

Afghanistan: Peace in a Glasshouse

The Emergency Loya Jirga is over. Given circumstances it was no doubt a success. It took place at the time foreseen in the Bonn Agreement; it brought together in apparent harmony the various ethnic communities of Afghanistan and voted a new President for the Afghan Transitional Administration. The majority of the members of the Loya Jirga were elected and most regional barons and local warlords showed up to pledge their allegiance. Overall this was surely the closest thing to democracy that Afghanistan has experienced for decades. That the Loya Jirga decided rather little and that there were other imperfections are relatively small concerns against the backdrop of over twenty years marked by foreign occupation, civil wars, anarchy, fundamentalist regimes, terrorist infiltration, forced migration, internal displacements, widespread hunger, deprivation, bodily harm and death.

But this act of democracy, as indeed the entire peace process, is taking place under an US-led military hegemony over the country. This military dominance has brought the entire peace process under a kind of glasshouse with a controlled environment. One has therefore to be careful in assessing progress in the peace process without considering this very special, and one may say artificial, circumstances in which it is taking place. Afghanistan's peace will not be able to remain under the protection of the glasshouse for ever and the real test for it will only come when the glasshouse is dismantled and foreign troops, in particular the omnipresent US air cover, are withdrawn. The key question for the Afghan peace process is therefore whether one will be able to develop under the glasshouse a form of government and political stability that will survive the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops.

Creating a protected environment to give peace a chance and to allow a new government to take roots is a clear concept. But will this concept work in the context of Afghanistan, and if yes, what are the specific traps one will have to consider? This paper tries to look at potentials and pitfalls of introducing more democracy, of mobilizing more foreign troops and of bringing in more international resources in support of the peace process. It finally makes some suggestions that may help in moving the peace process eventually out of the glasshouse.

A. Can more democracy bring peace?

Bringing more democracy to a country is one of the gospels of Western interventions, especially of military interventions. Of course, there will be no long-term peace and stability unless people are empowered to choose their own government and political destiny. But in the short-run, writing a new Constitution and organizing free and fair elections, if at all feasible, may not do the trick alone.

While most foreign news reported that democracy has finally been given a chance in Afghanistan, it is less likely that most Afghans feel the same way. The Loya Jirga's vote for Hamid Karzai surely gives him legitimization in the eyes of his foreign partners, but it remains to be seen if this will also be true for most Afghans. Indeed, it is doubtful that the Loya Jirga vote will have translated into a real increase in his authority or made him any stronger vis-à-vis his Shura-i-Nizar partners in the government or the regional barons and local warlords who control most of the country. If anything, the Emergency Loya Jirga might have rather reinforced many Afghans' suspicion towards a Kabul-centered Western-style democracy.

What would happen if a rural member of the Emergency Loya Jirga returns to his village and is asked by those who elected him what he has done for the community? The answers might be disconcerting. He may talk about Kabul politicians manipulating the results in back-chambers; or of foreign interference; or the re-emergence of an intimidating 'Kabuli' security service. He may tell an attentive audience that he saw in Kabul many foreigners in white Toyota Landcruisers, a sure sign that the promised aid is finally on its way. But asked when and what should be done to

get a Toyota to come their way, he will have to admit that he simply does not know. Our returning member of the Loya Jirga will also have to confess that he had done very little to advance security in their region. No regional baron or local warlord had been de-throned, had his authority questioned or was made accountable for his actions. If anything, warlords had become stronger and he may even have told his villagers that they would do better to arrange themselves with local powers for a long time to come.

The Afghan Transitional Administration will have to prepare a new Constitution and hold free and fair national elections. These are mammoth tasks that will have to be completed in a record time of only 18 months – and this even though the most rudimentary conditions for introducing rule of law or organizing elections are entirely absent today. This will draw enormous energies from an already overextended Transitional Administration and prevent it from concentrating its efforts on possibly more urgent tasks such as providing security and basic services. It also runs the risk of taking place in the abstract environment of elusive committees in Kabul with little tangible relevance for the pressing problems facing the majority of Afghans.

Although democracy and the rule of law are important for Afghanistan and must hence remain the ultimate aims, the international community would do well not to make these the main pillars of their intervention. One will have to consider more indigenous solutions that have a more immediate and tangible impact on the life of the common Afghan if one wants to give the fragile peace process a chance to survive.

B. Can more military bring peace?

Reading the few news articles that still appear about political developments in Afghanistan, one could almost forget an important, if not the most decisive factor in the Afghan peace process: the military dominance by foreign forces over virtually all parts of the country. Since October of last year, the United States and its coalition partners maintain, mainly through the US air force, an all-embracing military grip over Afghanistan with the ability to survey and hit virtually every place inside the country within minutes and with high accuracy. This extraordinary omnipresence of potential threat of retribution with the most modern weaponry over a country that barely manages to feed and house itself, gives this military menace a superiority unprecedented in history. Afghans are too aware of these potential threats. This awareness will, no doubt greatly influence the political attitudes throughout the country.

But this is not all: Kabul has its own military umbrella in the form of 4,500 soldiers of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This military umbrella, though much smaller, has made Kabul a special enclave within Afghanistan – a cloche within the glasshouse - that is fundamentally different from the situation in the rest of the country.

The key question for the peace process is therefore if solutions found in such an 'un-real' environment can survive the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops? Are the internal political solutions that are emerging under the foreign military umbrella strong enough and sufficiently deeply rooted in the Afghan society to ensure a relatively stable country once the United States decides to reduce or completely disband their air cover over Afghanistan? Are the various power centres, the regional and ethnic interests sufficiently balanced to prevent the outbreak of an open power struggle as soon as the glasshouse is broken down? Is it conceivable that ISAF could remain in Kabul to protect a central government once the American military presence is diminished?

Both, the military air cover over Afghanistan and the special security umbrella for Kabul come at soaring costs for the international community. Even if one hears now more often that the Americans prepare to stay a long time, their presence can not be maintained forever. Two years, or three, perhaps five – all this is no time in the Afghan context. Afghan power players know that, and will act accordingly. To protect their respective interests, Afghan groups, regional barons and local warlords will have to develop survival strategies for the time in the glasshouse and for the

"time after" One could image the following survival strategies for the various groups of Afghan actors under the glasshouse.

a) Taliban and al Qaida

Whatever Taliban or al Qaida forces may remain in Afghanistan, their rational survival strategy would be to lay low and, except for small and well-planned provocations, wait and see. Being faced with an overwhelming US military power and the determination to use it, they would lose most in direct confrontations. On the other hand, their political aims would benefit most by keeping the US military guessing their whereabouts, by denying them the satisfaction of reaching their war objectives and hence by drawing them further and further into an Afghanistan war they can not finish. A prolonged military operation in Afghanistan comes at enormous costs and may yield comparatively little in concrete returns.

The longer the US keeps their forces in Afghanistan, the less will its modern weapons and sophisticated bombs be useful and effective tools. Even worse, US forces will find themselves increasingly pressured to engage in 'nation-building' while exposing themselves to the risk of antagonising parts of the Afghan population. The very fact that the US and coalition forces were not able to find, arrest or eliminate most al Qaida and Taliban leaders despite billion-dollar operations might indicate that there is more local and international support than we want to admit.

b) Regional barons and local warlords

The most rational survival strategy for regional barons and local warlords would be to build up their strength and prepare for an eventual power struggle after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. Until such time, the rational things to do will be:

- To maintain good relations with US forces to prevent being prematurely eliminated and hence being thrown out of the race. Equally, they will have to try to extract as much foreign military and financial help as possible. A little reminder here and there that the Taliban and al Qaida are still around will surely help American and coalition generosity.
- To secure an independent economic and military source that will make them immune to efforts by the Transitional Administration to curb their powers and help them to protect against the ambitions by one of their fellow regional barons to extend their zones of influence. Income sources can be drugs, smuggling, precious stones or cross-border taxing. It may also entice some of them to look increasingly for outside support.
- To keep good relations with local leaders build a local power-base and to forestall any attempts of being overthrown by one of their local warlords. Regional barons will have to take into account an increasing unpopularity of foreign troops and the risk of being seen as puppets of Western secret services. In the Pashtun areas in particular, prudence may also dictate negotiating also with former (?) Taliban leaders.

c) Forces co-opted into the Transitional Administration

Even the elements that make up the Transitional Administration will have to plan for the time after an eventual withdrawal of US forces. This applies in particular to the Shura-i-Nizar. As a windfall of the anti-terrorist war, they turned out to be the great winners after having almost been wiped out. But they may have bitten off a piece that is too large for them to swallow and that will bring them increasingly into bitter conflicts with other Afghan players, mainly with Pashtuns – but possibly also with Uzbeks and Hazaras¹. Their rational strategy would therefore be to use the time in the internationally recognised government to build up a strong 'national' army and 'national' police and security forces to help them to protect what had been gained. They must also have an interest in weakening their potential opponents while still being internationally protected. They will hence support the on-going hunt for al Qaida and Taliban forces in Pashtun areas and support 'police' actions such as the fight against illicit drug production and smuggling in the South of the country.

¹ In this context, it is telling that Ismail Khan, although a Tajik himself has kept his distance from the Fahims and Qanunis of the Transitional administration.

For Karzai and the Rome Group the situation is far more tricky. As they have no 'natural' power base inside Afghanistan their rational survival strategy must be trying to convince as many Afghans as possible that they are the hope for a peaceful, stable and eventually prospering country. They must try to extend their support from the very small urban elites (mainly in Kabul) to the great majority of rural Afghans. The few real trump cards they have are the support by the international community and the general weariness of the population with war and warlords. But it remains to be seen if this is sufficient. Indeed, Karzai's coalition with the Shura-i-Nizar might be seen by many of his fellow Pashtuns as treason, and the American bombing of villages in areas of potential support to Karzai will have done great damage. Similarly, the difficulties (or incapability) of the international community to give Karzai the means to provide a peace dividend to his Afghan people through the Transitional administration will further undermine him. His greatest asset, his closeness to the international community, might end up becoming a liability.

While operating under the glasshouse, the main strategic asset for most groups of Afghan actors is *patience*. Patience in adversity, Sir Olaf Caroe² reminded us, is one great virtue of the Pashtun fighter – an assessment that probably applies to all Afghans. Only Karzai can ill afford patience – he must deliver now if he wants to take root in the Afghan population and survive in the long run. Against him will also be that Western military forces most likely do not have patience either. The final political solution for Afghanistan might therefore be determined by the struggle of patience versus the most modern Western weaponry. One is tempted to bet that *patience will have the upper hand in the end*³.

Once the glasshouse is 'lifted', will this leave Hamid Karzai dangling in the air and the Rome Group slip into insignificance? It is a bad omen for the future political stability of the Transitional Administration when its just-elected new President has to ask for an American force to protect him. It reveals not only a deep mistrust over the intentions of his fellow Afghans in government but also reflects badly on ISAF and raises the question of who really controls Kabul. All this does not bode well for the future peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The present instability and insecurity in Afghanistan is partly at least, the result of the way the US-led coalition has fought its war. It wants a strong central government while at the same time having brought back, armed and financed many regional barons and local warlords to do the fighting for them. Their intervention has changed the ethnic power balance - e.g. by allowing one ethnic minority to take over Kabul – that brought a great deal of instability. It is a matter for the US-led coalition to make up their mind what they want in Afghanistan – and not a matter of bringing in more military or of expanding ISAF.

C. Can more international resources bring peace?

In the wake of the anti-terrorist war, the international community is making enormous efforts in helping Afghanistan to get back on its feet. It has freed the country from a fundamentalist regime supported by one of the most notorious terrorist networks, it provides military protection for a new government to take shape and has promised substantial humanitarian and reconstruction aid. All this is giving Afghanistan a unique chance for peace, stability and development after a quarter of a century of war and deprivation.

But good intentions and the allocation of more military and economic resources alone will not do the job. In order to play a constructive role, the international community must first and foremost

² Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, 1958

³ In 1839, a British force chased the Afghan ruler Dost Mohammed, only to return to his throne three years later. Having been seen initially as a foe to British interests, he, in fact turned out to be one the British Raj's most reliable neighbours. To suggest that something similar could happen today and see some kind of Taliban return is surely stretching historical parallels too far.

beware of pitfalls of working in the Afghan context. Indeed, if not careful, the international community could become part of the Afghan problem rather than part of its solution.

Above all there are three deep faultlines in the Afghan society that the international community must prevent itself from falling into:

- the contradiction between a rural traditional society and a more modern city elite;
- the mistrust among Afghan ethnic groups and
- the rejection of foreign influences and cultures.

Each of those three faultlines has been at the origin of violent conflicts, civil unrest and wars. The operations must therefore be designed to prevent deepening the rural-city divide, to avert fueling the inter-ethnic mistrust and to reduce hostilities over foreign influences.

Prevent deepening the rural –city divide

The international intervention has had a very different impact on the countryside and on cities such as Kabul. This difference may deepen the traditional divide that exists between rural areas and major cities and the distrust between the rural traditionalists and an urban elite. This rural – urban divide can release great destructive forces as seen during the destruction of Afghan cities by the mainly rural mujahideen forces in the early nineties and more recently the imposition of fundamentalist policies by the also rural-based Taliban.

While an international force of about 4,500 men and women watches over the security in Kabul, the security in much of the rest of the country has deteriorated since the collapse of the Taliban regime. Under the protection of ISAF, political, social and economic conditions are developing in Kabul that are more and more de-linked from developments in the rest of the country. The protected enclave of Kabul risks producing an Afghan political leadership that is more responsive to the international community while losing (or better failing to gain) the confidence within the mostly rural Afghan society.

In the wake of the international intervention, two kinds of Afghan leaders returned to Afghanistan: Royalists and technocrats that have joined the Interim Administration with the help of the UN; and former Afghan warlords, many of whom have been able to reclaim their lost fiefdoms with the help of coalition forces. Whereas the first group now dominates much of the international scene in Kabul, the second group has taken control over much of the countryside. No doubt this will further antagonise the divide between the countryside and Kabul.

Kabul is fast 'filling up' with foreign diplomats, UN officials, bilateral aid official and all sorts of international NGO workers. More and more international offices are being rent at sky-high prices and more and more white Toyota Landcruisers hustle foreign "dignitaries" and aid workers through Kabul's central streets in search of one or another Minister to present him/her with yet another vision of how to help the country. There will be very little of such activity in much of the rest of the country. The lack of security (or a times the perceived lack of security) around Kabul and in many parts of the country will further enhance the tendency for a Kabul-centred approach to international assistance with little involvement from the countryside.

Furthermore, the international intervention has brought with it the US dollar as a medium of exchange. The dollar increasingly dominates the money exchanges in the cities whereas the countryside will largely remain in the Afghani economic zone (or a Pakistani rupee economic zone). As a result, the city (and here above all Kabul) will benefit most from the money brought in by international organizations, be it aid money or simply money paid for services required to sustain the international community itself. This will also deepen the rural – city divide.

In the midst of all the rubble, Kabul is quickly undergoing social changes. Women work in offices alongside with foreigners, cinemas show Indian films, videocassettes are traded, pictures of women sold and sports games between Afghan youth and foreigners are organised. These will be seen with much suspicion in the countryside and provoke resentment among tribes that

perceive them as subversive Western values – and hence as being un-Islamic. Much of the country –city conflict was provoked over these kind of issues.

Avert inter-ethnic mistrust

The political balance in Kabul worked out in Bonn⁴ rests essentially on a power-sharing settlement between the Shura-i-Nizar and the Rome Group. The problem is only that the resulting 'alliance' brought together very uneven partners. The Shura-i-Nizar leadership is home-grown, has local support and commands considerable military muscle. The Rome Group consists mainly of members who returned to Afghanistan after many years of exile and who maintain one leg outside the country. Many are aged, became nationals of other countries with families and homes abroad; their grown up children no longer speak the languages of their fathers. The local support for these parachuted Afghan leaders is hence questionable and they have no credible military organization to back them up. Karzai and the Rome group will be no match for the Shura-i-Nizar should it come to a power struggle.

Despite the international fixation with real or perceived Afghan inter-ethnic strife, it is surprising how little attention has been given to this issue in conducting the war of the US-led coalition. This is a great mistake that will have its negative impact. Indeed, the war of the coalition has changed the power balance among ethnic groups in Afghanistan and with it the potential for renewed ethnic conflicts. To have allowed the Shura-i-Nizar to take Kabul was probably one of the gravest mistakes in the US-led coalition. It has created a claim to power by one of the Afghan ethnic groups that will make any compromise difficult.

The fall of Kabul to Panjshiri forces is not necessarily seen as liberation from Taliban suppression by all Afghans as many international newspapers may want us to believe. For many Pashtuns, and possibly also for other minorities, it is rather a symbol of a changed power balance in favor of one Afghan minority with the help of foreign troops – and is hence perceived as a potential threat.

Under the eyes of ISAF, the Shura-i-Nizar appears to build up its power-base in Kabul among the armed, police and security forces. The international community might even have helped this development through providing training, weapons, money and logistics to forces that could turn out to be a decisive partisan factor in the struggle among Afghan leaders. The recent (re-)creation of a central Afghan army could only increase the suspicion among non-Tajik ethnic groups. Both the Minister of Defense and his Chief of Staff are from the Tajik community. Also the security and police forces appear to be recruited from and controlled by Tajiks. Furthermore, many Pashtuns in the South were effectively disarmed during the Taliban years whereas their Tajik confreres kept their arms and are now dominating mixed ethnic regions such as Loghar.

This will further be accentuated by the fact that coalition forces are fighting mostly in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Military actions against any existing, or perceived, opposition are justified with hunting down alleged Taliban and al Qaida terrorist forces. However, Afghan opposition may increasingly have very little to do with al Qaida terrorist networks, but be an expression of dissatisfaction with the results of the international intervention. The resentment of being singled out by the US-led coalition forces and the suffering among the civilian Pashtun population could quickly increase these trends.

Whatever committee superstructures are being envisaged to supervise the new armed forces, this may do little to ease the fear that the reigns of power remain effectively in the hands of a few powerful players representing one group only. The recent military parade held in commemoration of the withdrawal of Soviet troops ten years ago with large posters of Shah Massoud had the taste of a victory parade for the Shura-i-Nizar rather than that for a united and multi-ethnic Afghanistan. Is Fahim turning out to be just another regional baron instead of a member of a multi-ethnic and broad-based Transitional Administration?

⁴ This is not entirely fair. Also other groups are represented in the Kabul government, but with much less influence.

Ease hostility towards Western influences

Considering the role of foreigners in their war-torn history, Afghans have all the reason to be suspicious. Every bullet that has been fired over the last twenty years, every machine gun, every missile and every mine that has killed or maimed an Afghan has been given by various foreign "friends" with the assurances of their good intentions towards the Afghan people.

Now the wind of an aid bonanza blows over Afghanistan: two billion dollars had been pledged in Japan for the first year and two and half billion more for the next two years. The air is full of promises and assurances. But six months down the road there is very little evidence of the concrete benefits that this has brought to the common Afghan. There are all the signs of an international community mobilizing for a major aid offensive: the foreign missions, aid agencies and NGOs, increasing numbers of foreigners and vehicles, the guesthouses, the walkie-talkies and mobile telephones. But are the tangible results commensurate with the promises and the mushrooming of representative offices of aid organizations? There are few signs that the peace dividend that the international community had promised in exchange for hunting down the al Qaida networks has actually reached the common Afghan men, women and children.

The promised aid, will it ever arrive at the level that was promised? Will it ever be effective in making a difference in the lives of poor Afghans? Too much of it will be eaten up by the international aid machinery, field representatives and the gadgets that go with it, while too little aid is left for funding the Afghan civil service and the building and funding of Afghan institutions. Too many resources are devoted to foreign forces and too little for local security. Too many aid agencies compete for attention, with too many experts promoting their respective pet projects. International funding is highly fragmented, is attached to too many vested institutional interests, particular priorities and separate conditions of working. Well-intended aid programmes throw imported resources on local solutions that would be better and cheaper produced at home⁵. All this overwhelms the local capacity to respond, and results in confusion and a waste of taxpayer's resources.

Too many managerial jobs are done by expensive foreigners. Qualified Afghans are financially much better off working in 'dependent positions' for foreign aid agencies or for the NGO community instead of in responsible positions of the newly established Afghan administration. In fact, the increase in aid offices draws qualified Afghans away from the Afghan administration. The local English-speaking engineer who works as driver for an international organization to chauffeur foreign aid worker sent to 'build local capacities', is probably the best metaphor for such misguided international aid. And this, although the reliance on international aid workers is extremely costly. He/she will cost the taxpayer between 200,000 and 250,000 US dollar a year⁶. The amount of money spent on a single expatriate would probably be enough to pay for the basic health services of an Afghan province over the same period of time. It is said that the UN family employs already close to 500 international staff members and experts in Afghanistan.

All this will undercut the ability of the new Afghan administration to build new national structures and to reach out to its poor compatriots. This will in the end undermine its credibility. How long will it take until expectations will turn into frustrations and hope into hate?

⁵ A recent report by UNDCP pointed out that the price for wheat in the traditional wheat producing areas of Helmand and Kandahar was depressed, a fact that contributed to the planting of illicit opium. At the same time WFP and other aid organisations bring wheat from as far away as the US and Canada to feed starving people that are only about a hundred kilometres away from Helmand and Kandahar.

⁶ The argument that this will prevent the misuse of resources is rather misplaced. Indeed, if one defines "misuse" as a deviation of resources, the funding of such enormous costs for large numbers of international staff and their infrastructure would fit this definition.

D. 'Afghanize' the Peace Process !

The international community is an integral part of the peace process and it must therefore carefully consider its options and approaches if it does not want to become part of the Afghan problem. The role of the international community must be geared to reducing its international presence and to making room for Afghan solutions. There will be no quick fix. No foreign army and no large-scale international aid presence will be able to produce peace if the Afghans themselves are not fully in charge. And Afghan ownership must not stop with only those very few Afghans that 'speak our language' or be limited to replacing Arab-Afghans by Afghan-Americans.

Central Government: *Weaker might be Stronger*

In describing a successful 'nation-building' by Ahmed Shah Durrani, the first Afghan King, Andre Singer⁷ claims that "the only method to government that had some success in controlling the Pashtuns is one that allows each tribe its independence over local tribal policy". Surely there is still some truth in it for today. Is it really desirable or even necessary, to pursue the aim of creating a strong and modern central government in Kabul that will govern the entire country? Under present circumstance this will anyway not be possible. So why act as if it is so? It will take time the build up of a strong central army, police and security forces and turn them not only into effective but also into politically (or ethnically) neutral tools for a central government. In the meantime, activities to create an armed force in Kabul might create fears and suspicions. It will only accelerate the building up of similar forces by regional barons and local warlords to counter-balance the threat posed by a central army that is not seen as neutral.

The trick will be to keep regional power centers strong enough to administer themselves but weak enough to prevent them from 'going it alone' and entice them to revolt against a central government. For the concept of a weaker central government with relatively self-governing regions to succeed regional barons must become weaker. To achieve this (a) the US-led coalition must end its military and logistic support to regional barons and local warlords (b) neighboring states must not pursue regional interests and clandestinely support local barons and (c) the international community must agree to channel all funding and aid resources through the central government.

Ahmed Shah Durrani kept the loyalty of the tribes by letting them share in the spoils of his expansionist wars. Similarly, the Karzai government could first and foremost use central funding for local security forces, schools, healthcare, roads, irrigation schemes, etc. as a bond to keep the country together. A small portion of the promised billions in foreign aid would be sufficient for this purpose. In this context, it is probably most important for the Karzai administration to create a new Afghan currency, to control its money supply and to get hold of sources of income that are presently controlled by regional barons and local warlords.

A weak central government with many small power centers throughout the country could be potentially very stable and allow for the time needed to grow closer together once communications, roads and education spread throughout the country. Such approach would not jeopardize the integrity of Afghanistan. Despite the civil wars and ethnic conflicts no leader and no commander has shown any sign of wanting to split away from Afghanistan. There are no 'liberation' – movements among ethnic or political groups. Also, no neighboring country has made territorial claims against Afghanistan.

Leadership: *Promote the young to take over*

Afghanistan will have a long-term stability only if it is able to develop a new and indigenous leadership. However, the two groups of Afghan leaders that came in the wake of the coalition war and the Bonn peace agreement could potentially suffocate any development for such new leadership. Unfortunately, the Emergency Loya Jirga appears of have further cemented the old leadership and has not been used to allow new leaders to emerge.

⁷ Andre Singer: Lords of the Khyber, 1984

In particular many of the warlords that will not fit a peaceful Afghanistan must be 'persuaded' to demobilize or leave. Here the coalition forces, in whose wake they returned, were trained, armed and funded, bear a heavy moral responsibility. It would probably be sufficient to make an example of one or two of those warlords with the worst human rights records to give a clear message for all Afghans.

Also members of the Rome Group could hamper the emergence of a new indigenous leadership. Too many of them represent a social system that no longer exists in Afghanistan. They have returned to a country that has undergone fundamental social change during the war years in which they, and more importantly their families, may find it difficult to integrate. At the present time they have a positive role to play – but for a brief transitional period only. If they are wise, they will use their experience, knowledge and international connections to encourage a new home-grown leadership to take charge.

Security: Localize security

Security is probably the most precious and the most elusive public good for most Afghans. Nonetheless, any international force would be unable to control the countryside effectively without risking in being drawn into local conflicts. On the other hand, the deployment of a central Afghan army could do more harm than good. In many parts of the country, an Afghan army would provoke ethnic fears and recall memories of the devastation inflicted by the former (communist) Kabul army.

The main issue for security is to prevent anarchy, the rule of the gun and to protect farmers, traders and city dwellers from a multitude of marauding gangs. Local militia forces might best do all this with strong roots in the population it is called upon to protect. To prevent that this would end up in an array of little local armies, the central government should maintain a strong leverage over those forces through a centrally recruited and trained officer corps. The central government should also provide the arms and funding for each of the local militia forces. The regular pay could also help to lure fighters away from warlords and hence contribute to decommissioning. The international community must consider covering the operational costs for the first years. It is a fraction of the costs that a prolonged international assistance force would cost and could substantially reduce the risks to their troops.

Such forces, similar to the 'levies' or 'scouts' in the tribal areas during the time of the British Raj, would be lightly armed and under the control of the local governor. Such region-based security force would hence reflect the local ethnic fabric in which they operate, ease communal fears and reduce human rights abuses.

Rehabilitation: Let the Afghans do the job

The first priority should be to do the feasible instead of dreaming up large-scale investment and institution building projects that will take years to materialize and show results. In order to ensure quick and tangible results throughout the country, the international community (and here I particularly mean the UN and NGO communities) should concentrate on fewer and simpler programmes that are geared to provide basic services such as in water, nutrition, shelter, health, schooling, etc. Such programmes could be very easily implemented through Afghans with very little international involvement.

The second priority should be to do more with less. The West is not necessarily under-investing in Afghanistan but heavily miss-investing. The substantial funds that are spent on armored vehicles for foreign 'dignitaries' that will quickly break their suspension on the roads of Kabul would go a long way to pay for schooling or basic health care.

The third priority is channel all assistance through the Transitional authority. If we want the new Afghan authorities to succeed, we will have to make sure that assistance is delivered through their channels. For this purpose qualified Afghans who are presently working for the ever

increasing NGO and UN communities (some sources estimate their numbers in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran at about 40,000) must be encouraged to join the Afghan administration. And if the international community is serious it must be prepared to pay the operational and salary costs for the government for a long time to come. Although this will go against the philosophy of Western donors, it is probably the cheapest and most efficient and effective way to deliver assistance and to strengthen the Afghan administration. It would go a long way to help develop local leadership.

The forth priority is to reduce drastically the presence of international staff, their representative offices and the gadgets that go with it. The money that can be saved on foreign salaries would probably make up for any possible local corruption.

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Wien, 28 July 2002