Afghanistan is at a turning point. The defeat of the Taliban in late 2001 was widely welcomed, but now there are signs of resurgence. The democracy project got a big boost from the successful presidential election last year, but Afghans are anxious about the parliamentary poll they are about to take part in. With an economy dominated by the drugs trade and far too few trained professionals, there is a worrying lack of optimism.

Does the world still care about Afghanistan? The G8 foreign ministers, meeting in advance of their recent summit, acknowledged progress had been made but recognised the immense challenges ahead. They committed themselves to continuing to support Afghanistan's development effort, to achieve pro-poor growth, develop human and institutional capacity. Afghanistan certainly needs long-term commitment. Parliamentary elections are planned for September 18, the final stage of the peace process, began at a 2001 conference in Bonn. But the security situation is deteriorating; with a combination of criminality and insurgency that increasingly threatens those with resources and those seen to be supporting central government. Stability for ordinary Afghans is being undermined. This will discourage investment the country needs if it is to reduce its aid dependency and make it impossible for those who want to help to do so.

Resentment

In May, a normally ameliorative President Hamid Karzai condemned that United States military action had helped create a mood of resentment among the population that had contributed to the violence. That same month a memorandum of understanding was signed between the two countries, encouraging the long-term presence of US forces and the possibility of permanent bases. These plans will be unwelcome to many Afghans who question whether they are aimed at US and regional security rather than their own.

Jittery

Rocket attacks and improvised explosives are now regular occurrences and suicide bombings have been used for the first time, something very alien to Afghan culture. Targeted assassinations began with election aid workers and proceeded to mujahedeen and tribal elders who support the central government. There is also intimidation of the public, still struggling with years of war and the
most severe drought in living memory. Despite the challenges, the majority of aid agencies have continued to operate, often under severe restrictions. Medical and essential supplies were flown into the capital of Kabul from across the world. However, the situation remains critical, with many children and families struggling to meet their basic needs.

The conflict has had a profound impact on the Afghan economy, with the United Nations warning that up to 80% of the population could fall into poverty by the end of the year. The World Bank has estimated that the GNI per capita will fall by more than 20% in 2020. The impact on the country’s infrastructure and educational system has been significant, with widespread destruction and a decline in access to education and healthcare.

Despite these challenges, there is hope for the future. The Afghan government, in partnership with international organizations, continues to work towards rebuilding the country. The Afghan government and the international community are committed to ensuring that the Afghan people have access to essential services and that the country can recover from the recent conflict.

In addition to the rebuilding efforts, there is a growing recognition of the importance of education and skills development. The government and international organizations are working together to ensure that Afghan children have access to quality education, and that adults have the opportunity to learn new skills to improve their chances of finding employment.

However, there are still significant challenges to overcome. The situation remains complex, with a need for continued support from the international community. The Afghan government and its partners are committed to working together to ensure a bright future for the Afghan people.