

Securing Afghanistan: Entering a Make-or-Break Phase?

by Robert B. Oakley and T.X. Hammes

Key Points

Afghanistan has reached a critical point in its struggle for post-Taliban recovery. The stakes are high and bound to influence enormously the future directions of Islamic extremism, global terrorism, a nuclear-armed Pakistan, and the stability of south and central Asia.

During the past year, major problems festered rather than being treated, mainly because Iraq diverted high-level U.S. attention, resources, and leadership. Aggravating these problems were internal tensions within the Afghan Transitional Authority of President Hamid Karzai, Pashtun resentment toward the authority, and the emergence of a serious Taliban-led insurgency in the south.

To correct these problems, major additional resources were allocated, Operation Enduring Freedom adopted a new focus on security and stability, and the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization agreed to expand the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force beyond Kabul. The successful adoption of a new constitution at the special national assembly (Loya Jirga) in January 2004 by a strong moderate consensus was a significant step forward in national unity, reduced Pashtun resentment, and strengthened the hand of President Karzai as a national leader.

Even so, critical ground and time have been lost, due in part to doubts regarding America's commitment. Success is not assured and will require a longer, harder, and more painful slog for Afghanistan, the United States, and the international coalition, as well as sustained U.S. leadership commitment.

To appreciate Afghanistan's predicament, it is essential to understand that all Afghan politics are tribal. Thus, while Afghans share a genuine national identity, their immediate concern in any political process is to advance or preserve the welfare of their ethnic or extended family group. Further, since the Russians and British artificially imposed the country's international borders, the tribes are not wholly contained within Afghanistan. They straddle the borders with surrounding nations. Thus, tribal politics are also international politics.

This tribal nature of politics has made Afghanistan highly susceptible to local warlords. These individuals draw power from the tribally based militias of the civil war that broke out after the Soviets left and that resumed in much of the country after the defeat of the Taliban. (The Taliban controlled or defeated militias and maintained public order, albeit ruthlessly, in most of the country from 1996 until 2001.)

Kabul has been relatively secure and economically bustling under the protection of the 5,000-person International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), now led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, the Afghan countryside has been dominated by the local and regional warlords and their militias, who have paid little heed (or taxes) to the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) to which they nominally belong as governors, corps or division commanders of the regional Afghan Militia Forces (AMF), ministers, or vice presidents. In an attempt to improve the security situation, the AMF—that is, the warlords' militias—were loosely incorporated into the ATA structure. Unfortunately, while some

militia members loyally assist the coalition, others have continued to be the cause of, rather than the cure for, insecurity, human rights abuses, and criminality, frequently in alliance with the increasingly powerful drug lords.

Neither the ATA nor coalition forces made much of an effort to redress this situation. The former did not feel that it had the power; the latter felt that the anti-al Qaeda/Taliban combat mission they had assumed in October 2001 did not extend to broader security or intra-Afghan ("green on green") disputes, even to supporting the ATA against the warlords. In many localities, the coalition was actually allied with warlords and their militias in pursuit of al Qaeda and Taliban remnants. The result is that outside Kabul, various warlords represent the real power in Afghanistan.

Each of the prominent warlords was a major commander during the war against the Soviets and the civil war that followed. In the north, west of Mazar-e Sharif, Abdul Rashid Dostum leads the Uzbek militia. Just to the east of the same city, Mohammed Atta leads the Tajik militia. Over the past 2 years, these commanders ignored the ATA and repeatedly fought to gain control of key locations and revenue sources in the area. Unfortunately, while they fought, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts were slowed or halted, exacerbating the unrest. In November and December 2003, some promising initiatives ended the fighting, began the collection of heavy weapons, and started improving governance. While still volatile, the area is much quieter and more secure than just a few months ago.

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Afghanistan



In western Afghanistan, warlord Ismail Khan remains firmly in control of the city of Herat and surrounding areas and of the lucrative official and unofficial customs duties generated by the substantial commerce with Iran. With the continued instability in the south and southeast, Iran has replaced Pakistan as the primary trade route, greatly increasing the value of the customs collected in the west. While Khan passes along a token portion of those revenues to the ATA, he has made it clear that he is the functional authority in that portion of the country. There is stability in his region, but it comes at a price for the Afghan people and the Karzai government. One either does business Khan's way or not at all.

In the south and southeast, warlordism extracts the highest price from both Afghans and the coalition. There is no single powerful Pashtun leader to unify the Pashtun tribes and no effective security in the area. Instead, there is constant fighting and shifting alliances (which can include cooperation with both the

coalition and the resistance and cross-border ties with tribes in Pakistan). The installation of Governor Yusuf Pashtun in Kandahar province and the commitment to provide better security and revitalize reconstruction initiatives are positive first steps in dealing with this volatile area, which has become the primary focus of Taliban efforts to disrupt coalition and ATA efforts.

Minister of Defense Mohammed Qasim Fahim Khan has been recognized as the most powerful warlord. He assumed leadership of the Northern Alliance in late 2001 and, with the collapse of the Taliban, moved his Tajik forces into Kabul. Despite agreeing at Bonn in 2001 to move outside the capital, Fahim kept over 5,000 militia and over 200 tanks inside the city. Tajik dominance of the ATA security establishment was bitterly resented by the much more numerous Pashtun. In late 2003, he began to redress his image by surrendering some heavy weapons stocks from the Panjshir Valley, moving others out of Kabul, and putting more non-Tajiks in senior Ministry of Defense positions.

The Karzai government, supported by the coalition, ISAF, the slowly expanding Afghan national army, and newly trained police, has to meld these and many other diverse elements into a functioning nation.

Political Progress

The outcome of the recently completed Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) will have an important, long-term positive impact upon security and national unity. Efforts by the anti-coalition forces to disrupt the holding of the CLJ failed. Subsequent efforts by Islamists and Tajiks to block key provisions of the constitution also failed. The constitution was endorsed largely as drafted with a strong presidential system and a two-house parliament. Those pushing for a strong Sharia law were rebuffed as were those (mostly warlords) advocating federal or provincial systems. Ethnic differences were overcome after a fierce debate, and minority and women's rights are protected. The result has been a psychological boost to President Karzai in particular and, in general, to national unity, the ATA, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United States, and the international coalition. It is also a boost to the Pashtun, who played a cohesive, decisive, and moderate role in the CLJ outcome.

While the new constitution may provoke discontent in some areas, these problems are probably containable. Of critical importance is not only the large majority of delegates who supported the constitution but also the nature and extent of the negotiations between power blocs that went into its approval. The Pashtuns had a majority of the seats and achieved most of what they wanted but did not humiliate the Tajiks, Uzbeks, or Hezara. The first real Afghan foray into democracy post-Taliban was a positive experience for most participants.

The next big challenge will be the presidential elections tentatively scheduled for June, possibly July 2004. Registration procedures and the actual polling process are inherently susceptible to insecurities. They probably are manageable for the presidential election, but preparations have been lagging due to preoccupation with the CLJ and the major security problems in the south and southeast. A belated crash campaign to prepare for security and registration in over 4,000 locations has been begun by the United Nations, the ATA, Operation *Enduring Freedom*, and NATO/ISAF. It is

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likely that presidential elections can be held in most of the country this summer. However, the more daunting task will be the formation of parties, the selection of candidates, and the actual voting for parliamentary seats, which can be much more easily influenced by the Islamist warlords and drug lords than the presidential elections. The objective is to hold both sets of elections at the same time. However, the new constitution states that parliamentary elections may be delayed up to a year after the presidential election, providing more time for the buildup of security.

External Complications

Complicating efforts to gain control of the warlords and their militias is the fact that each major tribal faction has external supporters:

- The Pakistanis want a friendly government in Afghanistan to secure what they see as their vulnerable rear area. For this and internal political reasons, they support the Pashtun—the majority tribe and traditional rulers of Afghanistan who make up the vast majority of the population of Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan as well as President Karzai have been frustrated by the absence of any single dominant Pashtun leader.
- The Indians continue their support to the Tajiks (Panjshiris) that began during the anti-Taliban period of the 1990s. They see this as a counterbalance to Pakistan's support of the Kashmir insurgents. Pakistan sees it as a threat, designed to promote subversion.
- Uzbekistan and Russia provide support to Dostum and his Uzbek militia.
- The Iranians continue to support Ismail Khan and the Hazara, who are Shia, and whom Tehran regards as an ally in the part of Afghanistan that borders Iran.

Thus far, respect for the powerful U.S. role and a wait-and-see attitude toward the ATA and Afghanistan's recovery have kept external support to various factions from reaching a sufficient level to undermine Afghan sovereignty. However, all the external powers, particularly Pakistan, are hedging their bets.

Transnational Threats

Two transnational forces further cloud the security situation in Afghanistan. First is the transnational drug trade. In 2003, opium production quintupled to three-fourths of the total world production. The opium trade is estimated to have brought in more money than all foreign aid during 2003. The huge injection of funds

increased instability by increasing criminality and corruption throughout most of the country, also reaching important officials in Pakistan, Iran, the Central Asian states, and Russia. It has clearly benefited the anti-coalition forces, just as it had earlier financed al Qaeda. Estimates indicate the acreage planted in 2004 could be almost double that planted in 2003.

Operation *Enduring Freedom* did not include a counternarcotics mission because U.S. leadership felt it would be a complication and diversion from combat activities against the Taliban. The United Kingdom volunteered for the mission and worked along with the Afghan authorities, but they have lacked the assets to attack the problem. The United States turned its attention (and resources) to the issue in late 2003, assisting Great Britain and the ATA.

The second transnational threat is the Islamic radical movement. It provides both direct funding for al Qaeda and the Taliban and indirect funding through Islamic religious schools (*madrassas*), mainly in Pakistan. Even more important, the *madrassas* provide a steady supply of Islamist recruits for the anti-coalition forces spread among the Taliban/al Qaeda remnants, and even Hekmaytar Gulbidin, the fundamentalist *mujabideen* leader who fought the Northern Alliance for control of Kabul in the mid-1990s.

Pashtun Resentment

A major threat to Afghan stability emerged from the southern Pashtun population (which is twice as large as that of the northern Tajiks), who see Kabul as their capital and the Tajiks as enemy occupiers. Among the Pashtun, the United States is portrayed as responsible not only for opening the way to renewed Tajik occupation of Kabul in November 2001 (by its assistance to the Northern Alliance in expelling the Taliban) but also for supporting their continued dominant presence. This argument resonates widely with the Pashtun population on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. President Karzai, the senior Pashtun in government, has been seen—at least until recently—by many of his fellow Pashtuns as too ineffectual to counterbalance Tajik domination of politics.

It has also struck a sympathetic chord with the Pakistani military and intelligence services, both of which dislike and distrust the Tajiks and are extremely concerned about the close ties (carried over from Indian support of the Northern Alliance versus the Taliban in the

late 1990s) that the Indians have with the ATA. When the ATA permitted the Indians to open consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar, Pashtun and Pakistani suspicions were further fueled. Indian-Iranian cooperation in developing railroads, roads, and commercial activities for the flourishing Iranian-Afghan trade has also upset the Pakistanis.

A second powerful and emotional message among the Pashtun has been the portrayal of the United States as basically anti-Islamic. This message took on even greater credibility with the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the aggressive, highly publicized Israeli military action against Palestinians with what is seen as American acquiescence.

A corollary to the anti-Islamist theme has been the portrayal of the United States as the driving force behind efforts to modernize the very conservative Afghan culture. Resistance to any central government attempts to modernize tribal society, particularly attempts to change the rights and role of women, has always been fierce. The initial tribal revolts against the Afghan communists during the late 1970s came in response to their attempts to modernize the society, not as a result of their deposing the monarchy. The subsequent tribal resistance to the Soviets was driven as much by the desire to preserve their tribal culture as by hatred of communism or Islamic rage.

The Taliban hardcore pushed all three ideas—that America is responsible for the Tajiks controlling Kabul, is anti-Islamic, and wishes to destroy the Pashtun way of life—and accused Karzai of being a U.S. puppet. The propaganda, plus the prevalent insecurity, absence of authority, and slow expansion of reconstruction, contributed to support for the regrouping and rearming of thousands of former Taliban fighters inside Afghanistan and in adjacent areas inside Pakistan. Starting in early 2003, the Taliban revitalized their alliance with al Qaeda remnants and related Pakistani Islamic groups, particularly Hekmaytar Gulbiddin's Hezb-e Islam. This conglomerate can be best labeled as *anti-coalition forces* (ACF).

Anti-Coalition Forces

The term *anti-coalition forces* is used deliberately here; to refer to the resistance as either *Taliban* or *al Qaeda* oversimplifies the problem. In fact, the resistance includes elements of both, but its core is formed by

Pashtuns, who are sustained by their perceptions of being excluded from power and under siege. In addition, the resistance gains strength internally not just from Taliban and al Qaeda remnants but also from drug lords and smugglers, and it enjoys support from elements on Pakistan's side of the border. One cannot simply neutralize al Qaeda and think the resistance will be broken.

Starting in spring 2003, the ACF conducted hit-and-run raids on ATA and coalition targets across the south and southeast of the country. Al Qaeda targets were the United States and coalition forces. Of even more concern have been the deliberate attacks by the Taliban on international assistance workers and those Afghans helping them (identified as partners of the United States in threatening traditional Islamic values). Aid organizations that provided assistance and remained in place through the initial Afghan revolution, the Soviet invasion, the Afghan civil war, and Taliban rule have been attacked for the first time. Also for the first time, they (and the United Nations) are pulling their people out of the south and southeast. As the Taliban intended, the raids caused a sharp reduction in reconstruction activities, still more preoccupation with security, and a corresponding negative impact upon support for the Karzai government, the United States, and the international coalition.

The Coalition Response

The Bush administration and NATO are moving aggressively to make up for the lost ground. At the same time, the Karzai government, reinforced by increased international support, is becoming more assertive. The United States tripled its resources during 2003 with an additional \$1.7 billion; \$1 billion more will be available for 2004, with an additional \$1 billion to be pledged by the United States at the March 2004 Bonn donor's conference. These new resources represent a significant boost for activities in the security, democracy/governance, and reconstruction sectors—including accelerated military, police, and antinarcotics programs. With U.S. support, the ATA also is proceeding with the new constitution and elections, provincial government reform, and promotion of women's rights. Efforts also are being made to

increase the pace of road construction, infrastructure rebuilding, and community development. Among other milestones, the vital Kabul-Kandahar road was completed in December 2003, and some 20,000 provincial police are to be trained by June 2004.

The United States has reorganized the coalition command structure and is reorienting the strategic thrust of Operation *Enduring Freedom*. The commander has moved to Kabul, where he is closer to and better able to coordinate with the Afghan government, a new American ambassador—who has not only much greater resources with which to operate but also, as President Bush's special representative, a broader, more dynamic mandate for support of the Karzai government—the UN Special Representative, and the newly empowered NATO/ISAF. The broad military coalition of Operation *Enduring Freedom* and NATO plans to undertake enhanced security measures outside of Kabul with a new nation-building focus as well as continuing and sustaining combat operations, especially in the south and southeast. This new approach is much closer to a classical, politically focused counterinsurgency strategy and represents a belated recognition that sporadic military actions alone cannot eliminate the renewed radical Islamist/terrorist threat. Instead of responding to sporadic ACF attacks and withdrawing, small units will remain in high-threat locations to deter the ACF and protect the local population.

The long-called-for decision in October 2003 by the UN Security Council and NATO to expand the ISAF mandate beyond Kabul is also a response to accumulating threats and reveals a determination to resolve them. In addition to providing more potential resources for the security of the countryside, this step has injected greater dynamism into ISAF and inaugurated closer coordination with Operation *Enduring Freedom* and a potentially broader role in all security sector reform programs. The United Nations continues to coordinate the overall security sector reform with increased efforts by the lead countries designated in the Bonn process. One major concern is the slowness of NATO to identify and provide the actual forces that they will commit to honor their expanded role.

Japan, in conjunction with UNAMA, has commenced the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) plan. The Japanese-led effort has successfully concluded pilot

projects near Konduz and Gardez in which 1,600 militia forces turned in their weapons in return for a small cash payment, aid, and retraining. Demobilization is currently under way in Kabul. In a significant positive development, both Dostum and Atta have turned in some of their heavy weapons for cantonment in the vicinity of Mazar-e Sharif. In a similar move with political significance, Fahim has moved some of his heavy weapons out of the Panjshir Valley to supervised cantonment sites and has removed some heavy weapons and militia from Kabul. Japan, the United States, and UNAMA will apply the lessons learned from the pilot program and the heavy weapons turn-in as they reorganize and expand the program to other areas the government can secure.

Germany, meanwhile, has focused its efforts on long-term police training. It developed a 3-year program to train senior police officials to fill the top-level position in the national and regional police. Large-scale, short-term training provided by the United States, in cooperation with Germany, is now complementing this program.

The United Kingdom is leading the anti-narcotics efforts but has limited resources for what it sees as a huge undertaking. Further, the ATA has very limited capacity in this area, although it is now gearing up new programs. The United States has allotted about \$123 million to assist the ATA, alongside the United Kingdom. *Enduring Freedom* units also have recently been given orders to take down narcotics laboratories and smugglers of narcotics if located. The key frustrations are the lack of an economically viable alternative crop and the absence of security in much of the poppy growing area. In September 2003, nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers reported that an Afghan farmer could earn only about one-fourteenth the amount of cash from an acre of wheat as from an acre of poppy. Also, in the absence of government security forces, he can be impelled to plant poppies by the warlords and their allied drug dealers. Since both crops are commodities, the price fluctuates, but it is difficult to see how wheat can be made competitive with poppy on a purely economic basis.

Police and Army

Security assistance, particularly police training, is picking up speed. In addition to the long-term German efforts for senior officers noted above, the United States is putting up

over \$60 million and has instituted a training program for ordinary police officers with centers in Kabul and eight key regional locations (such as Gardez and Kandahar). The total cost for police could be over \$75 million for 2003–2004 and \$115 million for 2004–2005. The European Union has contributed some \$50 million to the police training fund. The number of trained provincial police is supposed to reach 20,000 by June 2004. The United States is also working with Germany to train a 3,600-man border police organization by June 2004.

The objectives of the expanded police force are to work with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and coalition forces to provide security for the provincial reconstruction effort, to offer special protection against cross-border movement (smuggling) and for customs collection, to enhance safe movement on the roads, and to improve local intelligence. The police played a major successful role in security for the Constitutional Loya Jirga and will be the main security force for elections. The principal challenge will be the equipping and overall coordination, as well as overcoming the current weaknesses in training and incentives (for example, salary and allowances). Training, which is done primarily by Afghan personnel, lasts between 2 and 8 weeks, and there is no provision for trainers/mentors to be present alongside the newly trained police (as there is with ANA). These shortfalls, especially the lack of supervision on the job, can be dangerously corrosive given the pressure of smuggling, narcotics, clans, and sectarian tensions. However, with additional international police trainers assigned to the reconstruction effort in key provinces and active police support programs by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), working in coordination with Afghan trainers and police supervisors, the problem can be largely overcome.

The newly minted ANA units and their American, British, French, and Bulgarian trainers have proven to be a positive development, although the army's small size still limits the number of missions it can undertake. As of December 2003, the army had trained 13 battalions of roughly 600 to 650 soldiers each. As of mid-February, the army had trained 14 battalions of over 8,000 soldiers. To ensure loyalty to the central government rather than to a warlord, each battalion is ethnically mixed with recruits drawn from throughout the

nation. Each battalion is trained as a unit at a rebuilt base just outside Kabul. During January 2004, the training base capacity grew from 6,600 to 10,800 trainees annually. Reports from the field indicate that the ANA is a genuine, multiethnic national army that is operating effectively and steadily improving.

Reinforcing this success, recent changes in U.S. regulations allow American trainers to accompany the battalions to the field on operations. This is critical to complete the training on tactics, techniques, and procedures; to provide the communications links to coalition firepower and rapid reaction forces; and to offer a psychological boost to the army. ANA troops have deployed on operations in the south and southeast part of the country, conducted security for the Constitutional Loya Jirga, and monitored heavy weapons cantonment activities in the north.

By June 2004, the three brigades of the ANA Central Corps will be fully fielded with infantry and mechanized battalions. Newly instituted salary and benefits packages have increased the number of recruits sufficiently that the Office of Military Cooperation Afghanistan and the Ministry of Defense plan to expand the training program to produce three battalions per month starting in January 2004, depending on restructuring and retention.

Two issues cloud the future of the ANA. First, until December 2003, recruiting was not producing sufficient numbers to fill the ranks at the current rate of one battalion per month. Basic classes have a capacity of 750. Afghans had been filling only about 650 seats and delaying the classes by up to 3 weeks to reach that number. Greater involvement by the Afghan Ministry of Defense and General Staff, the opening of new recruiting stations in four locations nationwide, and increases in pay and benefits seem to have reversed this trend. In December 2003, the 14th training class began at full capacity and 1 week early. In addition, there are currently enough recruits awaiting training to fill the next two classes. It remains to be seen if this is a temporary or permanent increase in the number of Afghans willing to serve in the army.

A more serious issue had been the attrition (desertion) rate of around 10 percent per month from August through October 2003. As a result, when battalions 16 through 22 graduate, they will be broken up to bring the previous 15 battalions back up to strength to maintain the viability of the Central Corps. Although

the rate had decreased to 2 percent per month by late January, the Ministry of Defense is pressing forward with initiatives to increase the retention rate by improving living conditions, salaries, leave opportunities, and by building mosques in the garrisons in order to avoid another spike in attrition rates this spring.

Reconstruction

Reinforcing the growing Afghan police and army are new plans for accelerating the promising Provincial Reconstruction Team program. The PRT concept is drawn from time-tested counterinsurgency doctrine of extending the reach and influence of the central government. By providing basic security, the teams serve as a catalyst to development by opening up an area to both aid organizations and Afghan government agencies.

In Afghanistan, a Provincial Reconstruction Team helps to provide security and assistance for the community in which it works. Formed around a U.S. or international military force of between 60 and 100 soldiers, it is ideally reinforced with an ANA element, a national police element, various aid organizations, and effective representation of the ATA. Operation *Enduring Freedom* provides more immediate robust forces as a backup to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams when needed. The combined security forces provide the protection that the government departments need to begin rebuilding the community.

Reinforcing the reconstruction efforts, the teams work with the Departments of State and Agriculture, the U.S. Agency for International Development, UNAMA, and the Afghan government to coordinate closely with NGOs to ensure that each focuses on those projects its organization does best. For instance, in Bamian province, nongovernmental organizations were rebuilding schools and municipal buildings. They asked the provincial team if the military could focus on rebuilding the bridges essential to reaching some of the smaller villages. The team concurred and is using its resources to rebuild the vital bridges. With this division of labor and the increased general sense of security, both NGOs and government agencies are making steady progress in the area.

Using the PRT concept as a base, the aid and governmental organizations can reach further into the countryside. As security increases, they plan to set up other PRTs and

satellite facilities in the smaller communities. In essence, this program uses the same spreading “ink stain” concept that the British used in Malaya. Together with an Afghan internal security presence and greater support from *Enduring Freedom*, the teams have increased security in the Gardez area with a resultant step-up in the pace of reconstruction. Consequently, regional government officials have been replaced with more competent, honest, and loyal personnel. This area, previously one of the most unstable in Afghanistan, has become more supportive of the Karzai government and more resistant to the resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda than the surrounding provinces. The new DDR and police training programs will provide an additional impetus.

An unanticipated benefit accrued to the government with the establishment of PRTs in Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kandahar. They have strengthened the position of the central government sufficiently that, with the firm backing of the United States, the Interior Minister has been able to replace corrupt local officials with more effective ATA representatives. This provides a visible sign of the commitment by the government to rural Afghanistan. In the Mazar-e Sharif region, it has been accompanied by the cantonment of heavy weapons belonging to Dostum and Atta. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld reportedly gave both warlords a push in this process in early December 2003.

In addition to these three PRTs, the New Zealand contingent established a team in Bamian, the Germans have established one for NATO/ISAF in Konduz, and the United States has organized teams in Parwan, Jalalabad, Herat, Khowst, Ghazni, Qalat, and Kandahar provinces. There are at present 12 Operation *Enduring Freedom* teams and over the next 3 months, the operation plans to establish 4 more throughout the south, southeast, and west to reach a total of 16 by mid-summer. In addition, NATO hopes to establish two more PRTs in the North provided the necessary resources can be found from member states. While this is a positive step, experience has shown that it takes months for a PRT to gain the trust and confidence of the local population. Further, while *Enduring Freedom* can provide the forces to establish the teams, the ATA will be hard-pressed to provide the additional ANA battalions, trained police, DDR personnel, and competent staff for the governmental offices.

A new variation on the PRT theme is the Regional Development Zone (RDZ), a deliberately coordinated program derived from the success in Gardez. It will concentrate larger-scale security, governance, and reconstruction assets on a particular locality to achieve maximum synergy. It involves installing better government officials, providing better security (more trained police and border guards, an ANA presence, and support from *Enduring Freedom*), supporting effective counternarcotics and judicial reform, initiating DDR, and making larger investments in new infrastructure projects (such as dams and electrical power), as well as reconstruction (schools, clinics, government buildings). The army will be assisted by UNAMA and the PRT in overseeing and facilitating the RDZ, starting with Kandahar.

Pakistani Assistance

Reinforcing the coalition’s efforts in the south and southeast, the Pakistani government has moved forces into areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. For the first time in their history, Pakistani army forces are operating in the tribal areas. Even more encouraging is the fact that the Pakistanis are taking a long-term approach, with a focus on winning public support. Rather than simply hunting for al Qaeda and their Pashtun sympathizers, the Pakistanis are dedicating significant resources to improving the standards of living in particularly sensitive locations. They intend to have a lasting, positive impact there. In addition to stepped-up patrols and presence at known border crossing points, where they and U.S. forces have identified specific ACF targets, the Pakistanis have conducted successful targeted raids within areas of concern on Pakistan’s side of the frontier. There are regular bilateral U.S.-Pakistani military coordination meetings, at all levels including Operation *Enduring Freedom* Commander Lieutenant General David Barno,

and there are monthly Tripartite Commission meetings, including senior U.S., Pakistani, and Afghan military commanders. Lieutenant General Barno recently praised Pakistan publicly for increased activity and for closer cooperation, building toward a major effort on both sides in the spring against al Qaeda and Taliban leadership and their forces.

The parallel major military operations in mid-March on both sides of the Pakistani-Afghan border represented a quantum leap ahead in intensity and cooperation. On the Afghan side, ANA elements performed well, fighting alongside forces from Operation *Enduring Freedom*. The unprecedented Pakistan operations in the tribal areas showed clearly the commitment to take on al Qaeda and other local supporters, once they were located, despite considerable military, as well as political, costs.

The year 2004 may well be remembered as a decisive year for Afghanistan’s long-term stabilization and reconstruction, as well as the fight against al Qaeda. As the foregoing indicates, the CLJ has imparted much needed momentum to the forces favoring national unity. The ATA is demonstrating a more assertive, engaging posture toward the provinces. Army recruitment, retention, and training are accelerating. So is police training. Current or would-be spoilers are being marginalized, albeit slowly and painfully. The United States has demonstrated its commitment to stay the course; NATO is beginning to shoulder greater responsibility; and the strategy for promoting provincial-level stability and reconstruction is yielding measurable progress.

None of this should diminish our estimation of the remaining challenges, which are enormous. The current momentum is fragile and perishable. If it is squandered, Afghanistan’s slide back into civil war—with all the hazards that it entails—may be impossible to prevent.

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