supporting the internal Afghan resistance to the Taliban, the administrations of President George W. Bush, followed by Britain's Tony Blair opted for an outright military confrontation relying exclusively on US and British troops, and eventually supported, largely for cosmetic affect by ISAF.

Considered a devout Muslim but also a pragmatic modernist, Massoud was conscious of the danger to civilians. On several

occasions, he ordered the Panjshir to be temporarily abandoned by its population so that he could undertake military operations against the Soviets unhindered by humanitarian concerns. One of the reasons why Massoud reportedly hesitated from launching direct attacks against the Taliban in Kabul during the late 1990s and early 2000s was for fear of causing even greater civilian suffering. Buried in a martyr's grave on a hill overlooking the Panjshir River, Massoud today probably asserts more influence in Afghanistan dead than when he was alive. His heroic-style portraits dominate numerous Afghan streets, chaikhane and offices in government-controlled areas, far more than any other figure.

MAZARI, Abdul Ali (d. 1995)

Former leader of the Iran-backed Shi'a group Hezb-e-Wahdat (Unity Party), Mazari was killed while held by the Taliban in March 1995.

MOHAMMEDI, Mohammed Nabi (1921-2003)

Traditionalist Pushtun leader of Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami, Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi died in 2003. Born in Logar, Mawlawi, he was one of the first religious leaders to campaign against communist influences in the Afghan educational system. Elected to parliament in 1964 during King Zahir Shah's experiment with democracy, he fled to Pakistan after the Saur Revolution and organized armed resistance to the Kabul regime through a network of Mawlawis, some of them Taliban, who still revere him as a historical figure. In the 1980s he was leader of the so-called Islamic moderates and concentrated more on liberating his country than personal advancement. Early on in the war, Harakat was one of the more effective of the seven resistance forces based in Peshawar during the Soviet War. However, as the war ground on, Mohammedi lost many supporters to the more radical Islamist parties of Sayyaf and Rabbani.

MOHSENI, Mohammed Asif (b. 1935 -)

Mohammed Asif Mohseni is an ethnic Tajik (but considered Hazara) leader of the Shi'a mujahed faction Harakat-e-Islami. Born in Kandahar and educated in the Shi'a universities of Iraq, Mohseni is called Ayatollah by his supporters. He founded the rural-based mujahed group Harakat-e-Islami (Islamic Movement

of Afghanistan), and in 1980 was elected chairman of the "Afghan Shi'a Alliance," a mujahed umbrella group headquartered in Iran. In the 1980s, Harakat-e-Islami was the most important of the eight Iran-backed Shi'a groups. In June 1990 the Shi'a groups announced the formation a new organization called Hezb-e-Wahdat (Unity Party) in an attempt to consolidate Shi'a power. As a non-radical Shi'a leader, Mohseni did not receive the extent of military and financial support that the radical pro-Iranian Hezb-e-Wahdat received. Since political influence is closely associated with guns and money in Afghanistan, Mohseni now appears to have little power, but has written more than 20 books on Islam.

MUJADDEDI, Professor Sibghatullah (b.c 1926 -)

A senior politician and member of the Upper House of parliament, Sibghatullah Mujaddedi also serves on the Afghan High Peace Council, which has a mandate to seek reconciliation with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. He was Afghanistan's interim President from April to June 1992. Born in Kabul, he comes from an aristocratic Ghilzai Pushtun family in southern Afghanistan. Leaders of a prominent Sufi mystical order, the Mujaddedis have been fierce nationalists ever since a family member led the Shor Bazaar uprising against the British in the 19th Century. After studying at Cairo's prestigious al-Azhar Islamic University, he became teacher of Islamic studies at a Kabul high school, but was jailed from 1959-1964 for involvement in a purported plot to assassinate the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. His protests against growing Soviet influence in the early 1970s forced him into exile. At the outbreak of the Saur Revolution he was head of the Islamic Centre in Copenhagen. When over 70 members of his clan were murdered by communists, he went to Pakistan to lead the armed resistance of the traditionalist and moderate National Liberation Front of Afghanistan, the smallest of the seven Peshawar-based resistance parties.

Throughout the 1980s, his largely Pushtun guerrilla force was considered ineffective by Western arms suppliers, although he believes the ISI, Pakistan's military intelligence service, fabricated this myth to funnel more weapons to their protégé, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In March 1989, Mujaddedi was named President of the so-called Afghan Interim Government (AIG), a Peshawar-based government-in-exile. Many believed he was given the role

precisely because he was the weakest of the seven leaders. In April 1992, he re-appeared in Kabul as the unlikely head of the new mujahed interim "Islamic Council", ending 14 years of communist rule in Afghanistan. "We are all Muslims", he said, "It is now time for us to join hands in unity and work for the reconstruction of our homeland." However, in a country filled with armed radicals, the tolerant Mujaddedi, who had extended the olive branch to former collaborators of the communist regime, could not last for long. After two months of shelling from his hated enemy, Hekmatyar, he was ousted as President by Burhanuddin Rabbani. He departed Kabul an embittered man. As an Islamic moderate and an aristocrat, Mujaddedi makes no secret of his monarchist tendencies; he continues to play a role in peacemaking efforts, and acted as chairman of the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003.

NAJIBULLAH, Mohammed (1947-1996)

Mohammad Najibullah was the communist President of the Republic of Afghanistan from 1986 to 1992. While no one wants to return to the communist period, it is nevertheless true an increasing numbers of Kabulis, fed up with contemporary corruption, tend to look back on the relative calm during Najibullah's time in office with some nostalgia. Born in in Kabul to Ghilzai Pushtun parents, Najibullah graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Kabul University in 1975. In 1965 he joined the Parcham faction of the PDPA, and was purged from government by Taraki along with other Parchamis in 1978. He remained abroad, but returned to Kabul with Babrak Karmal after the Soviet invasion in December 1979. Known as the 'ox,' he was head of KHAD, the secret police or State Information Service, from 1980-1986. In May 1986, Najib (another nickname) replaced Karmal as President of Afghanistan and Secretary-General of the PDPA. Continuing friction between Parcham and Khalq factions led to further fragmentation of the PDPA, a divide and rule policy adopted by the Soviets to ensure no one faction became too powerful or potentially anti-Soviet. Najib successfully headed off a Khalqi coup in March 1990, organized by his own defence minister Shahnawaz Tanai, although the Army was still very pro-Khalq. Under Najibullah the Army and all government ministries were dictated to by the USSR. Priority was given to education and the social services, modeled on Soviet examples, and the media and all cultural institutions such as theatres and music were controlled by the Soviets.

Najibullah presided over the withdrawal of Soviet troops in February 1989, calling for reconciliation and power sharing with the mujahideen, which the latter rejected. He then pushed for a UN plan that envisaged a neutral transitional administration made up of Afghan technocrats coupled with his own resignation. With the assistance of General Dostum, the mujahideen foiled the UN plan, forcing Najibullah to take refuge in the UN compound in Kabul. This resulted in the collapse of his regime in April 1992, when a four-member council of the ruling Watan party (lit. 'Fatherland' party, previously the PDPA), transferred 'power' to Mujaddedi as the first president of the mujahed government. When the Taliban took Kabul in September 1996, Najibullah welcomed their arrival, but he was dragged from the UN compound, beaten and shot dead. The Taliban hanged his body by the neck from a lamp-post in the middle of Kabul. The gesture did little to endear the Taliban movement to the West.

NAWANDISH, Mohammed Younus

Appointed mayor of Kabul in January, 2010, Mohammed Younus Nawandish, an ethnic Uzbek, has undertaken numerous urban improvements such as new parks, the planting of trees, asphalted streets, anti-pollution environmental controls and waste management. Dubbed "the builder of Kabul," he does not hide his criticism of government abuses and is known for striking hard against corruption by all concerned, including the international community. Nawandish, who often walks for miles through the streets of Kabul at night, makes a point of dropping in unannounced on construction sites to ensure that the job is getting done. His outspoken opposition to the land mafia of the warlords who have been illegally grabbing or developing property, has resulted in numerous threats against his life. He jokingly notes that he has already purchased a piece of land for his grave.

OMAR, Mullah Mohammed (b. c1959 -)

Also known as Amir ul-Momineen (Leader of All Believers, Mullah Mohammed Omar, is the undisputed head of the Taliban movement which swept to power through southern Afghanistan in 1994. Omar was ousted by the US-led military intervention in late 2001. Before that he had led a reclusive life in Kandahar and refused to meet foreign diplomats, journalists, or aid agencies. A former mujahed, Omar was wounded fighting the Soviets,

and had one eye removed at the Red Cross hospital in Quetta in neighbouring Pakistan. Alongside Osama bin Laden, his capture, dead or alive, was originally cited by the Americans as one of the main objectives for intervention in Afghanistan. Until bin Laden's shooting in May, 2011 by American special forces, the US had failed to track him down. The US reportedly narrowly missed killing Omar in an aerial attack outside the village of Singesar in Kandahar province on 12 October 2001. The attack, however killed his 10-year-old son, who died instantly. To date, Mullah Omar remains at large. He is still believed to be actively involved in insurgency operations and is regarded as a key player for any eventual negotiations with the Taliban.

Now in his mid-50s, Omar was born into a poor family in Maiwand district near Kandahar. In the early 1990s he launched a movement to combat the moral degradation to which he felt the mujahideen had succumbed. The main goal of the movement, whose membership was limited to Taliban (Islamic students), was to rid Afghanistan of "corrupt, Western-oriented timeservers," and re-establish the rule of shari'a. Ironically for the leader of one of the most repressive Islamic regimes in the world, he had, in the governor of Kandahar's words, "not too much religious knowledge." Nevertheless his authority in all military operations and over the Taliban's six-man, ruling shura remained absolute. Mullah Omar claimed that he supported the possibility of future peace negotiations, even if they included ex-communists such as General Dostum, and he had this to say to the Pakistani newspaper The News on Sunday about female Afghans:

"As for women's rights, we are willing to talk about it and we feel Islam has given the most rights to women. We aren't opposed to girls' education but we have to decide about our priorities keeping in view our meagre re-sources. Islam supports education for both men and women and we have every intention of following Islamic teachings."

Despite the re-emergence of the Taliban as an armed insurgent force, Mullah Omar appears to have ceded part of his military authority to fellow fundamentalist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. This reportedly resulted from a loose alliance among radical members of Pakistan's ISI, al Qaeda, Hezb-e-Islami and other anti-Western Islamic military groups, established in Quetta in early 2003 for the purpose of undermining the Kabul regime. Fighters belonging to the alliance have deliberately targeted Afghans working with Western aid agencies, international aid workers, Afghan govern-

ment representatives and foreign military personnel. Ironically, one of the first foreign aid workers to be deliberately murdered in March 2003 was a delegate with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the very organization which had helped care for Mullah Omar when he was wounded during the jihad.

TOORYALAI, Wesa (b. 1954 -)

Wesa Tooryalai has been governor of Kandahar Province since 2008. He faces difficult challenges as Coalition forces withdraw. Born in Kohak, Arghandab and raised in Kandahar city, Tooryalai has enjoyed a close relationship with President Karzai and is, without doubt, the President's man in Kandahar. He is also popular with the international community because of his close western affiliations, and a familiarity with the west after having lived and worked in British Columbia, Canada for a number of years. Nevertheless, as a highly educated man with a strong background in the economics of agriculture, Tooryalai is precisely the sort of technocrat who may appeal to a more pragmatic Taliban. Another issue is whether he will survive that long. Tooryalai narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in 2009, followed by another in 2012, which resulted in the death of his two attackers.

QADIR, Hajji Abdul (1951-2002)

Hajji Abdul Qadir, who acted as Vice President and Minister of Public Works in the interim government until his assassination, was the brother of former guerrilla commander Abdul Haq, who was executed by the Taliban. The family still retains considerable influence in Afghanistan today.

A former merchant with business links to (West) Germany, who also operated as a leading guerrilla commander in Nangarhar province during the Afghan-Soviet war, Qadir had assumed the governorship of Nangarhar province after the fall of the Communists. With the arrival of the Taliban, Qadir began operating in support of Massoud's United Front. He was one of the few Pushtuns to hold a senior position in the northern-dominated opposition. With the collapse of the Taliban, he became governor of Nangarhar once again but was then appointed Minister of Public Works and eventually became one of Karzai's Vice Presidents. He was killed in broad daylight on July 6, 2002, by unidentified assassins. The government and the US were quick to accuse the Taliban. However, it is possible that his murder may have result-

ed from a settling of accounts by business or political rivals. Qadir was involved in opium trafficking during the jihad, but once he was given a position in the government, he began to crack down on this highly lucrative trade. One of Qadir's main rivals was Hazrat Ali, a leading Pashai warlord supported by the Americans.

QANOONI, Younis (b. 1957 -)

Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) and a former Minister, Qanooni, a graduate in Islamic studies at Kabul University, was the United Front's (Northern Alliance)head of delegation at the Bonn Conference in December 2001. A former senior Massoud stalwart from the Panjshir Valley, Qanooni became Interior Minister under the first United Front-dominated government after the fall of the Taliban. This meant that the so-called 'Panjshiri Mafia' controlled three key ministries: Interior, Defence and Foreign Affairs, a situation deemed unacceptable by many Afghans and the international community alike. Qanooni was obliged to relinquish his post and became Minister of Education as a consolation prize. A savvy, affable individual, he stood against Karzai in the 2004 presidential election. Qanooni has proven to be an extremely adept politician by energetically seeking to improve not only Afghanistan's level of education, but also his own standing.

RABBANI, Burhanuddin (1940-2011)

Burhanuddin Rabbani was president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan from June 1992 to September 1996. He later became head of the United (or Afghanistan) National Front, the largest political opposition to Karzai. Nevertheless, he was appointed by Karzai to head the Afghan High Peace Council, seeking reconciliation with the armed opposition. On 20, September, 2011 Rabbani was assassinated by a suicide bomber at his home in Kabul earning him the official memorial title: "Martyr of Peace."
Born an ethnic Tajik in in Faizabad, Badakhshan province, and educated at Kabul and al-Azhar Universities in Islamic Studies, Rabbani was a founding father of the anti-communist Islamist movement from the late 1950s onwards. An inspirational university leader in the mid-1960s, shortly after Afghanistan's Communist Party was founded, he attacked the relatively liberal regime of the King for its secular modernization and communist sympathies. In 1971 he was selected head of Jamiat-e-Islami (Islamic Society

of Afghanistan) and in 1974 fled Daoud's regime to Pakistan to seek support against left-wing influences in Afghanistan. In 1975, failed Jamiat raids into Afghanistan revealed policy differences between Rabbani and Hekmatyar, which led to the latter forming his own Hezb-e-Islami party in 1976. Rabbani continued to lead Jamiat after the Saur Revolution. Throughout the Soviet-Afghan war, Rabbani was based in Peshawar. He moved to Kabul in 1992.

Jamiat became one of the best organized of the resistance groups during the Soviet War with an array of highly effective guerrilla "fronts of the interior" affiliated with the party in return for outside support, weapons and other supplies. By 1989 it had an estimated 20,000 followers, mainly Tajiks from northern and western Afghanistan, but including some Pushtuns. The Jamiat's legendary military commander was Ahmed Shah Massoud. In June 1992, Rabbani replaced Sibghatullah Mujaddedi as the major power on the Islamic mujahed council and declared the Islamic State of Afghanistan. In contrast to Mujaddedi, a moderate, Rabbani pushed for the radical transformation of Afghan society on the basis of Islamic law and Qu'ranic principles. He was elected President in December 1992 and Hekmatyar was appointed his Prime Minister. Vicious fighting over Kabul erupted in the first half of 1994 with President Rabbani's Shura-e-Nezar forces pitted against those of Dostum's and Hekmatyar's Shura-e-Hamahangi forces.

The emergence of the Taliban in late 1994 and their capture of Kabul in September 1996 ended Rabbani's leadership. However, he remained President of the Afghan government in Kabul while the territory it controlled shrank to less than 20 percent of the country. On the fall of the Taliban, Rabbani continued to act as self-proclaimed President and insisted on living in the presidential palace in Kabul. Even after the Karzai government was confirmed in December, 2001, it took two months for the UN to persuade Rabbani to leave the compound. Like most mujahed leaders, Rabbani had property and businesses in Europe, UAE and Kabul. It was usually registered in the names of family members and close associates.

RABBANI, Salahuddin (b. 1971 -)

Son of Burhannudin Rabbani, Salahuddin, an Afghan diplomat and policitian, replaced his murdered father in April, 2012, as head of the Afghan High Peace Council, which is seeking to con-

duct talks with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. Salahuddin is likely to be a future player and is a figure not to be ignored.

SAMAR, Sima (b. 1957 -)

Former Minister of Women's Affairs, now Human Rights Commissioner for Afghanistan. Samar is one of the country's best known advocates for human rights and for the rights of women. She is a member of the Truth and Justice Party founded in 2011.

SAYYAF, Abdul Rasul (b. 1946 -)

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf is a leading parliamentarian and head of the radical Ittehad-e-Islami, which became the Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan, a political party, in 2005. He is suspected of having had a hand in the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud, an allegation he firmly denies. After theological training at Kabul University and al-Azhar in Cairo, Sayyaf joined the Islamist movement under Rabbani and Hekmatyar. In 1980 he became the spokesman for the mujahed alliance in Peshawar, and two years later formed his own group, Ittehad-e-Islami, which was the smallest of the Sunni fundamentalist factions. Now in his late 60s, Sayyaf is an eloquent Arabic speaker and has secured considerable financial support from Arabic Gulf states, especially the Saudi royal family. Ideologically close to Hekmatyar and Khalis, he has been accused of allying himself with Arab Wahabi groups. Sayyaf supported the anti-Taliban Kunar uprising and then the Western-backed battle against the Taliban. Sayyaf remains an extreme conservative. In 2007, he called for an amnesty of all former mujahideen, including those suspected of war crimes, among them himself. According to the 9/11 Commission, Sayyaf was a mentor of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who is considered to be the key strategist behind the 9/11 attack against the New York World Trade Center. Sheikh Mohammed is currently imprisoned at Guantanamo.

SHAHRANI, Ne'amatullah

One of Afghanistan's initial four post-Taliban Vice Presidents, Shahrani was also head of the independent commission created to draft the country's new constitution.

SHINWARI, Fazul Hadi

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Shinwari's appointment, following the June 2002 Loya Jirga, raised serious human rights concerns. Shinwari's hardline approach was felt to be too close to that of the Taliban. While supporting shari'a punishments such as stoning and amputation, Shinwari, nevertheless, stressed the importance of strict guarantees of legal due process. Close to the religious thinking of Sayyaf, Rabbani and Hekmatyar, Shinwari pushed fundamentalist values during the drafting in 2003 of the country's proposed new constitution, much to the dismay of more moderate Afghan constitutionalists.

SHIRZAI, Gul Agha

Governor of Nangrahar Province and former governor of Kandahar, Shirzai is a powerful pro-government warlord with up to 20,000 armed men at his disposal. Ousted as governor of Kandahar by the Taliban in 1994, Shirzai returned when the Taliban collapsed on December 7, 2001. He was accompanied by 3,000 guerrillas. During 2002-03, he benefited financially from customs duties at Spin Boldak on the Quetta-Kandahar highway and enjoyed support from the Americans based at Kandahar airport. However, the Kabul government put him on a shortlist of warlords who needed to be controlled. He was sacked as governor of Kandahar in August 2003 after charges that he had been involved in opium trafficking. Sherzai remains a crucial ally of Karzai and is sometimes considered a possible presidential candidate despite his refusal to run in the 2009 elections. Sherzai narrowly escaped assassination outside Jalalabad in July, 2006.

WARDAK, Abdul Rahim (b. 1945 -)

Minister of Defense since 2004 and former Jihadist commander, Wardak is an ethnic Pushtun from Wardak Province, who fought with Gaylani's National Islamic Front (NIFA) during the Soviet war. Wardak is an old guard Jihadist who knows everyone's baggage and who could play a significant role in any reconciliation talks leading up to 2014 and beyond. While his mujahed forces were described as "Gucci" brigades because of their chic dress and equipment (Wardak himself always liked to look prim and proper) and sometimes made dubious claims of highly successful military operations against the Soviets, Wardak nevertheless maintains a proven guerrilla record and is widely re-

spected for his analysis and knowledge of Afghanistan.

ZADRAN, Badshah Khan

Rebel warlord of Khost. A former Soviet militia commander, Zadran was supported by US-led Coalition Forces as a military commander capable of countering Taliban and al Qaeda influences in southeastern Afghanistan. Zadran, who actively opposed governors appointed by Karzai, is reputedly involved in drugs and timber trafficking as well as other forms of 'import-export' business. He was elected to the lower house in 2005.

ZAHIR SHAH, Mohammed (1914-2007)

King of Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973. Zahir Shah was proclaimed monarch, at the age of 19, just hours after the assassination of his father, Nadir Shah. His cousin, Mohammed Daoud, was Prime Minister from 1953-1963, until Zahir Shah forced his resignation. In 1964 Zahir Shah introduced a new constitution, which limited the role of the royal family in government and promised free elections, a free press and the formation of political parties. While Kabul grew considerably during this period, through the flow of economic aid from both the East and the West, many sectors of Afghan society did not benefit. In 1973 while on a trip abroad, the King was ousted in a coup by Mohammed Daoud who proclaimed Afghanistan a republic with himself as President. Zahir Shah abdicated shortly afterwards and went to live in exile near Rome.

During the late 1980s, both the US and the Soviet Union promoted Zahir Shah's return to Afghanistan, not as King, but as President of a 'neutral' government based on a coalition. This administration, it was hoped, would have been in position to hold a Loya Jirga or National Council of tribal, resistance and religious leaders which it was hoped would be able to form a consensus on the possibility of future elections. In contrast to its often misguided support for extremist Muslim fundamentalist factions, the US viewed the King as a moderate, who could work to avert a bloody struggle for power between patriotic and extreme religious rivals in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal. The monarchist cause was popular among other moderate leaders, such as Sibghatullah Mujaddedi who believed that the King was the only real symbol

of national unity. This notion, however, was anathema to radical Islamists such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who blamed the origin of Afghanistan's troubles on the King and his acquiescence to communist ambitions.

Zahir himself rejected US proposals for a government-in-exile and later dismissed President Najibullah's offer to share power. "I have no ambition to restore the monarchy," he repeated over and over again. "All I want is to restore the unity and prosperity of my country." Many Afghans saw the return of the King in the summer of 2002 as crucial to the success of the Loya Jirga. However, despite the King's readiness to play a role, US behind the scenes political machinations assured his elimination from the political scene, a move that in the long run proved disastrous. Zahir Shah was the only person broadly respected by a majority of Afghans, and thus the only one in a position to effectively push reconciliation. Due to his advanced age and fragile health, Zahir Shah's impact on Afghan politics became largely symbolic. In December 2003, the new constitution named him "Father of the nation," a title he retained until his death nearly four years later. While some of Zahir Shah's family members are active in Afghan politics, a return of the monarchy is highly unlikely.

ZAHEER ul Islam (b. 1956 -)

Zaheer has headed Pakistan's powerful ISI, its military Inter-Services Intelligence agency, since March, 2012. He consequently controls what is by far the most influential and powerful Pakistani organization dealing with Afghanistan. A Lieutenant General in the Pakistani army, Zaheer replaced Ahmed Shuja Pasha Kayani, who, in 2011, was considered one of the world's 100 most influential people by TIME magazine. Zaheer can be expected to ensure that Islamabad does not lose any of its sway over Afghanistan, particularly in light of India's growing role in the country. Interestingly, Zaheer is a nephew of the Indian National Army General Shah Nawaz Khan, a fact that ISI refuses to acknowledge. Some observers wonder whether General Zaheer will exhibit the same paranoia regarding India as the older generation of hard line senior officers.

The A to Z Guide

to Afghanistan Assistance

2013

Eleventh Edition

CONTACTS

Who is Who in aid and development

A wide range of local and international organizations have sprung up in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion in October, 2001,

The following listings are done in partnership with the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), which publishes the A-Z Guide. The 2012 publication can be downloaded from AREU's website: http://www.areu.org.af/. We have not given street addresses, since many organizations prefer to keep that information confidential for security reasons. For more specific contact information send an email to the organization or telephone them. The information in the list will be updated regularly at the Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan website at www.efgafghan.com.

Coordinating agencies

AFGHAN NGOs COORDINATION BUREAU (ANCB)

Founded in 1991 as a network of Afghan NGOs, ANCB operates offices in Kabul, Wardak and Jalalabad for its 200 members representing health, agriculture, human rights, women empowerment, education, environment, protection, and capacity building.
Web: http://www.ancb.org/

AGENCY COORDINATING BODY FOR AFGHAN RELIEF (ACBAR)

Established in 1988, ACBAR is an umbrella organization for over 90 NGOs, both international and Afghan. Their aim is to provide a framework for members to exchange information to promote more coordinated, efficient and effective use of aid resources. Has offices in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad.
Web: www.acbar.org

BRITISH AGENCIES AFGHANISTAN GROUP (BAAG)

A unique advocacy and networking agency which aims to support humanitarian and development programmes in Afghanistan. Founded in 1987 and the only UK-based coordinating group of its kind, it currently represents 30 member organizations.
Web: www. http://www.baag.org.uk/

Non-governmental organizations

The following is a list of prominent Afghan and international aid agencies. More agencies can be found in the AREU A-Z Guide.

AFGHANAID

One of the oldest NGOs operating in Afghanistan, Afghanaid is a British NGO founded in 1983. Sectors: economic and social de-

velopment of impoverished rural Afghan communities (especially marginalized), women's organizations, community infrastructure, watershed management and road rehabilitation. Head office in Kabul with over 400 staff members, 90per cent of them Afghans. Afghanaid also has a London presence in charge of fund-raising. Web: www.afghanaid.org.uk

AFGHAN AMPUTEE BICYCLISTS FOR REHABILITATION AND RECREATION (AABRAR)

Founded in 1992. Sectors: rehabilitation and physical therapy for disabled Afghans.
Web: www.aabrar.org

ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM (ACF)

French NGO founded in 1979. Sectors: to fight famine and hunger around the world. Since 1995 ACF Afghanistan has been involved in nutrition, health, water and sanitation, food security and other programmes.
Web: http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/

ACTED

Founded in 1983 to provide clandestine relief, refugee and other forms of support for Afghans, the Agence d'Aide a la Cooperation Technique Et au Developpement (Agency For Technical Cooperation and Development) deals with food security, health promotion and various other activities, including bakeries; coalmining to supply hospitals, clinics and orphanages with power and heat; urban rehabilitation; mapping.
Web: www.acted.org

AFGHAN DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (ADA)

Created in 1990. Sectors: rehabilitation and development, integrated agricultural and environmental training. Principal focus is on disadvantaged communities.
Web: http://www.ada.org.af/ADA/

ASIA FOUNDATION (AF)

A US foundation going back nearly 70 years and committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous and open Asia-Pacific region. Sectors: governance and law, economic reform and development, women's participation, international relations.
www.asiafoundation.org

AIDE MEDICALE INTERNATIONAL (AMI)

French NGO founded in 1979 and one of the oldest aid agencies providing emergency relief in Afghanistan. Sectors: basic healthcare, healthcare training, and humanitarian relief.
Web: http://www.amifrance.org/spip.php?lang=en

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (AKDN)

AKDN is a family of agencies, created by his Highness the Aga Khan, which address three main areas: social development, culture, and economic development. Working in over 20 countries, the Network's underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society and its agencies and institutions work for the common good of all citizens, regardless of origin, gender or religion. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) coordinates the Network's culture activities to enhance quality of life, foster self-understanding and community values, and to expand opportunities. Web: www.akdn.org

AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING (AIL)

Founded in 1995 to assist Afghan women and children, AIL is run entirely by Afghan women and is one of the largest employers of Afghan women in the country. It has grown significantly over the years with helping all Afghans with inadequate access to education, particularly women and children. Sectors: empowering Afghan women by expanding their educational and health opportunities and by fostering self-reliance and community participation.
Web: http://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org/

AFGHAN TECHNICAL CONSULTANTS (ATC)

Created in 1989 as the first Afghan NGO to deal with mine clearance, now an implementing partner of the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA).
Web: http://www.atcafghanistan.org/

AMITIE FRANCO-AFGHANE AIDE HUMANITARIE ET INFORMATION (AFRANE)

From its foundation in 1980 until 1986, AFRANE concentrated on humanitarian aid and information, through a quarterly review called Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan in collaboration with the Center de Recherches et d'Etudes Documentaires sur l'Afghanistan (CEREDAF). From 1986 onwards the agency has focused on rural development and education, plus promoting Franco-Afghan rela-

tions. It still publishes Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan.
http://www.afrane.asso.fr/fr-php/home.php

BBC AFGHAN EDUCATION DRAMA – BBC Media Action

The BBC World Service first began broadcasting educational dramas in Persian and Pashto in the late 1980s. The success of these shows led to the formation of BBC AED and the launching in 1994 of its radio soap opera "New Home, New Life". Towards the end of the 1990s, AED also launched the Media Action International-initiated programme, Radio Education for Afghan Children (REACH). The BBC's education and media development programmes are now run by Media Action, formerly the BBC Trust.
Web: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where_we_work/asia/afghanistan/afghanistaneducation.html

CORD AID (CA)

Dutch member of the Caritas Confederation and is one of the largest development organizations in the Netherlands. As part of its Afghan support, Cordaid (Catholic Organisation for Relief & Development Aid) currently deals with Healthcare, Women's leadership, Food Security, Security & justice.
Web: http://www.cordaid.org/en/

CARITAS Germany

Working in Afghanistan since 1994. Sectors: handicapped people, education (rehabilitation of girls' winter programmes/schools), workshop training for war orphans, and construction of roads, bridges and schools.
Web: http://www.caritas-germany.org/55106.html

COOPERATION CENTRE FOR AFGHANISTAN (CCA)

Operational in Afghanistan since 1990, CCA is an Afghan NGO specializing in the promotion of human rights and sustainable development.
Web: http://www.cca.org.af/

CARE INTERNATIONAL (CI)

Founded at the end of World War II as the Committee for Aid and Relief in Europe, CARE is now one of the world's largest international humanitarian agencies. CARE established its first mission in Afghanistan in 1961 with a focus on medical training

and improving healthcare services. Sectors now include: fighting poverty in south-eastern Afghanistan, agriculture, construction, education, health, income generation, relief, and water supply.
Web: http://www.care-international.org/

CENTER FOR HUMANITARIAN PSYCHOLOGY (CHP)

Focus includes the impact of psycho-social trauma from war and humanitarian crisis.
Web: http://www.humanitarian-psy.org/

CHILDREN IN CRISIS (CIC)

Founded in UK by the Duchess of York, it began work in Afghanistan in 1997 through support to the India Ghandi Hospital, home-based schools and Tahia Masuan and Allauddin Orphanages. Sectors: teacher training education for vulnerable groups (IDPs and street working children). Plus community-based education centres. Web: http://www.childrenincrisis.org/

CIET INTERNATIONAL

New York-based survey and research organization, Community Information and Epidemiological Technologies (CIET) specializes in researching data for emergency situations, using a Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey method (MICS). It has worked on landmines but most recently in 2008 produced a "Demonstration Social Audit of Health Services" to two districts in Afghanistan. The landmine work has produced three publications.
Web: http://www.ciet.org/

COORDINATION OF AFGHAN RELIEF (CoAR)

Created by Afghans in December 1989 to contribute towards rehabilitation. Implementing programmes for donor agencies such as Norwegian Church Aid or World Food Programme, CoAR focuses on: sustainable development, agriculture, water provision, environment, livestock, rural engineering, health, women's programmes and education, disaster risk management, income generation. Web: http://www.coar.org.af/

DANISH AFGHAN COMMITTEE (DAC)

Danish NGO created in 1984. Sectors: humanitarian assistance, basic healthcare, nursing training, emergency medical assistance.
Web: http://www.afghan.dk/

DANISH COMMITTEE FOR AID TO AFGHAN REFUGEES (DACAAR)

Founded in 1984 to provide humanitarian support to Afghan refugees. Its members are Danish People's Aid, Danish Refugee Council and MS-Danish Association for International Co-operation. Sectors: agriculture, construction, emergency, sanitation, health and water supply, particularly in support of returnees and IDPs. Also works with the National Solidarity Programme. Web: www.dacaar.org

HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1982 in France. Sectors: rehabilitation of people with disabilities (orthopaedics, fitting of prostheses, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, etc), landmine clearance, health, including psychology and HIV/AIDS, social development and education, emergency aid, water and sanitation, micro-credit and economic development. Web: www.handicap-international.org

HALO TRUST (HT)

Established in Kabul in 1988. Sectors: mine clearance, medical dispensaries in Kabul, Jabul-us Seraj and Pul-e-Khumri, and clinics in Kabul treating malnourished children and pregnant women. Web: http://www.halotrust.org/

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION (IAM)

Founded in 1966, All expatriate personnel are unpaid volunteers who attend a four-month Dari language course on arrival. IAM offers Dari and English language courses to non-IAM personnel by prior arrangement. IAM suffered the tragic loss of 10 Afghan and international aid workers in 2010, murdered by unknown gunmen. Sectors: operations in Kabul, Heart and Mazar-e-Sharif, focusing on health and eye care (Noor Eye Hospital in Kabul), ophthalmic centres, mobile eye clinics, secondment of expatriate surgeons and nurses to train/assist government doctors, education, rehabilitation and economic development, notably the Renewable Energy Sources in Afghanistan Programme (RESAP).
Web: http://www.iam-afghanistan.org/

INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION OF HOPE (IF HOPE)

Based in Colorado, USA. Sectors: healthcare, education, community development, construction, relief, agriculture and income generation.Web: http://www.ifhope.org/

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS (IMC)
Sectors: agriculture, emergency, health, income generation.
Web: https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC)
Founded in the US in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein to assist opponents of the Nazi regime in Germany. IRC began cross-border rehabilitation in 1988. Sectors: rural assistance, education, agriculture, health, infrastructure rehabilitation, protection and advocacy.Web: http://www.rescue.org/

ISLAMIC RELIEF-AGENCY (ISRA)
Began working with Afghan refugees in 1984. Sectors: health, agriculture, education, social welfare, rural development, environment, gender issues, human rights, relief & protection.
Web: www.islamic-relief.com / www.irafghanistan.org

MADERA
A French NGO, Mission d'Aide au Developpement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan has operated in Afghanistan since the early 1980s. MADERA works in eastern and central Afghanistan, and aims to link present rehabilitation concerns with a long-term development perspective. Sectors: integrated refugee return, rural rehabilitation notably reforestation and agricultural support.
Web: http://www.madera-asso.org/

MERCY CORPS INTERNATIONAL (MCI)
Began medical work for war-wounded and refugees in Quetta in 1986. Sectors: drought mitigation, cash-for-work projects, agricultural development, health, education, landmine rehabilitation and NGO capacity building. Web: http://www.mercycorps.org/

MINE DETECTION DOG CENTER (MDC)
Established in 1989 by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), MDC operates one of the biggest and best Mine Dog programmes, including dog breeding, in Afghanistan. It operates with over 1,300 personnel and 83 mine action teams.
Web: http://www.mdc-afghan.org/

MÉDECINS DU MONDE (MDM)
First began with crossborder assistance in early 1980. Sectors: support for Herat regional hospital, camp dispensaries, mother-child healthcare, rehabilitation of provincial hospitals in western

Afghanistan, and protection of internally displaced refugees.
Web: www.medecinsdumonde.org

MEDAIR

Swiss-based NGO working in Afghanistan since 1996. Sectors: relief and rehabilitation, TB treatment, winter distribution of non-food items to widows in Kabul, shelter, swater anitation, and M-Link (to facilitate contact between international and Afghan NGOs).
Web: http://relief.medair.org/en/

MEDICAL EMERGENCY RELIEF INTERNATIONAL (MERLIN)

Began working in Afghanistan in 1995. Sectors: emergency healthcare, particularly to remote areas. Midwifery. Web: www.merlin.org.uk

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES (MSF)

Withdrew from Afghanistan in the summer of 2004 following the brutal killing of five of its staff in northwestern Afghanistan. Established in 1971 and operational inside Afghanistan since the early 1980s, MSF had various national sections (Switzerland, France, Holland and Belgium) operating in different parts of Afghanistan. Sectors: primary healthcare, mother-child healthcare, water and sanitation, emergency preparedness. MSF returned to Afghanistan in 2009 and now works with over 1,000 Afghan staff in Khost, Kabul and Kundz. Web: http://www.msf.org.uk/about-msf

MANAGEMENT SCIENCE FOR HEALTH (MSH)

Sectors: surveying health facilities, workers and other potential healthcare providers, such as shops and pharmacies. MSH is working with the Ministry of Public Health to help coordinate donor support and NGOs. Web: http://www.msh.org/

NORWEGIAN AFGHANISTAN COMMITTEE (NAC)

Founded in 1979 in response to the Soviet invasion. Sectors: education, health, environment and infrastructure (engineering/construction). Web: http://www.afghanistan.no/English/index.html

NORWEGIAN PROJECT OFFICE/ RURAL REHABILITATION ASSOCIATION FOR AFGHANISTAN (NPO/RRAA)

Established in Peshawar in 1990, now an independent Afghan NGO with offices in Jalalabad, Gardez, Mazar and Herat. Sectors: income generation and skills training, construction, agriculture, education. Web: http://www.nporraa.org.af/

ORGANIZATION FOR MINE CLEARANCE AND AFGHAN REHABILITATION (OMAR)

Afghan NGO established in 1990. Sectors: mine awareness courses, training aids and publications on mine awareness, manual mine clearance, primary education, healthcare, rehabilitation.
Web: http://www.landmineclearance.org/

OXFAM

British NGO established in 1942, Oxfam has worked in Afghanistan since 1989. Sectors: rural education and health, livelihoods, emergency & drought relief. Web: http://www.oxfam.org/

SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL

International children's NGO with various national committees, several of which have been working in Afghanistan for years. Focus is on child protection, health, education…Web: http://www.savethechildren.net/

SOLIDARITE AFGHANISTAN BELGIUM (SAB)

Began assistance to Afghan refugees in 1985. Sectors: education and income generation, such as horticulture, teachers' training and literacy. Web: http://www.assosab.be/pages/Accueil.en.php

SWEDISH COMMITTEE FOR AFGHANISTAN (SCA)

Founded in 1980, SCA is one of the oldest and experienced NGOs operating in Afghanistan. Sectors: primary healthcare, education and agriculture in 17 provinces. Web: http://www.swedishcommittee.org/

SERVING EMERGENCY RELIEF AND VOCATIONAL ENTERPRISES (SERVE)

Began operations in 1980 in Peshawar. Sectors: disability, health, agriculture, forestry, literacy and community development.
Web: http://www.serveafghanistan.org/

SANDY GALLS'S AFGHANISTAN APPEAL (SGAA)

British NGO set up in 1986. Sectors: orthopaedic workshops and physiotherapy departments for disabled Afghans. Based in Kabul and Jalalabad, SGAA is part of the Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Project (CDAP). Web: http://www.sandygallsafghanistanappeal.org/

SHELTER NOW INTERNATIONAL

Established in 1979 as an international volunteer relief organization. Sectors: reconstruction of clinics, hospitals, schools, roads and canals. Web: http://www.shelter-now.org/

SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AFGHANISTAN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE (SPACH)

Established in 1994 in response to a growing awareness of the vulnerability of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan, SPACH aims primarily to share information about the state of collections, historic monuments and archaeological sites among local and international cultural institutions and individuals.
Web: http://spach.af/ehistory.htm

TEARFUND DRT

Has supported projects in Afghanistan since 1971. Sectors: support to refugees, IDPs and disaster affected communities, water and sanitation, school reconstruction, public health education.
Web: http://www.tearfund.org/en/about_us/what_we_do_and_where/countries/eurasia/afghanistan/

TERRE DES HOMMES (TdH)

Swiss-based NGO which began work in Afghanistan in 1995. Sectors: street children in Kabul, child day-care, mother and child home-visiting teams, post-earthquake rehabilitation.
Web: http://www.terredeshommes.org/staff/tdh-lausanne/

TROCAIRE

Sectors: emergency relief, human rights, income generation, peace building. Web: http://www.trocaire.org/

WORLD VISION AFGHANISTAN (WVA)

Part of World Vision International. Sectors: agriculture, infrastructure, education, emergency, health, relief & protection.
Web: http://wvi.org/afghanistan

WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF-PAKISTAN)

WWF-Pakistan, which has established links with the Afghan Ministry of Environment and Planning, believes in linking the environmental problems of Afghanistan into a region-wide approach to conservation, particularly with regard to deforestation and the protection of wildlife. Web: http://worldwildlife.org/

ZOA Refugee Care/CORD

Operating in Afghanistan as an alliance since September 2000. Sectors: assisting rural communities affected by large-scale displacement, nutrition, food assistance and community development. Web: http://eu-cord.org/member/zoa/

United Nations agencies

AFGHANISTAN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SERVICE (AIMS)

AIMS primary role is to support coordination through information management. It provides map products (incl. GIS), database development and maintenance, technical support and capacity-building for the Afghanistan Transitional Administration.
Web: www.aims.org.af

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)

FAO has a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living as well as to improve agricultural productivity. It took a while to become operational in Afghanistan post-2001. FAO is the leading UN agency for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan's agricultural sector and seeks to operate as much as possible through NGOs. FAO has four principal objectives: to create national food security, to increase economic and social development, to raise the levels of skills and knowledge and to protect scarce natural resources. Has offices in Kabul and other cities.
Web: www.fao.org

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (ILO)

ILO promotes decent work and social safety nets by setting and supervisinginternational labour standards in the form of conventions and recommendations. ILO has set up computer training

and English language centres in the Ministries of Labour & Social Affairs and Women's Affairs.
Web: http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm

UN ASSISTANCE MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN (UNAMA)

UNAMA was established in an effort to integrate all UN activities in Afghanistan. There are some 16 UN agencies in the country working together with their Afghan government counterparts and with national and international NGO partners. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan (SRSG), who leads UNAMA, has overall responsibility for all UN activities (political and humanitarian) in the country. UNAMA has a core mandate which entails: promoting national reconciliation, human rights, the rule of law and gender issues (as detailed in the Bonn Agreement); and managing all UN humanitarian, relief, recovery and reconstruction activities in coordination with the Afghan Administration. In addition to its Kabul headquarters, the Mission has regional offices in Bamiyan, Gardez, Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif. There are two liaison offices in Islamabad, Pakistan, and Teheran, Iran.
Web: http://unama.unmissions.org/default.aspx?/

UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

UNDP is focusing on providing support to the Afghan Government in its recovery and reconstruction efforts and developing its capacity to deliver basic services to the people, with the long term objective of alleviating poverty. The UNDP Country Programme rests on three fundamental pillars: Recovery and Reconstruction focusing on programmes and projects designed to yield quick results; Governance which includes Public Administration, Justice, Security, Gender; Policy Support and Advice to generate data for decision-makers and provide analytical perspectives to make informed policy choices. Web: www.undp.org

UNIT NATIONS EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

UNESCO has been working in Afghanistan since 1948. It re-established a full office in Kabul in December 2001. Activities include: Education: Capacity-building at the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, teacher training, basic education, curriculum development, literacy, English language teaching; Science: Water resource management, environmental issues;

Culture and communication: capacity-building at the Ministry of Information and Culture, conservation of the physical heritage, preservation of intangible heritage, development of free press, media training, support for radio, television and news agencies. Web: www.unesco.org

UN POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)

UNFPA assists in providing population assistance through improving reproductive health and contraception services and formulating population policies. A key principle is the focus on individual male and female choice, not on achieving demographic targets. Half of UNFPA assistance is targeted at reproductive health including maternal and child healthcare and family planning. A further 15per cent of UNFPA assistance goes into projects carried out by NGOs.Web: http://www.unfpa.org/public/

UN-HABITAT

The mission of UN-HABITAT is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements. It has worked in Afghanistan since the early 1990s, addressing the rehabilitation of urban areas in Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Farah and Bamiyan. Their focus is not only on restoring citywide infrastructure, but also on rebuilding communities through a community development & support strategy working closely with local municipalities. Web: www.unhabitat.org

UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

The UN Refugee Agency's main objectives are to provide protection to refugees who flee their country due to persecution or conflict and to find durable solutions to their plight through repatriation, integration or resettlement to third countries. By mid-2013, over 5.7 million refugees had returned to Afghanistan. With its offices and support staff throughAfghanistan, UNHCR's assistance programs include: Return assistance: provides drinking water, shelter material and seeds to returnee communities in rural areas; Community services: supports extremely vulnerable individuals and provides vocational training for women; Mass Information: provides refugees and internally displaced people with information on the conditions in the areas of return through the local media; Protection: monitors the situation of returnee communities, paying particular attention to ethnic minorities; Government capacity building: provides expert advice, skills training,

human resources and administrative support to ministries responsible for the return and reintegration of refugees.
Web: www.unhcr.org

UN CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

UNICEF's primary goal is to realize the rights of all children and women, enabling even the most disadvantaged to fulfil their basic needs, to receiveprotection form harm and abuse and to develop their full potential as human beings. These rights to protection, survival and development lie at the heart of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Through its offices in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif, UNICEF implements the following programmes:

- Humanitarian relief: life-saving humanitarian assistance including winterized non-food items, essential emergency medical supplies, therapeutic foods and equipment for provision of safe drinking water;
- Education: assisting the ministries of Education in the restoration of learning opportunities of all children at the primary level; deployment and training of teachers, provision of essential learning supplies; provision of safer learning spaces and increase of access to secondary education, particularly for girls;
- Health & Nutrition: immunization (mass measles campaigns and polio National Immunization Days); treatment and prevention of protein energy and micronutrient malnutrition' and safe motherhood initiative as a component of maternal and child health programs;
- Water & Environmental Sanitation: increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities for the under-served rural areas and IDP camps, improved knowledge of hygiene practices and involvement of women in their promotion; rights-based community schemes; development of a water resources management plan; and training of national partners in systems maintenance, including on drought mitigation;
- Child Protection: juvenile justice; legal protection of children and women; mine/unexploded ordnance awareness; protection and integration of child soldiers and other war-affected young people; psycho-social support for children and families; and social protection of vulnerable children and women.

Web: www.unicef.org

UN MINE ACTION SERVICE (UNMAS)

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) collaborates with

13 other UN departments, agencies, programmes and funds to ensure an effective, proactive and coordinated response to the problems of landmines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions. Web: http://www.mineaction.org/unmas

UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC)

UNODC activities for Afghanistan in countering illicit drugs production, processing, consumption, trafficking and crime prevention are centred on assisting the government in the sectors of Alternative Development, Drug Demand Reduction, Law Enforcement and Institutional building/Judicial reforms. The agency has been assisting the Afghan authorities in strengthening their capacity in dealing with the issues and mainstreaming of the drug control element in development assistance. It has also been supporting the authorities in the rehabilitation of drug addicts, formulation of narcotic drugs law, legal reform and combating organized crime. Provides latest narcotics reports. Web: http://www.unodc.org/

UNWOMEN (Formerly UN FUND FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT/UNIFEM)

UNWOMEN's primary objective is to build Afghan women's capacity and leadership for their effective participation in the social, economic and political reconstruction process. It seeks to promote female Afghan leadership at all levels, from local communities to national governments. Key elements of the strategy include: building capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, supporting women's leadership at the community level, strengthening Afghan women's NGOs and networks, promoting Afghan women's economic security, promoting Afghan women's rights and their participation in the governance process. Web: http://www.unwomen.org/

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

The largest international food aid organization in the world, WFP first began operating in Afghanistan in 1964. It has been operational to counter the effects of Afghanistan's recent droughts, plus the overall economic degradation of the country from war.
Web: http://www.wfp.org/

WORLD BANK (WB)

The World Bank has the following four projects currently under implementation: emergency infrastructure rehabilitation, emergency public administration, emergency education rehabilitation and de-

velopment, and emergency community empowerment and public works. Other activities include projects in health, transport and micro-finance and providing technical assistance and policy advice in areas such as civil service reform, oil and gas, and financial sector reform. Web: http://www.worldbank.org/

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

WHO is one of the leading UN agencies working in the field of health. With a main office in Kabul, WHO also has sub-offices in Herat, Mazar, Kandahar, Faizabad, Kunduz, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Jalalabad and Islamabad. Activities include: Disease prevention control: TB, malaria, leishmaniasis, vaccine preventable diseases, CDD, ARI, meningitis, typhoid, tetanus, measles and rabies; Supplies: provision of medical/surgical supplies to Ministry of Public Health, hospitals and clinics; Training: of doctors, nurses, public heath workers, TBAs; Water supply: provision of safe drinking water supplies, rehabilita-tion of networks in Kandahar, Ghazni, Jalalabad, Kunduz and Badakhshan; Rehabilitation of hospital and medical facilities.
Web: http://www.who.int/en/

Red Cross & Red Crescent

AFGHAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY (ARCS)

Founded in 1934, ARCS operates in four main areas: health, relief, Marastoons (homes for the homeless) and voluntary self-help. ARCS is a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva.
Web: http://arcs.org.af/en

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)

The ICRC's permanent presence in Afghanistan dates from 1986. Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has been is biggest operation in the world. Recent deliberately targeted against against the ICRC (June, 2013) have forced the organization to severely curtail its activities involving international delegates. Its principal activities include:

- Emergency Relief: focuses on drought and conflict-affected areas;
- Protection: visits to security detainees and prisoners in 65

places of detection, including Guantanamo Bay;
• Red Cross Messages network: Restores contact between families and detainees separated by conflict;
• Water and Habitat: emergency interventions on water networks, hand pump repair, wider scale projects on well field sites;
• Environmental sanitation: building or rehabilitating latrines, giving health education, repairing sewage collectors and pumps;
• Health: focuses on facilities providing surgical care and assistance to main hospitals in Kabul, Kandahar, Ghazni, Gulbahar and Jalalabad; Physical Rehabilitation: six rehabilitation centres in Afghanistan;
• Mine Action: Data base on victims of mines/UXO shared with other organizations, improves mine awareness in selected central and eastern provinces;
• Promotion of International Humanitarian Law: instruction in IHL to the Afghan National Army as well as to other groups and arms carriers.
The main delegation is in Kabul with sub-delegations in Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz and sub-offices in Bam-iyan and Chakhcharan. The ICRC has a specific humanitarian mandate based on neutrality and impartiality, and enshrined in the Geneva Conventions. Web: www.icrc.org

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES (INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION)

The International Federation is the umbrella organization for all national Red Cross/Crescent societies worldwide. It aims to prevent and alleviate human suffering by coordinating disaster relief, disaster preparedness and primary healthcare. Since 1989, the International Federation has supported the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) in its health and relief programmes, and has reinforced ARCS's organizational structure nationwide. This support enables the ARCS to assist vulnerable people throughout the country in the following fields:

Basic Health Care: through outpatient clinics providing curative services, pre-ventive healthcare and health education; Community-based First Aid: through a network of 12,000 trained volunteers who carry out first-aid, community health and referral services; Emergency mobile units: immediate mobilization of personnel, equipment, medicines and vehicles in an emergency; Water and Sanitation: construction of wells and latrines in drought-affected areas; Disaster management: comprehensive disaster prepared-

ness and response programme at national and provincial levels including training volunteers and stockpiling essential relief materials. The International Federation delegation has offices in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif.
Web: www.ifrc.org

Governmental, inter-governmental and security organizations

Most countries ranging from Japan to Poland involved with Afghanistan have provided project support or operate donor programmes. Here is a list of donors.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC)

The European Union hosted the Bonn Conference which provided the blueprint for Afghanistan's future and has participated in security, humanitarian and development sectors. Along side USAID, it is one of the largest donors. Its programmes include:

- Support for public administration;
- Funding for technical assistance, equipment and salaries for Afghan ministries and public sector workers;
- Rural recovery: to support recovery of rural livelihoods by creating employment through an injection of capital into the local economy, providing an alternative to poppy cultivation;
- Mine action: mine clearance, impact survey, mine awareness, victims' rehabilitation;
- Basic urban infrastructure: water and sanitation, waste disposal, housing, power supply, public amenities, improved public buildings and the re-launch of urban planning;
- Information and co-ordination: to ensure a consistent and improving flow of data, focusing on information standards, processing of information at regional level, and the relay of data to implementing partners and decision makers;
- Food security: re-starting agricultural activities and rural production systems), aid to uprooted people;
- Special initiatives: including human rights, asylum and migration, rapid reaction mechanism, humanitarian assistance through the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO).

Web: http://ec.europa.eu/

EUROPEAN COMMISSION HUMANITARIAN AID OFFICE (ECHO)

ECHO is the humanitarian arm of the European Union and has funded shortterm humanitarian activities in all parts of Afghanistan since 1995. ECHO supports former refugees returning to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries, internally displaced people (IDPs) and other vulnerable and drought-affected populations. Sectors include: food security, medical, water supply, shelter and protection. ECHO also finances logistical and coordination activities to support the work of its NGO partners.
Web: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

GERMAN AGENCY FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION (GTZ)

GTZ is the main implementing agency for technical assistance from the German government. After an emergency programme in early 2002, GTZ initiated programmes of structural reconstruction, development-oriented emergency aid and measures to promote democracy. GTZ shares an office in Kabul with the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). KfW finances programmes in the areas of drinking water, energy, road repair, education and health. Web: http://www.giz.de/en/

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)

IOM is a non-UN intergovernmental body with 93 member states and 37 observer states. IOM programming focuses on the return and reintegration of qualified Afghan nationals. Other sectors include: camp management, emergency assistance and quick impact programmes to provide shelter and non-food assistance to Afghans displaced across the country. Web: http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we-work/asia-and-the-pacific/afghanistan.html

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE (ISAF)

ISAF is a UN-mandated international force, created at the 2001 Bonn Conference, to help provide security for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is a three-way partnership between the Afghan Transitional Authority, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and ISAF. On 11 August 2003, NATO assumed leadership of ISAF, ending the six-month national rota-

tions. NATO became responsible for the command, coordination and planning of the force, including the provision of a force commander and headquarters on the ground in Afghanistan.
Web: http://www.isaf.nato.int/

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION AGENCY (SIDA)

Swedish government-funded development assistance programmes. Sectors include: education and infrastructure.
Web: www.sida.se

SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION (SDC)

Part of Switzerland's foreign ministry, SDC provides emergency relief and reconstruction aid to Afghanistan. Sectors include: public healthcare, food aid, agriculture. Contributions are partly channelled through multilateral agencies (ICRC, UN). SDC also seconds engineers, logistics experts and doctors from the Swiss Disaster Relief Unit.
Web: www.sdc.admin.ch

UNITED KINGDOM'S DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (UKAID/DFID)

Funding projects in the sectors of humanitarian aid, recovery, economic management, peace process, sustainable livelihoods. DFID also supports the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.
Web: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)

The largest country donor, USAID aims to meet Afghans' relief and reconstruction needs. As well as emergency food aid, sectors include:

- Infrastructure: primary and secondary roads, government buildings, power, electricity, irrigation and drinking water;
- Health: maternal healthcare, clinic construction;
- Education: books, accelerated learning for girls who missed out on primary education, school construction, teacher training;
- Economic governance: providing advisors to strengthen the ministry of finance;
- Democracy and governance: working with various commissions

to strengthen their capacity;
• Media: journalist training, setting up community radio stations, production of radio programmes. Web: www.usaid.gov

Diplomatic missions in Afghanistan

The number of diplomatic missions has expanded enormously since the US-led invasion of October, 2001. By 2013, more than 30 countries had established embassies or representations in Kabul. A few, nevertheless, still deal with consular issues in Islamabad. A small number, such as the United States, India, Pakistan and Iran, maintain consulates or representations in cities such as Jalalabad, Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif. Most missions are security conscious and may not be easily visible from the road because of high barriers. To rach others, you may need to pass through armed checkpoints. For mission addresses, click for direct links in the electronic EFGA version.

- Embassy of the United Kingdom
- Embassy of Canada
- Embassy of Denmark to Afghanistan
- Embassy of Finland
- Embassy of Japan
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Embassy of the Republic of Hungary
- Embassy of the Republic of Turkey
- The Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain
- US Agency for International Development
- Royal Norwegian Embassy
- Embassy of Bulgaria
- Embassy of France
- Embassy of India
- Embassy of Italy
- Embassy of Sweden
- Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China
- Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia
- Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan

- Embassy of the Republic of Korea
- Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan
- Embassy of the Russian Federation
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
- Embassy of the United States of America
- Embassy of Turkmenistan
- Embassy of Uzbekistan
- Embassy of Belgium -
- Embassy of Italy, Civilian Component of PRT

Media organizations

For security reasons, most foreign news agencies and correspondents working in Afghanistan do not normally advertise their addresses and contact information in public. We have nevertheless listed a few media agencies below that can be contacted directly for further information.

GOVERNMENT MEDIA & INFORMATION CENTRE

For official comment, speeches and other media resources.
Web: http://www.gmic.gov.af/english/index.php

AFGHAN MEDIA AND CULTURAL CENTRE (AINA)

As a media NGO, AINA facilitates initiatives in the area of education, information and communication.
Web: http://www.ainaworld.org/about/

INSTITUTE FOR WAR AND PEACE REPORTING (IWPR)

A London-based media NGO, IWPR has been working in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion in October, 2001. It focuses on training mainly print reporters plus providing them with a forum to publish their reports.
Web: http://iwpr.net/

INTERNEWS

A Washington-based international media organization focusing primarily on the development of quality local journalism, independent radio and television by working through its Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Project (AMDEP).
Web: http://www.internews.org/where-we-work/asia/afghanistan

NAI – SUPPORTING OPEN MEDIA IN AFGHANISTAN

Works locally to empower independent media and promote freedom of expression. An Afghan NGO established in 2005 with the support of Internews, Nai works in training, advocacy and production.
Web: http://www.nai.org.af/en

SOUTH ASIA FREE MEDIA ASSOCIATION (SAFMA)

A regional media practitioner's group of eight South Asian countries seeking to promote peace and media related issues.
Web: http://www.safma.net/

ALERTNET

Operated by the Thomson-Reuters Foundation, this website provides humanitarian news coverage. Web: http://www.trust.org/?show=alertnethumanitarian

IRIN

A UN-funded news and analysis information site. Offers articles, photographs and videos on Afghanistan, plus other humanitarian crisis zones.
Web: http://www.irinnews.org/country/afg/afghanistan

Williams Afghan Media Project

This exceptional project is an online resource for the study of Afghanistan. In addition to helping to preserve and make available resources related to Afghanistan, WAMP also provides a site for exploring the country's cultural legacy, history and current situation. Three photo collections that document in image and sound Afghan history from the late 19th century through the Soviet occupation (1979-89) represent the heart of the WAMP website. These are:

- The Khalilullah Enayat Seraj (KES) collection of photographs taken between the late 19th century and 1930.
- The Louis and Nancy Hatch Dupree collection of slides taken between 1949 and 1987.
- The Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC) collection of photographs and slides taken between 1987 and 1992.

Web: http://contentdm.williams.edu/wamp/web/information.htm

Human rights

AFGHANISTAN INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (AIHRC)

Established as result of the 2001 Bonn Accords. SeeoSeeks to promote, protect and monitor human rights.
Web: http://www.aihrc.org

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (AI)

AI is a London-based international advocacy organization which campaigns against human rights abuses worldwide. AI has published numerous papers on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. Web: www.amnesty.org

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW)

A US-based NGO which campaigns against human rights abuses. Has conducted numerous reports on Afghanistan. Web: www.hrw.org

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW GROUP (IHRLG)

A non-profit and non-governmental organization of human rights and legal experts engaged in human rights advocacy, litigation and training around the world. Established over 20 years ago, the Law Group started a women's rights advocacy program (WRAP) for Afghan refugee women in Pakistan in 1999. Web: www.hrlawgroup.org

LAWYERS COMMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (LCHR)

Focuses on the legal side of human rights protection. Together with the Reebok Foundation, the LCHR has sponsored the Witness Program, which provides simple multimedia tools, such as camcorders, to human rights activists to enable them to document human rights abuses in parts of the world where governments, the local media, and armed opposition groups often successfully hide human rights abuses. The LCHR has no website yet, but can be contacted through:
New York Office
330 Seventh Ave., 10th Floor N.
New York, NY 10001
Tel. +1 (212) 629-6170
Email: nyc@lchr.org

PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (PHR)
Exceptional group which has done highly unusual forensics work in conflict or post-conflict zones. Web: www.phrusa.org

ORVILLE SCHELL CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS (Yale Law School)
Web: http://www.law.yale.edu/intellectuallife/SchellCenter.htm

LEUTNER CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW AND JUSTICE (Fordham Law School)
Undertakes various human rights projects with students. Open to interesting partnerships. Web: http://www.leitnercenter.org/

Women's issues

AFGHAN INSTITUTE OF TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT (AIL)
Founded in 1995 to assist Afghan women and children, AIL is run entirely by Afghan women and is one of the largest employers of Afghan women in the country. Sectors: empowering Afghan women through training by expanding their educational and health opportunities and by fostering self-reliance and community participation. Web: www.learningpartnership.org

AID TO AFGHAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN (AAWC)
Established in 1997 in Peshawar, this is a small grassroots organization whose goals are to support the Afghan widows, orphans and children of poor or vulnerable families. AAWC opened a school in Maimana, Faryab Province for orphans and needy children. An office and school were opened in Kabul in 2003.
See The Canadian Women for Afghanistan website.
Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

AFGHAN WOMEN'S EDUCATION CENTER (AWEC)
A non-political NGO that has been operating in refugee communities since 1991. AWEC runs the Center for Women and Street Children in Kabul. This aims to improve the status of women as leaders and agents of positive change in an Islamic and tradi-

tional Afghan society. It also seeks to improve living conditions of marginalized women and children through educational programmes for children, literacy for women, health services, vocational training and work in the area of peace education.
Web: http://www.awec.info

AFGHAN WOMEN'S NETWORK (AWN)

Created in 1995 by Afghan women in Pakistan and Afghanistan active in Peshawar, Islamabad, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul. Many worked in Afghanistan as lawyers, engineers, professors and doctors, but are now mainly with NGOs, UN agencies and schools. AWN has over 2,000 individual members plus 62 Afghan women's NGO members. Combining rural, educated, refugee, urban and professional women, members operate both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The overall goal is to build capacity among Afghan women and to encourage more positives toward women within Afghan society.
Web: http://www.afghanwomensnetwork.org

AFGHAN WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER (AWRC)

Founded in 1989, AWRC seeks to improve access among women to security, education and employment and health care. Projects include education and literacy training, income generation and skills development, as well as training for basic health services both in Afghan refugee camps near Peshawar, Pakistan, and throughout rural and urban centres in Afghanistan. After opening their offices in Kabul in 2002, AWRC helped establish a number of resource centres throughout the country.
For further information, see The Canadian Women for Afghanistan website. Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

AFGHAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS LIST (AWRL)

An informal and evolving email list for networking and information sharing among NGOs, government officials, parliamentarians and others interested in women's issues.
The Group can be contacted and/or joined via Facebook at:
http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=62412000821

AFGHAN WOMEN'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (AWSDC)

A non profit organization established in 1999 with programming

focusing on the needs of Afghan women, including widows, the disabled and chronicaly ill, and orphan children. The goals of AWSDC are to reduce the suffering of Afghan women and children through promotion of peace. It also helps initiate rehabilitation and development projects reaching the most vulnerable populations in the remote and urban areas of Afghanistan. Based in Kabul, it has implemented a number of emergency, relief and development projects for vocational skills training, literacy, English language and computer classes. It also provides facilities for informative workshops, resources, networking and collaboration with other organizations.
For further information, see website for The Canadian Women for Afghanistan.Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

AFGHAN WOMEN'S WELFARE DEVELOPMENT (AWWD)

An Afghan women's NGO set up in 1989, its principal focus is to support educational, social, economical and medical needs of women. It provides educational services such as literacy, computer and English language training or by providing women with employment opportunities through its projects.
For further information, See The Canadian Women for Afghanistan website. Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

CANADIAN WOMEN FOR AFGHANISTAN (CW4A)

Supports various women's initiatives in Afghanistan and a good source for further information. Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF AFGHANISTAN (HAWCA)

An NGO established in 1999 by a group of Afghan men and women to help alleviate the despair and devastation suffered. Provides free social services for women and children, notably education, protection, counseling, health and child-care, emergency response operations, income generating projects. Web: http://www.hawca.org

International Working Group on Refugee Women (IWGRW)

A Swiss-based NGO, forming part of the Special Committee of International NGOs on Human Rights (Geneva). IWGRW is active within the Afghan diaspora in Western Europe.
Web: http://www.ppseawa.org/97S/Chadors.html

NOOR EDUCATION CENTRE (NEC)

Set up in 2001 by a young volunteer group of Afghan women. Their motto is "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." NEC seeks to direct positive efforts towards through programmes in support of Afghan women and children. These include: awareness-raising in gender, human rights, and children's rights issues; English language, literacy, health and Koranic education classes; home schools; vocational training and special classes such as sign language and other programmes for disabled women. CW4WAfghan has funded the Nazoo Annah Library since 2004, which is part of the NEC programming.
For further information, See The Canadian Women for Afghanistan website.
Web: http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/events-and-resources/resources/afghan-civil-society-organizations

PARSA

Provides integrated educational and economic development programs for widows, orphans, and disabled people of Afghanistan. such as weaving and the setting up of the PARSA gift shop. This is the only source of income for many of these widows to support their families. The average income normally ranges between $20 and $50 per month. The women take great pride in the excellent quality of their work and in completing custom orders in a timely manner. Web: http://www.afghanistan-parsa.org

SHUHADA ORGANIZATION

It's objective is to help raise funds to support the work of Dr. Sima Samar and the Shuhada Organization, a non-profit established in 1989 with an emphasis on the empowerment of Afghan women and children. Projects include: health, education, home-based schools, income generation and relief distribution.
Web: http://www.shuhada.org.af/

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)

RAWA has been active since the mid-1980s, campaigns for women's rights and provides education and health facilities for women and children.
Web: www.rawa.org
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC)
Web: www.womenscommission.org

VIII. Glossary

Adat: custom, habit (plural: Ada't).
Afghani: Afghanistan's currency, reissued in October 2002 when three noughts were knocked off its face value. Now between 50-60 Afghanis to the US dollar.
Afghan Mellat: Afghan Social Democratic Party.
Afghan Peace Movement: an Islamic political party.
Alem (plural: ulama): religious scholar; graduate in higher Islamic studies from a madrassa.
Amir: leader, lord, sometimes king.
ANA: Afghan National Army. Until the arrival of the Americans with their penchant for acronyms, everyone simply referred to government troops, whether under the Soviets or during the civil war of the 1990s, as askari (soldiers) or "regime forces."
ATA: Afghanistan Transitional Administration, led by Hamid Karzai since the June 2002 Loya Jirga until 2004 with the first presidential elections.
Basmachi: Islamic and traditionalist fighters who resisted Soviet rule in Central Asia; literally 'bandits.' The Soviets often referred to the mujahideen as basmachi. Now sometimes used to refer to freelance bandits, some with government or insurgent links.
Buzkashi: violent sport played in northern Afghanistan by two teams of horsemen fighting to drop a decapitated goat inside a chalk circle. (SEE BUZKASHI)
Coalition: The NATO-led international forces in Afghanistan. By 2013, 48 armies were operating in the country ranging from the Americans to the Estonians.
Chador: garment worn by women in accordance with Islamic law or local custom to cover required parts of the body.
Durand Line: boundary imposed by the British in 1893 on Amir Abdur Rahman which separated Afghanistan from British India. The line still splits Pashto-speaking tribes between Afghanistan and Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly NWFP) region. (SEE DURAND LINE)
Durrani: Pashtun tribe living in south-western Afghanistan, from which the Royal family came. Rivals of the Ghilzai.
FATA: Federally-administered tribal agencies in Pakistan, more commonly known as Tribal Agencies. Tribal areas also exist in Afghanistan are mainly in the Pashtun east and south.
Fundamentalist: "for fundamentalism it is of paramount

importance to get back to the scriptures, clearing away the obfuscation of tradition. It always seeks to return to some former state; it is characterised by the practice of re-reading texts, and a search for origins. The enemy is not modernity but tradition… fundamentalism sits uneasily within the political spectrum, for the "return to first things" may take many different forms… in Afghanistan fundamentalism, defined as a desire to get back to shari'at as the sole authority, is the natural attitude of the educated clergy, the ulama, whereas the mullah of the villages, who have not mastered the whole corpus of the law, are traditionalists and not fundamentalists." (Olivier Roy) The Taliban movement is considered to be traditionalist not fundamentalist.
Gelim: woven rug from Turkic tribes of northern Afghanistan. General Dostum's men were nicknamed the gelim jam (literally "carpet-baggers") because of their reputation for looting and pillaging.
Hajji: Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.
Ghilzai: Pashtun tribe in south-eastern Afghanistan. Rivals of the Durrani.
Hadith: Prophet Mohammed's sayings and doctrines, handed down through a line of authorities.
Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami: Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami: Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi (died 2002). The largest mujahideen movement in the early 1980s. A traditionalist party based on madrassa and tribal Pashtun support, many of its members defected to the Taliban (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Harakat-e-Islami: Moderate Shi'a mujahideen party, led by **Mohammed Asef Muhseni:** Not currently a member of the 'united' Shi'a Hezb-e-Wahdat. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar): Party of Islam (Sunni) led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; mainly radical Pashtun Islamists. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Hezb-e-Islami (Khalis): Party of Islam (Sunni) led by Mawlawi Younis Khalis; a splinter group from Hekmatyar's party; mainly moderate Pashtun Islamists. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Hezb-e-Jomhorikhahan-e-Afghanistan: Republican Party of Afghanistan.
Hezb-e-Tahir: One of the main political parties.
Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami: Party of Islamic Unity (Shi'a/Hazara) led by Karim Khalili. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Hojra: guest room or house.

Imam: leader of any Islamic community; leader of a collective Islamic prayer.
ISI: Inter Services Intelligence (Pakistani military intelligence).
Islam: literally, 'submission' to the commands of Allah, the omniscient and omnipotent God. A monotheistic religion which completes the prophetic Judaeo-Christian tradition and recognises Mohammed as the last of the prophets. The Five Pillars of Islam are:
1) **Shahadat**, the profession of faith in Allah and Mohammed, made daily after waking up and before going to sleep; 2) **Salat**, ritual prayer five times a day facing Mecca, performed by all Muslims over the age of 10; 3) **Zakat**, compulsory gift of 2.5% of annual savings to the poor; 4) **Sawm** (Ruza in Dari), abstaining from all bodily pleasures (including food) between dawn and sunset during Ramadan or ramzan (literally, "the month during which the Koran was sent down") 5) **Hajj**, pilgrimage to Mecca (in Saudi Arabia), which all physically able Muslims should make at least once in a lifetime.
Islamist movement: originated in the late 1950s in reaction to the process of Westernization and liberal secularization in Afghanistan. Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani was pronounced Chairman in 1971 and it developed into the Jamiat-e-Islami. Puritanical reformists more than fundamentalists.
Isma'ilis: Shi'a Islamic sect led by the Aga Khan, numbering some 300,000 people living in north-eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Iran, Syria and Africa. They are 'Sevener' Shi'as as opposed to the 'Twelver' Hazaras. (SEE ETHNIC & TRIBAL)
Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan: Formerly Ittihad-e-Islami: Islamic Alliance (Sunni/Pashtun); an Islamist group led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Izzat: honour (collective and individual)
Jamaat-e-Islami: Society of Islam (Pakistani Sunni party)
Jamiat-e-Islami: Society of Islam (Afghan Sunni party) led by ex-President Burhanuddin Rabbani. Mainly moderate Tajik Islamists, its military commander was Ahmed Shah Massoud, a Panjshairi Tajik. One of the major parties in the anti-Taliban "Northern Alliance," or United Front – its official name. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)
Jihad: literally 'struggle' interpreted either as inner spiritual struggle, or wider holy war to defend or propagate Islam.
Jirga: Pashtun tribal assembly for resolution of disputes and decision-making; literally, 'circle', denoting the equality of

participants.

Jumbesh-e-Melli Islami: National Islamic Movement (Sunni/Uzbek) led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum. (SEE KEY PLAYERS)

Kafir: non-Muslim, unbeliever; literally, 'denier.' The inhabitants of Kafiristan remained pagans until they were converted to Islam by the sword in 1896, after which their land became known as Nuristan, "Land of Light."

Karez: underground gravity-fed irrigation canal.

KHAD: Khademat-e-Ittela'at Dowlati, State Information Services. The former Afghan communist government's East German-trained secret police. Once headed by Dr Najibullah.

Khalifa: caliph. Arabic word meaning successor. Following the Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 AD/CE, four of his companions competed to succeed him as Caliph: Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and Ali.

Khalq: one of the two main factions of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Literally, "People" or "Masses," it was mainly Pashtun and military in its membership. Formed in 1967, it was led by Nur Mohammed Taraki (April 1978 to September 1979) and Hafizullah Amin (September to December 1979). (SEE KEY PLAYERS)

Khan: leader of a clan, ethnic group, professional caste; socially/locally appointed (unlike a malik).

Kuchi: nomad.

Loya Jirga: Great Council; highest representative institution in the Afghan state. Met in 1964, 2002 and 2003. Other Loya Jirgas have taken place, such as one resistance-led one in 1980 in Peshawar, or one organized by the Kabul PDPA regime during the late 1980s. A further one took place in Kabul in 1993 organized by then President Rabbani. Many of these other Loya Jirgas, however, were never considered fully representative and hence not regarded as national or official.

Madrassa: school for secondary or advanced Islamic studies, usually attached to a large mosque.

Malik: chief of a tribe or clan, usually one appointed by the state, as opposed to a khan; literally 'ruler.'

Masjid: mosque; Masjid-e-Jami: Friday Mosque.

Mawlawi: graduate from a madrassa (college of higher Islamic studies); similar to an alem.

Mazar: monument built over the tomb of an important figure; literally, "place of pilgrimage."

Melmastia: Pashtun hospitality, especially the feeding of guests.
Mir: lord or ruler, especially of Hazaras.
Mirab: someone elected and paid to ensure local water rights are respected.
Mujahideen: soldiers of Islam or holy warriors. A mujahed is one engaged in jihad; mujahed is also an adjective.
Mullah: a village-level religious leader and preacher.
Namus: Pashtun honour, law, principle; those things a man must defend to preserve his honour.
Nasr: Victory, a radical Islamist Shi'a Afghan group once supported by Iranian Hazaras.
National Democratic Institute: A non-profit organized established in 2002 to promote democracy in Afghanistan.
Northern Alliance (officially – United Front): anti-Taliban military alliance between the mainly Tajik Jamiat-e- Islami party of Rabbani and Massoud, the mainly Uzbek forces of General Dostum, centred on Mazar-e-Sharif and the predominantly Hazara Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami. Replaced the earlier Shura-e-Hamahangi (Supreme Coordination Council, an alliance of the northern-based forces of General Dostum and Hezb-e-Islami-Hekmatyar) and Shura-e-Nezar Shomal (Supervisory Council of the North, an alliance led by Massoud). Allies of the US-led Coalition which toppled the Taliban in late 2001. Pakistan's ISI began calling the United Front the "northern Alliance" in order to create a division between the mainly Tajik and Uzbek north and the Pashtun south. The ploy succeeded, when the term was more or less used by the Americans, and above all, the media.
NWFP: Renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 by the Islamabad authorities, but formerly North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, largely Pashtun-inhabited. Part of Afghanistan since 1747 but assimilated under British control and divided up from Afghanistan by the Durand Line of 1893. Consisting of a number of tribal agencies it is today a semi-autonomous region not fully answerable to Islamabad.
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: See NWFP.
PDPA: People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The Afghan Marxist party, founded in 1965 with the aim of turning the feudal society of Afghanistan into a socialist state. Rivalry led to a split in 1967, with Nur Mohammed Taraki creating the Khalq ('Masses') faction and Babrak Karmal forming the Parcham ('Flag') faction. Pressure from the Soviets caused the two factions to re-unite in 1977. The PDPA came to power after staging the April 1978 Saur

Revolution which deposed (and killed) President Daoud. Taraki became President of the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, but was (murdered and) replaced first by Hafizullah Amin and then Karmal, on the eve of the Soviet invasion. Dr Najibullah replaced Karmal in 1986 and re-named the party Hezb- e-Watan ("Fatherland Party"), but it was ousted from power and dissolved when Najib's government fell to the mujahideen in 1992. The PDPA government was throughout the 1990s referred to as the 'regime.' (SEE HISTORY), but this now appears to be the name given to the current western-backed administration in Kabul.

Parcham: one of the two main factions of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Literally, 'Flag' or 'Banner', its membership was mainly non-Pashtun intelligentsia and government officials. The party was formed in 1968 and led by Babrak Karmal, becoming dominant over the Khalq faction when Karmal was installed as the country's President by the Soviets in December 1979.

Pardah (or purdah): seclusion or separation of women from men; literally, 'curtain.'

Pashto: the language spoken by Pashtuns.

Pashtun: also called Pakhtun, Pukhtun and Pathan. The largest ethnic/tribal group in Afghanistan. Sunni Muslim. (SEE ETHNIC & TRIBAL)

Pashtunwali: Pashtun tribal code, often known literarily or historically as the "Law of the Pathan."

Pir: religious leader of the Sufi order; literally "the old one."

Qabila: large and established tribe.

Qazi: Islamic judge.

Qizilbash: literally "red head"; Dari-speaking Shi'a Afghans descended from the 18th Century Turkic contingent left behind by Iran.

Qu'ran (or Koran): the holy book of Islam.

Sardar: chief or military commander.

Sayyad: someone descended from the Prophet (through his daughter Fatima).

Shah: king (Persian).

Shari'a: Islamic law; literally, "the path to follow." The primary sources for Shari'a are the Qu'ran and the Sunnah, while its secondary sources are Qiyas (analogical reasoning by Islamic jurists) and Ijma (consensus of Islamic jurists). Rejected by the Communists in the 1980s but reintroduced as the basis of the Islamic State of Afghanistan by both the mujahideen (1992-

94) and the Taliban (1994-2001). According to Afghan expert Ali Wardak: "past experiences show that it is only that version of shari'a that is in harmony with Afghan cultural traditions, existing legal norms and fundamental principles of human rights that can make important contributions to a credible post-war justice system in Afghanistan."
Shi'a: Muslim sect which holds that leadership of the Islamic community should be by dynastic succession from Imam Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed) and his descendants. Their view conflicts with the Sunni principle that Mohammed's successor or caliph should be elected. Shi'as divide into three main sects according to which of their imams is believed to be the "Expected One", who will return on judgement day: the 5th, 7th or 12th. In Afghanistan the Hazaras and Qizilbash are mostly 'twelvers', as in Iran; but the Isma'ilis are 'seveners.' Shi'a represent around 15% of Afghanistan's population. They are followers of the Ja'afari jurisprudential school.
Shura: council, assembly.
Sufism: Islamic mysticism; emerged in the 8th Century; seeks personal experience of union with God, rather than rational knowledge of God; long in conflict with more scholastic Sunni Islam. (Afghan contemporary Sufi orders include Qadiri and Naqshbandi).
Sunnah: the statements and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed.
Sunni: Muslim sect which holds that Mohammed's successor or caliph should be elected. Their view conflicts with the Shi'a principle that leadership of the Islamic community should be by dynastic succession from Imam Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed) and his descendants. Sunnis constitute up to 85% of the population of Afghanistan, including most Pashtuns. They are followers of the Hanafi school.
Taliban (singular: talib): religious students (literally, 'seekers') from a madrassa; the Taliban are a Pashtun-based traditionalist armed political group which emerged as a powerful force in November 1994 and took Kabul in September 1996, before being toppled by the US-led Coalition and its Northern Alliance allies in late 2001. (SEE TALIBAN and Traditionalist below)
Traditionalist: "the desire to freeze society so that it conforms to the memory of what it once was: it is society as described by [our] grandfathers. In this vision history and tradition are merged; the historical development of society is effaced in favour of an imaginary timeless realm under attack from pernicious

modernity. Traditionalism can never provide the basis for any coherent political programme; it is riddled with nostalgia and its politics naturally incline towards all that is conservative." (Olivier Roy) The Taliban movement is considered to be traditionalist not fundamentalist.

Ulama (singular: alem): academics specializing in Islamic learning and traditions.

Umma: pan-Islamic community, or Islamic nation.

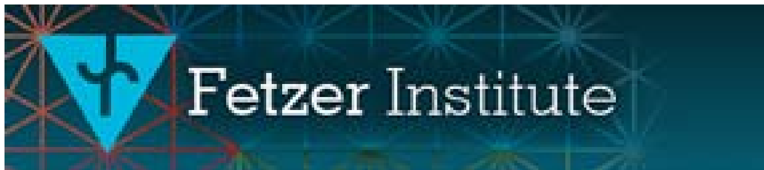
United Front: alternative name for the Northern Alliance. Karzai's defence minister, the Panjshairi Tajik Mohammed Fahim, is one of the United Front's principal leaders (SEE KEY PLAYERS).

Wahabism: extremely puritanical Saudi Arabian Islamic sect.

Wali: governor of a province.

Watan: Literally means homeland; Fatherland Party (see PDPA).

Zakat: Islamic tax on capital, payable to the poor, clergy etc.



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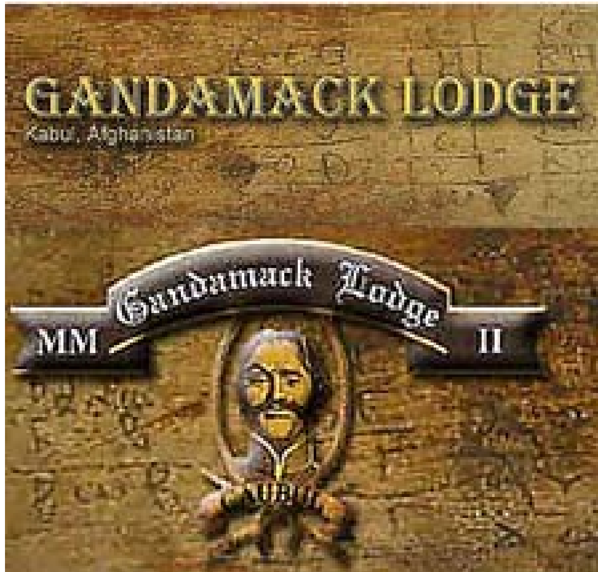

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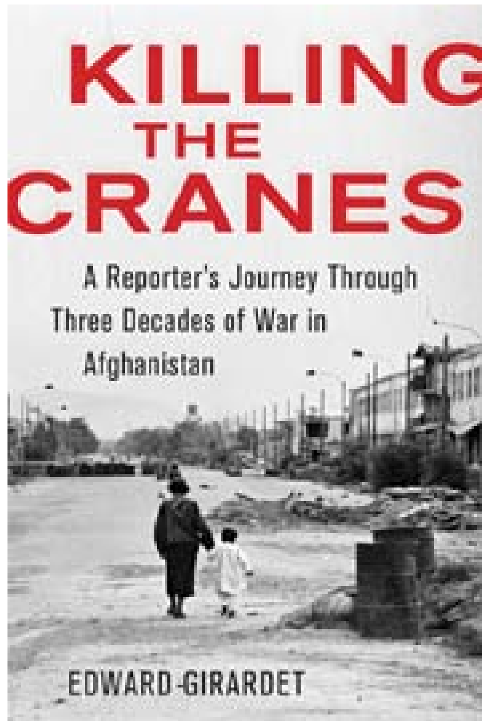

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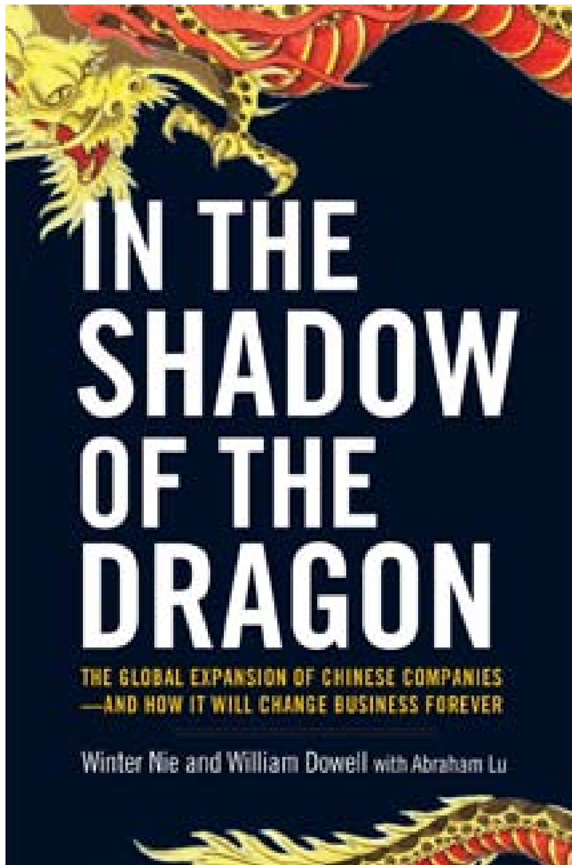

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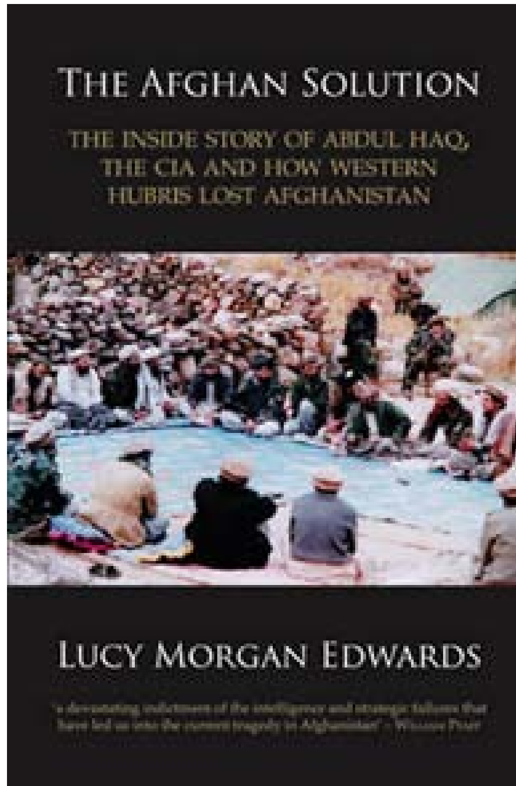

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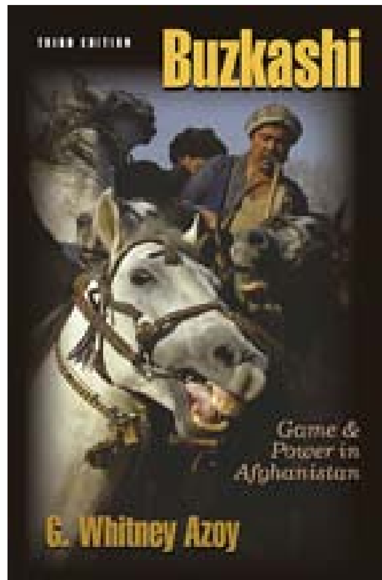

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