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SECURING AFGHANISTAN: THE NEED FOR MORE INTERNATIONAL ACTION

OVERVIEW

A series of incidents has highlighted the frailty of the military and political situation in Afghanistan and raised questions regarding the international community's approach to stabilising the country. These incidents include the slaying of Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism Abdul Rahman, labelled by the leader of Afghanistan's interim government, Hamid Karzai, as an assassination, and reports that peacekeepers have been fired upon in Kabul in drive-by shootings.

Outside the capital, more serious problems are contributing to a sense of insecurity. Sources of concern include friction between rival militia factions, particularly in Mazar-I-Sharif; violence that is driving many Pashtuns from areas in the north of the country; civilian deaths that result from U.S. bombing in the south and hamper efforts to bring Pashtuns more fully into the Loya Jirga process and so develop more representative government institutions; continuing banditry; and, often conflicting reports of renewed efforts by various states to influence military leaders through payments.

While most of these might be considered relatively low-level disturbances in view of the depth of violence in Afghanistan over the last 23 years, they illustrate the challenges facing the country and the international community. First, the international community – particularly the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France – will need to expand the mandate and scale of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). There is widespread desire within Afghanistan to see the peacekeeping force expand its reach beyond simply patrolling Kabul. The failure of major NATO powers to

summon the political will to take such a step risks seeing Afghanistan again slide toward factional fighting.

Recent security incidents underscore the challenges in creating credible national military and police forces. While support for establishing ethnically balanced forces has been strong rhetorically, particularly from the United States, these are massive undertakings that will take more time and resources than are yet available. Afghanistan has not had a genuinely effective police force in more than a decade, its current force has not received training in years, officers have not been paid for months, and the force structure is built around an old Soviet-style system. Similarly, the notion that a national military can quickly be propped up as an effective national force – free of allegiance to local commanders – is subject to serious question.

The immediate priority, therefore, has to be an expanded ISAF – up from 4,500 to more than 25,000 troops – and a more effective one as well. In addition to the problem of sheer numbers that needs to be addressed urgently, ISAF should improve internal coordination, which is highly problematic for the current small force made up of eighteen national components all in the Kabul area, and will be still more challenged if the force grows in size and geographic responsibilities.

These security developments will shape a difficult political process being played out through the emergency Loya Jirga. The timeline for the emergency Loya Jirga to be held in June is daunting, and there are already signs that the UN Special Mission for Afghanistan (UN SMA) is struggling in its stewardship. UN bureaucratic delays in funding and deploying field officers,

combined with what will surely be aggressive rivalry by all political and military groups as well as efforts by outside actors to exploit Afghan internal divisions and influence the Loya Jirga process, could well prove a combustible mixture if significant steps are not taken to improve the security situation across the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The international community should rapidly:

- expand ISAF forces to 25,000-30,000 troops;
- expand the mandate to cover the main cities of Afghanistan and secure vital transport routes;
- clarify which country will command ISAF when the British relinquish the role, and improve ISAF's internal coordination; and
- provide funding for those countries such as Turkey that wish to play a role but face financial difficulties.

The United Nations should move quickly to:

- push member states vigorously for expansion of ISAF;
- expand its political and civil affairs operations around the country to monitor potential disputes that could derail the Loya Jirga;
- expand public affairs operations so more Afghans are aware of the workings of the Interim Administration and the process of putting together the Loya Jirga; and
- expand its role in planning a national police force and a national army, developing a legal system and monitoring human rights.

I. PEACEKEEPING – A FAILURE OF POLITICAL WILL AGAIN?

Kabul presents visitors with a somewhat deceptive aura of calm. Shopkeepers are painting and repairing stores. Enough taxis have returned to the streets to cause the occasional traffic jam, and markets are crowded. Locals are generally quite friendly to the growing number of international officials who have flooded into the capital, and there is little in the way of armed checkpoints within the city. The number of armed men has been reduced, and traffic police can even be found at larger intersections. A curfew is still in place but it is largely safe to walk the streets during the day, although most women continue to prefer to remain behind closed doors, and the few who appear in public wear the traditional burqa.¹ ISAF has been increasingly active in patrolling within the city. Its presence has helped violent crime to drop sharply in most parts of the city and encouraged local police officers to challenge armed banditry more directly. All these are positive signs, indicative of a population that is palpably thirsty for peace.

The View from Kabul: Among Afghans in the capital interviewed by ICG, there was also a broad sense of fatigue and disgust with many of the old guard military and political leaders who have done so much to perpetuate the violence in Afghanistan. Support for historically powerful players such as former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar,² General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mawlawee Rasoul Sayiaf and others would seem to be declining, although all still command degrees of financial resources, external support and troop backing.³ Rabbani and

¹ The burqa has become something of a symbol of insecurity for outsiders looking at Afghanistan but this can sometimes be misleading. Many Afghans say that women continue to wear the burqa for a number of reasons, not least to protect their family's honour by remaining anonymous in queues for aid. Women also say it hides their poverty and despair.

² Iran closed Hekmatyar's offices in that country in February 2002. A short time later, Pakistan made clear that it would bar Hekmatyar's entry into their country. There are unconfirmed reports that he is now in western Afghanistan.

³ This view is not universal, however. Indeed, one senior ISAF officer told ICG he believes that at least among non-Pashtuns in Kabul, support for the old guard, or at least

Dostum are widely reported to control abundant stocks of Afghan currency,⁴ and the latter will be poised to assume a larger political role unless the international community is able to find a way to fill the military and political vacuum. There is a sense among many citizens that peace will simply not be possible if these actors resume any central role.

As one resident of Kabul noted, "Afghanistan is ready for peace; anyone not ready for peace should be shot". Despite their oxymoronic appearance, such sentiments are indeed genuine, and many of the old guard militia leaders who are widely and deservedly viewed as corrupt, venal and far more committed to war than peace, are said to be increasingly nervous about their own personal security. The killing of the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism reveals the vulnerability of the government and appears to have widened differences between Karzai and ministers from different political and ethnic groups. The incident also illustrates how ill equipped local forces are to provide any semblance of security without ISAF support. The airport was under the control of Afghan security forces at the time of the killing. Since then, a number of officials, particularly those associated with the former king, have requested that ISAF provide their security

While there is certainly no promise that old guard figures will be replaced by more capable, honest or peace loving figures from the younger generation, Afghans are eager for change. Closely associated with this is a widespread desire for ISAF to be expanded beyond Kabul. Almost every individual interviewed by ICG in Afghanistan, whether from the police, the Interior and Foreign Ministries, humanitarian relief organisations, or international diplomatic officials, ISAF officers and UN staff, agreed that expanding the peacekeeping presence and extending its mandate to include other major cities is essential to developing any kind of political stability.

An ISAF presence makes Afghans hesitate to resort to force to resolve disputes and thus pushes them towards the negotiating table. As an Afghan

acceptance that they will likely remain influential, is increasing.

⁴ Rabbani's alleged stocks of currency are not technically counterfeit in that they are said to have been additional print runs by the Russian company that was originally hired to print the Afghanis that were diverted to Rabbani.

journalist noted to ICG, "The best thing the world can do right now is to have an American B-52 fly overhead once a day. It doesn't need to drop anything; everyone just needs to know that the Americans are still here and paying attention".

The security situation outside Kabul remains tenuous, and roadside banditry and flare-ups of fighting between rival military factions have been common. So far these have not spread into a wider conflagration but they will be increasingly difficult to tamp down without international peacekeepers. The many unemployed former fighters with weapons and time on their hands also represent a dangerous element. It is deeply troubling that some Afghans are already expressing nostalgia for the relative security and stability that were present when the Taliban controlled their areas.

Even in Kabul, confidence does not run deep, and almost every Afghan that ICG spoke with felt that ISAF was necessary to provide the political space for them to work out their differences. There is a very strong sense that without an expanded role for ISAF, the political process, disarmament and creation of a multi-ethnic national army have poor prospects. Given the display of U.S. military force in helping crush the Taliban, there is a respect among fighters and civilians for U.S. capacity and little desire to get crossways of such firepower. Many fear, however, that local warlords will simply be able to "run out the clock" on the international community's engagement with Afghanistan and quickly return to their warring ways once attention has turned elsewhere.

Outside Interference: Many Afghan officials, including senior members of the Interior, Defence and Foreign Ministries, view expansion of ISAF as adding a critical element to external security, and not simply as a means to keep warring factions separated. Afghans have long been accustomed to the influx of weapons, money and influence from Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Russia, China, India, France, the United States and elsewhere. Many feel that an expanded peacekeeping presence is the only means to limit the influence of what they see as outside provocateurs and allow the country's internal political process time to develop. This theme was echoed again and again by Afghan officials. Given the long history of regional strategic contests that have played out on Afghan soil, there is every reason to believe that neighbouring states such as Pakistan and Iran will

quickly abandon restraint if they feel their interests are threatened or the political vacuum has grown too dangerous.

There are already widely differing reports of the extent of Iranian influence not only in Herat, but elsewhere. Unhindered by the bureaucratic restrictions of many Western aid agencies, the Iranians are able to disburse assistance quickly to targeted groups of their choosing. Even modest sums of money may gain them disproportionate influence as frustration with the pace of delivery of Western aid mounts. However, there are widely differing views among Western diplomats and in military circles as to the intensity of the Iranian activities and whether these should be seen as a threat to political and military stability.

The most commonly expressed fear in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is that increasing Iranian activity may provoke Pakistan's intelligence services to again interfere intensely in local politics. If both Pakistan and Iran become more active, it would signal that the floodgates of foreign influence were open, a particularly dangerous prospect as the country moves to an emergency Loya Jirga. It is impossible to reduce Iranian and Pakistani involvement to zero since both are neighbours with legitimate interests in Afghan developments but greater diplomatic and other efforts need to be made to channel their activities to productive ends. Ultimately, their security concerns are best served by a stable Afghanistan.

It also needs to be recognised that the U.S. has been buying influence with many Afghan groups – there has been talk of “Pentagon-created warlords” – and that this game has many dangers for all players. The U.S. may feel that this is in its short-term military interests but longer term interests lie in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, a process that will not happen without the expansion of ISAF and the eventual diminution of the power of war lords.

The U.S. Role: In some ways, it is ironic that the United States has been one of the nations most loudly complaining of Iranian adventurism in Afghanistan when it is dragging its feet on exactly the one step that might most directly reduce such adventurism. An expanded ISAF would diminish the jostling for power among rival Afghan groups and so reduce the opening for foreign actors to interfere. The U.S. position on ISAF expansion has

been self-contradictory, with the State Department and the CIA actively making the case but the Department of Defence insisting that support for training and developing the Afghan national army will suffice to address security concerns.

Both the U.S. Ambassador in Kabul and the U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan have endorsed expanding ISAF's size and mandate. As of publication, State, the CIA and at least some of the uniformed military have been urging that an expanded ISAF, with U.S. logistics, intelligence and extraction forces, be established quickly before a disaster prompts the same result. The Department of Defence and some in the White House are opposed to doing anything now, and particularly to direct U.S. participation in ISAF. State, the Department of Defence and USAID are also close to presenting final proposals for a White House decision on how large a supplemental appropriation should be requested for Afghanistan, including funding for the new Afghan army, police, justice and other reconstruction needs.

Some U.S. officials have been warning of the “mission creep” that they claim was seen in Bosnia, but this is misleading. In Bosnia, the NATO-led mission moved in strongly with a large force of 55,000. The situation stabilised rapidly, and troop numbers were soon reduced to about 18,000 with minimal casualties. (The total U.S. troop presence in the Balkans is now down to 9,000.) In Afghanistan, by contrast, the initial force is too small to stabilise the country and will almost certainly have to be expanded. This is not “mission creep” but a necessary response to a situation that should have been foreseen from the outset.

The other main argument has been that ISAF troops could interfere with the U.S. military action against al-Qaeda and the remaining Taliban. These actions, however, are being fought in small, rural areas, not in the main cities that ISAF would patrol. Coordination between the missions has not proved to be a problem so far with some countries involved in both ISAF and military action against al-Qaeda.

While the U.S. continues to have a veto on ISAF expansion, few have called for the wholesale introduction of U.S. peacekeepers on the ground. The allies and Afghans alike want the U.S. to serve at least as a potential extraction or rapid reaction force to respond if other national peacekeeping

contingents were to run into difficulties. Their primary role in ISAF should be the provision of logistics, communications and intelligence, as it was in East Timor. There is much to recommend such a model. This would leave the bulk of peacekeeping duties for other nations, but send a clear message to parties on the ground that U.S. military could be quickly called upon in a crunch.

Given U.S. force protection practices, the U.S. military tends not to handle some peacekeeping functions as well as some of its European allies. European forces generally are more willing to get out and about in the communities to which they are assigned, and thus able to do more extensive and effective liaison work with local actors and officials. This is an important component of peacekeeping in Afghanistan given the country's low level of institutional development and capacity.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer has indicated repeatedly that President Bush remains opposed to any broader role for U.S. forces in keeping the peace in Afghanistan: "The President's position is unchanged about the use of the United States combat forces. The President continues to believe the purpose of the military is to be used to fight and win wars, and not to engage in peacekeeping of that nature".⁵ Unfortunately, as Afghanistan has already suggested, without broader measures to ensure stability, such a hands off approach means that the U.S. and its allies may soon find themselves in the position of fighting at least parts of the war over and over again.

In a possible compromise, the U.S. is said to be considering a limited expansion of ISAF, targeted at cities such as Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad where tensions have been highest between rival military commanders. While certainly justified in opposing the introduction of peacekeepers into areas where U.S. military operations are still ongoing, the outer edges of what the U.S. is currently willing to support appears to be a doubling of the current ISAF force of 4,500.

While obviously a step in the right direction, the instinct of not just the U.S. but the whole international community still seems to be willingness to spend whatever it takes for offensive

operations while skimping on the peacekeeping that is essential to preserve stability. A simple doubling of the force will be inadequate. More realistic estimates suggest 25,000-30,000 troops would be needed to provide security in the main cities.

⁵ White House press briefing, 25 February 2002.

II. MILITARY AND POLICE ISSUES

While the international community has stated that helping Afghanistan develop an effective national military and police force is one of the highest priorities, the scope and difficulty of such an undertaking should not be underestimated. The ability of the Afghan military and police to work as desired will take time. It is also important to stress that much needs to be done to define the legal and constitutional role of Afghan institutions – including relations between the central government and the provinces – and that these steps will have to be taken within a still emerging political process. It remains unclear whether regional political and military forces will accept a national police and military. It will not be possible to create an effective police or military rapidly nor will they soon be able to substitute for international peacekeepers.

The ministries of Defence and Interior are starting with almost bare shelves. While senior officials have been installed to run ministries, there is little in the way of administrative experience, little concept of how the institutions of state will need to become self-supporting over time and few resources. Exacerbating these problems, models of government in Afghanistan for more than a generation, whether under the Taliban, feuding militia factions in the early 1990s or the Soviet-backed regime, offer little in the way of practical models for running a modern state, and simply restoring traditional systems is an unattractive option.

A. A NATIONAL POLICE FORCE

Challenges for the Police: The depth of the challenge to re-establish police functions was starkly revealed in a series of ICG interviews with the Interior Minister, Yonus Qanooni, senior police and interior ministry officials and ISAF officers conducting liaison work with the police in Kabul. There is a desperate need to reconstitute a police force to maintain control in the cities, start to spread out over the country, and assure civilians that the law, not simply the most powerful military factions, will be respected.

It will also be important that the international community take care not to allow its support for

developing the police and the national military to cement ethnic divisions. With Afghanistan's "power" ministries – Defence, Interior and Foreign – all controlled by prominent ethnic Tajiks from the Panshir Valley, special emphasis will need to be placed on making the police and military genuinely integrated ethnic forces, not simply an extension of Northern Alliance power.

In general, the state of the police in Afghanistan is pitiful. In 1990 the Kabul force had more than 300 vehicles at its disposal; in February 2002, it had a handful of borrowed trucks. It has little in the way of communications equipment or even office supplies and works out of dilapidated buildings. The Police Academy has been closed since the early 1990s when the Taliban replaced the force with the Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. No salaries have been paid to those who have returned to work over the last several months. Those salaries that are likely to be paid will be at untenably low levels – just dollars a month – and no money was pledged at Tokyo to deal specifically with police and security issues.⁶ At police headquarters recently, the guard at the gate was not even wearing socks despite temperatures well below freezing.

The police are still designed as a quasi-military force along the lines of the Soviet-influenced system. There is also little understanding of the need for oversight, human rights training and anti-corruption efforts. Initial planning efforts would include bringing police in from each province for quick training and then sending them out to be based in other provinces to ensure that commanders could not build up personal fiefdoms in their home bases. The government appears to have given little thought, however, to the need for broad and fairly comprehensive reform of the police structure.

Police Size: Part of any reform effort will be to make the police a smaller, more professional force than in the past. Moving former fighters into the ranks is not seen as a significant part of any demobilisation program. At the high-water mark, national forces consisted of more than 106,000

⁶ Subsequently, however, Germany has promised U.S.\$7 million and the UK U.S.\$300,000 in assistance for the Ministry of the Interior, a significant portion of which is likely to be spent on police and security issues.

police, a level that Afghanistan will neither be able to pay for nor train. Minister Qanooni envisions that a national force will need to be closer to the 60,000-70,000 range. The most ambitious plans in his ministry are to have some 30,000 police in place by the time the Loya Jirga is held.

Several of the officials with whom ICG spoke seemed to have a different idea of the manpower needed in Kabul and nationally. There also appears to be little sense of how many men have returned to work, how many were legitimately in the police previously and how many have just signed on to claim back pay. There has been no survey of what survives in the way of buildings, materiel and men in the provinces. The police and intelligence commanders who have returned to service or been recently installed also raise some problems. This group is dominated by Panshiri Tajiks appointed by Minister Qanooni. In addition, many of the existing police were trained under the Najibullah regime and imbued with the mindset of Khad, the communist secret police who were hardly a model for any modern and professional force.

Foreign Assistance: Germany has taken a lead in working with the police force, although the British continue to play an active liaison role. The Germans have said they will provide training and vehicles, the British a radio system and the Russians uniforms. Germany has also been active in exploring what it would take to restore police training facilities and put in place a crash course training program for returning officers. France has indicated some willingness to assist the police but wants to see some fundamental doctrinal and command questions resolved before moving forward with aid. Doubtless it will take some time for all this assistance to arrive.

In the meantime, ISAF is working closely with the police, and there is good cooperation over patrols and liaison about reporting crimes. Kabul residents are increasingly turning to ISAF when they face crimes or the common problem of property disputes. While ISAF will not handle property disputes and normally refers crimes other than the most serious such as murder and rape to the local authorities, the trust and hope local residents invest in ISAF by attempting to bring a wide range of problems to it is impressive.

Police Monitoring: Monitoring of international assistance to the police is a key issue. Given

frequent human rights abuses by police forces in transitional societies, as well as concerns about corruption, this has often been a difficult area of assistance. Further, given the need for budgetary support for institutions that lack any transparency or financial accountability, it will be vital to watch aid money closely. Interior Minister Qanooni said he would be willing to accept thorough monitoring of foreign aid to the police, even an intrusive process. Donors should move quickly to take him up on this.

A possible method would be to put in place international paymasters who could ensure that salaries are actually delivered to those officers who have reported back to work and allow for better understanding of needs and capabilities within the force. There needs to be a close assessment of whether police are genuinely working or simply recent "recruits" just drawing a salary. Monitoring of human rights standards is also essential and needs to be built in to police doctrines and training from the start of any program of international aid.

B. A NATIONAL ARMY

Efforts to create a national army face the same problems. Estimates of the number of armed men in Afghanistan vary enormously but the figure of those with combat experience is likely around 200,000-300,000. A substantial number will need to be demobilised and disarmed over time. While Minister of Defence Fahim has said that he hopes to establish a national army that is 250,000 strong, U.S. and British officials have made clear that they think a force of some 50,000-60,000 would be far more realistic. Troops from Britain, Turkey, France, Italy and Germany have already started training some men, and discussions within NATO suggest that intensive army training in Afghanistan will be led by U.S. and British Special Forces, with Germany taking charge of police-training efforts. There has also been some initial assistance by ISAF to upgrade the conditions of barracks.

The creation of a national force, the political process, economic development and the demobilisation process will need to be woven together, although how the latter process will work remains quite poorly defined. Initial national army training efforts have made clear the scope of the challenge. Providing some form of economic opportunity to the tens of thousands of fighters

who need to be demobilised will be key to preventing more widespread outbreaks of lawlessness.

Some commanders have privately expressed interest in downsizing their own forces, largely driven by concerns that it will be difficult to continue to meet payrolls and that new rivals could spring from the ranks of under-utilised and disaffected soldiers. However, other commanders are said to be re-arming refugees to boost their power ahead of the Loya Jirga. A bumper crop of heroin is likely to boost the capacity of commanders to pay their men.

III. THE LOYA JIRGA

The Loya Jirga is a traditional Afghan national decision-making process. In accordance with the Bonn agreement, an internationally facilitated emergency Loya Jirga will be used as the vehicle for striking a broader political accord among the often competing military and political factions. It will be charged with selecting the next interim government and is expected to convene in June.

A 21-member Loya Jirga commission is currently drafting rules for the meeting. These cover how to select members, a code of conduct and rules for the meeting itself. This process is supported closely by the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) led by the United Nations special representative for Afghanistan and former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi. The last time the Loya Jirga process was used successfully was to ratify the 1964 constitution, a document that many still cite as responsible for opening a deep rift between city and provinces. There is no guarantee that the process will work again or that it will have widespread legitimacy in a political culture that has changed considerably. One issue is that only six of the 21 members of the present commission are Pashtuns, none of whom are from Kandahar.

A number of warning signs already surround the process – one that would be extraordinarily difficult even in the best of circumstances. The timetable established in the Bonn agreement is ambitious. Organising a national enclave to decide the future of the country and the fundamental shape of the government within a matter of months presents a host of daunting political and logistic problems.

The UN Footprint: Light or Invisible? There is concern that the UNSMA approach to use a “light footprint” means that the United Nations is not being active enough in political matters. UNSMA actually had fewer staff in January 2002 than in August of the previous year, before Afghanistan was thrust into the spotlight. The establishment of a new administration will require aggressive international stewardship if the political process is to avoid dissolving into chaos or being disrupted by influence peddling. In many parts of Afghanistan, the UN’s light footprint has unfortunately proved to be nearly invisible.

Brahimi enjoys considerable international status and respect but some consider that he is overly constrained by the U.S. and has not pushed hard or fast enough on key issues. ISAF, while it has a Chapter VII mandate going beyond the traditional UN peacekeeping role, has a fundamentally similar function – to help keep the peace until Afghan institutions are strong enough to do that job themselves. Brahimi would be better served, therefore, if he more closely followed the UN report on improving peacekeeping operations that bears his name.

In that report, the UN took a critical look at past peacekeeping efforts, and strongly encouraged member states to provide adequate political, personnel, material and financial support to UN peacekeeping missions. (The report also made clear that the UN needed to improve its rapid deployment capabilities and strengthen the surge capacity for planning, preparing and deploying missions, and that peacekeeping operations would not be effective unless backed by sufficient force on the ground.) Although ISAF is not itself a UN mission, these points are highly relevant to its operation.

Brahimi's initial unwillingness to support an increase in the size of ISAF because he did not think support for that increase would be forthcoming had all the elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy. While it is understood that he has now changed his position, he and Secretary General Kofi Annan need to be more resolute and vigorous in their calls for an expansion both of ISAF and UN operations generally.

Some of the valuable lessons of the Brahimi report seem to be going by the wayside in Afghanistan. The hiring of field UN civil affairs officers to facilitate the Loya Jirga process that is only six months from start to finish has taken on average at least three months. The UN has also been quite slow in approving budgets to help facilitate the field operations needed to educate Afghans about the Loya Jirga process.

Afghan Awareness: Public education will need to be an important component of the political process. Afghans do not know enough about how the Loya Jirga will work and how their

interests will be represented. Too little has been done to get the word out, to explain what is happening and to build public support. More needs to be done to bring the BBC, VOA and other international broadcasters that have large audiences in Afghanistan into the political dialogue. Radio Afghanistan would be the best vehicle for political education as long as interference from the Interim Administration or other political forces is kept to a minimum, and it is seen as an impartial voice.

Haphazard planning and logistics, while long associated with the UN bureaucracy, are dangerous in a political process of such high stakes. It remains unclear whether those involved with the Loya Jirga, much less the decisions that they reach, will command respect. It is too early to tell how much legitimacy the process can muster, but it would be deeply disappointing if it foundered on what essentially are easily avoidable mistakes that could be addressed through modest financing, a streamlined bureaucratic process and more vigorous leadership by the UN backed by its member states.

Kabul focus: Both the UN operation and the peacekeeping force continue to take a largely Kabul-centric approach to Afghanistan. However, traditionally, problems in Afghanistan have more often than not come from the periphery, not the centre. The state needs to be built down from Kabul and up from the provinces. Not enough is being done outside the capital, and both the UN and ISAF need a wider mandate to deal with problems around the country. Much more needs to be done to build regional institutions and to consider the future political relationship between Kabul and the provinces.

The international community should recognise a lesson from Afghan history. Control over Kabul gives political players international legitimacy and access to resources but does not translate into power over the whole country. If a government has little or no legitimacy outside Kabul, it may eventually be challenged by a rival from the provinces that wishes to control the capital. Even if this does not happen directly, the efforts of those who hold local fiefdoms to increase their power are likely sooner or later to bump up against each other, leading to new conflict. There is also an urgent need to develop local institutions that can do such things as handle land disputes – already

surging as refugees return and potentially a source of intense conflict that could undermine the wider political process.

Outside interference: Some UN officials have indicated privately their growing concern with influence buying by outside parties, particularly the Iranians. While Iranian officials continue to say many of the right things, interference in the political process is serious and more pressure should be put on Iran by Brahimi and others to allow the Loya Jirga to move forward with a minimum of outside tampering. Of course, Iran itself remains deeply split about both its domestic and foreign policies, with sharp divisions between reformers and conservatives playing out both at home and abroad. Of the competing factions within Afghanistan, those loyal to the former King, Zahir Shah, see the Iranian influence as most directly threatening their own interests. Brahimi should also urge the United States to be more selective in choosing its allies and to refrain from intensifying competition among local commanders and thus worsening regional tensions.

Ethnic Groups: The questions of how Pashtun interests will be represented in the both the Loya Jirga process and the future government is also difficult. Politically, militarily and socially, the Pashtun community is deeply divided. There is no sense of clear or unified leadership, although significant support for the former king remains in many communities. These divisions are made more troubling by simmering resentments among many Pashtuns that Tajiks and other non-Pashtuns are over-represented in the current administration, and some sentiment that Karzai is largely beholden to Northern Alliance officials who dominate the power ministries.

The violence against Pashtuns living in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance as well as civilian casualties resulting from ongoing military operations are potentially key difficulties that could be highly disruptive to the political process. The former needs to be tackled rapidly.⁷ Ongoing allied military operations in the south and east of the country, with resulting civilian casualties, complicate the vital process of integrating Pashtuns into the Loya Jirga process. Given that Pashtuns are a substantial proportion of the population and

that Afghanistan's major trade routes run through Pashtun territories, the fact that Pashtun areas have fragmented into a mosaic of power bases is a major problem for political and economic development. Building legitimacy among Pashtuns for the next interim government is an absolutely essential task to be faced in the coming months.

Across Afghanistan, Hazaras also remain quite vulnerable. Already some Tajiks, Uzbeks and Pashtuns are talking about their willingness to have a multiethnic national army "as long as it doesn't include Hazaras". Hazara leader Karim Khalili is understandably unwilling to disarm his forces given the continued insecurity that Hazaras face across the country. Other ethnic groups may be less vulnerable but share this reluctance to disarm.

⁷ See Human Rights Watch statement, "Anti-Pashtun Violence Widespread in Afghanistan", 4 March 2002.

V. CONCLUSION

Having had remarkable success in driving the Taliban from power and hunting down al-Qaeda forces, the international community must now stabilise Afghanistan by providing security, facilitating a political process and assisting the creation of basic institutions of government. Unfortunately, there are signs that it is repeating some of its past mistakes with regard to Afghanistan. The U.S. failure to resolve its stance on expanding ISAF has chilled the commitment of others to take the force to cities outside Kabul. The failure to muster the political will to expand ISAF reads much like the disastrous policy of neglect that followed the mujahidin victory in 1992.

Establishing a competent and multi-ethnic national army and police force is a high priority, but this will take time and more resources than are currently on offer. Simply providing uniforms and cursory training, and then declaring that the Afghans are capable of maintaining security, would be disingenuous and dangerous. Building the security institutions of Afghanistan from scratch, and ensuring that these bodies are grounded in a political and legal system that protects human rights, is vital.

There are warning clouds on the horizon with regard to the Loya Jirga process. The reluctance to expand ISAF is a direct impediment to the process.

Without many more peacekeepers – a force of 25,000-30 000 troops – will be much harder to control the disputes that will invariably bubble up during this process and more likely that any given squabble could take a violent turn. The limited peacekeeping presence will also make it more likely that regional actors such as Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, India and Russia will attempt to directly influence the Loya Jirga process. Renewed regional competition in Afghanistan, particularly at a time when the political system is both nascent and fragile, would have dire implications for stability.

The United Nations should be strongly encouraged by its member states to take a more assertive posture toward its mission. Efforts to approach the situation with a “light footprint” ignore important lessons learned from other post-conflict settings. Any political process as challenging as the one playing out through the Loya Jirga demands strong international stewardship to keep it from dissolving in acrimony. More aggressive efforts need to be made to get UN civil affairs officers into the field to help guide the Loya Jirga process and educate local populations about its importance and conduct. The delays in personnel decisions and funding for this important task are unacceptable.

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