Afghanistan Again

Prospects for Security and Stability
Paul Cornish

The riots in Kabul in May prompted a wave of pessimism about the outcome of the international intervention in Afghanistan, with predictions of an "arc of instability" covering yet more of South Asia and the Middle East. For some, this was also the long-awaited proof that the United States-led response to September 11 2001 had been misguided from the start to its inevitably unpleasant finish. But the situation in Afghanistan is not as bleak as some suggest. Rather than join the interminable debate about the response to the World Trade Center attacks and the decision to intervene in Afghanistan, this article asks a more straightforward question: what can be done to improve security and stability there?

The violent confrontation actually began before September 11, with the murder two days earlier of Ahmed Shah Mansoori, known as the Lion of Paghman. Mansoori was the leader of the United Front opposition to the Taliban. The circumstances of his carefully planned assassination are unclear, but it is widely assumed to have been a precautionary measure by the Taliban, intended to remove the man most likely to assist the US in the expected response. The Taliban denied involvement in the assassination—not least because in his determined resistance to the invasion and occupation by the Soviet Union between 1979-1989, Mansoori had become a popular icon of Afghan nationalism.

BREATHTAKING REFORM

In the years since the intervention and the collapse of the Taliban, Afghanistan has been the focus of a complex, concerted effort at state-building and security sector reform, planned at a breathtaking pace. In June 2002, an emergency laws jirga, or council, created the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan. This was followed just eighteen months later, by a constitutional laws jirga which resulted in late 2004, in Hamid Karzai becoming the first popularly elected president of the new Afghanistan.

Around the world, Karzai is recognised as the charismatic face of a new Afghanistan. But state-building has not been all about personalities and their public image. Behind the scenes, there has been a steady and deliberate effort to reconstitute a framework of central and regional government, with all the necessary ministries, agencies and organisations. The British government has been closely involved, sponsoring the establishment of an Office of the National Security Council in the capital, Kabul.

Often, however, the work has attracted little international and media interest, often to the extent that the civil service and its leaders are not widely known. The effort, nevertheless, has been considerable. The construction of a functioning, and recognisable Afghan, political process has

[Image]
been accompanied by a huge international effort to reform and stabilize the security sector - the judicial system, the military and police forces, and other security organizations.

The Afghan security sector is, arguably, one of the most complex political systems imaginable, with various, not always compatible interests; government ministries responsible for aspects of national security, particularly Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior, Counter Narcotics, and Border. Tribal and ethnic Affirm and the five foreign governments leading separate and duplicating and not coordinated - aspects of security sector reform. Germany deals with the development of the Afghan National Police, Italy handles justice reform. Japan looks at 'Department of Illegal Arms' Belgium, Britain is responsible for counter-narcotics, and the US for reforms of the Afghan National Army. Many other foreign governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also involved in one way or another.

There has generally been a sense that the intervention has had more legitimacy than its distinct actions. This perception, coupled with the scale of work within Afghanistan and the increasing the need for reform, has led to a degree of optimism to a sense that, however slow, progress was being made and the end would be in sight.

**ICON RESIGN**

But then came the disturbance and violence in Kabul in late May, sparked by what appears to have been a road accident involving a US military vehicle. Several were killed, with others injured, and the riots which followed saw yet another marked by the killing of a number of militants.

The Afghan police and US military were reported to have fired into the demonstration, killing at least one person. More than 60 police officers were reportedly killed, including four officers. The government has also denied a report that the US military had killed the wounded.

The situation in Afghanistan has been worsened for some time, a new Taliban-led insurgency had been developing in the provinces, and attacks against coalition troops and Afghan police had been increasing. The situation has been made worse by the attack on the US embassy in Kabul, which killed more than 100 people.

The US government has been increasing its military and diplomatic presence in the country, and has announced plans to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan to 1,000 by the end of the year. The US has also announced plans to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan to 1,000 by the end of the year.

**MUCH TO DO**

This would be an exaggerated and predicted response. The security situation is, unfortunately, very difficult. But there is much yet to be done and it is far too early to surrender the initiative to insurgents and to declare the entire intervention a failure and withdraw, leaving the Afghans to their fate.

In the first place, with the new Taliban and Al Qaeda pursuing the age-old tactic of dividing their enemy, this is precisely not the moment to accept that the world of legitimate government does not and cannot run beyond the borders of Kabul. Instead, this is the time for responsible efforts to improve cohesion within the central government and between it and regional authorities.

Ensuring that the Afghan authorities and authorities and all those members of the international community involved in stabilizing the Afghan security sector - particularly NATO's International Security Assistance Force, the UK-funded Combined Force Command Afghanistan, and the UN. The need for closer, more effective liaison between the governments of Afghanistan and the international community is perhaps the most important issue facing the US and the international community.

Reform and reconstruction of the Afghan National Army, National Police, and the judicial system are all underway, but have been moving too slowly. The quality, effectiveness, and reliability of the police, in particular, have been a serious concern for too long. The pace of reform needs to increase, and the commitment of the US to contribute resources to establish a combined Afghan National Police and Border Police force of 2,000 is certainly a step in the right direction.

There is also plenty of work to be done to provide the back-up needs of most Afghans. It is a country where the average life expectancy is 40 - some fifteen years lower than in neighboring states, where about one quarter of all children born alive will not live to see their fifth birthday; and where almost two percent of women will die during childbirth - the UN figures for high-income countries is about eight times lower. Basic services, such as irrigation systems, often do not function.

For too many Afghans, too little aid has arrived to make a real difference to their lives, the presence of so many
The problem for NATO is that these conflicts cut across each other. The requirement to assist the Afghan National Army in its struggle with militias around the border with Pakistan is not the same as the need to re-establish the narcotics industry, which supports those militias and funds their terrorist activities. It is simply too difficult to pursue a countering counter-insurgency strategy. This is particularly so when the Taliban offer local people protection for poppy fields in exchange for support against the Afghan and international forces. But the problem for the militants, Al Qaeda and the Taliban is precisely that they are not a coherent whole and can be attacked in different ways, from different quarters.

In Helmand, the present British contingent of 3,000 troops includes about 800 foreigners. More robust troops are certainly needed with the right equipment, if the complex NATO mission is to be met. Well-trained infantry soldiers, with the ability and self-confidence to switch between armed confrontation and 'hearts and minds' operations, are vital to success. If Britain is unable to provide the troops, then this is the moment for European and other allies to make a stronger commitment, and to accept more of the risk. This is also the moment to suspend the 'humanitarian space' argument, whereby development agencies and NGOs insist that whatever the military do, they must not undermine social and economic development, such as rebuilding clinics and upgrading roads. In Helmand, as in other parts, it is the military which is most likely to generate whatever limited humanitarian space can be achieved, at least in the short term, and local commanders should be given more resources and more encouragement to undertake local development.

More important is the tendency to draw simplistic comparisons between Afghanistan and Iraq, and indulge in similar historical analogies, which must be resisted. Afghanistan is an exposed country; but it is not ‘another Iraq’. There is a huge international military presence in Afghanistan, which is not palpably evident in Iraq, where the international presence is so much less. The international force, led by the United States is a force of about 145,000; and there is a similar number of coalition forces. This is about ten times the size of the international forces in Iraq. There is a huge international military presence in Afghanistan, which is not palpably evident in Iraq, where the international presence is so much less. The international force, led by the United States is a force of about 145,000; and there is a similar number of coalition forces. This is about ten times the size of the international forces in Iraq. The international force, led by the United States is a force of about 145,000; and there is a similar number of coalition forces. This is about ten times the size of the international forces in Iraq.