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TESTIMONY

The State of the Afghan Insurgency

SETH G. JONES

CT-296

December 2007

Testimony presented before the Canadian Senate National Security and Defence Committee on December 10, 2007

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The State of the Afghan Insurgency²

Before the Standing Committee on National Security and Defence
The Senate of Canada

December 10, 2007

Six years after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, Canada, NATO, and the Afghan government stand at an important crossroads. There have been some successes during this period. According to the World Bank, for example, Afghanistan's economy grew by an estimated 14 percent in 2005 and 5.3 percent in 2006.³ Annual end-period inflation, as measured by the consumer price index for Kabul, decreased to 4.8 percent in March 2007. Annual end-period "national" inflation, covering Kabul and five other cities, was 3.9 percent in March 2007.⁴ Democracy returned after a 30-year hiatus, hearkening back to Zahir Shah's "blueprint for democracy" period in the 1960s and early 1970s. Afghanistan held presidential elections in October 2004 and parliamentary elections in September 2005. President Hamid Karzai has retained relatively high levels of support. According to a December 2007 public opinion poll, for instance, 63 percent of Afghans rated the work of President Karzai positively.⁵ This is a greater level of support than many Western leaders enjoy.

In addition, several Afghan cities have experienced a fundamental transition over the past few years, as I have witnessed. Kabul, for example, is awash in electronics equipment and a sprinkle of new Internet cafes. The streets are clogged with bright yellow taxicabs, watermelon carts, bicycles, and cars imported from Europe and Asia. Young boys and girls shuffle to school along the city's congested sidewalks. Construction projects dot the city, including several new banks and a modern indoor shopping mall in Kabul City Center. The city had been reduced to rubble a decade earlier. In 1992, Beirut-style street fighting erupted in the city and it was savagely bombarded with rockets, mortars, and artillery. Kabul was reduced to shambles. Neighborhoods, mosques, and government buildings were destroyed.

¹The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. The series records testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

²This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT296/>.

³World Bank, *Afghanistan At A Glance* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007), p. 1.

⁴International Monetary Fund, *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: Second Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility—Staff Report* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, July 2007), p. 26.

⁵ABC News / BBC / ARD, *Afghanistan – Where Things Stand* (Kabul: ABC News / BBC / ARD, December 2007), p. 16.

But there have been growing challenges in the country. This testimony does not pretend to be a comprehensive assessment of Afghanistan's insurgency. Rather, it touches on a few, select points that could be addressed.

Rising Insurgency

The evidence I have collected from repeated trips to Afghanistan between 2003 and 2007 indicates that there is an increasingly violent insurgency that threatens the country. It includes a range of insurgent groups, such as the Taliban, the Haqqani network, foreign fighters (including al Qaeda), Hezb-i-Islami, criminal organizations, and some allied tribes and sub-tribes. The overall number of insurgent-initiated attacks increased by 400 percent from 2002 to 2006, and the number of deaths from these attacks increased over 800 percent during the same period.⁶ Many of these attacks were against Afghan civilians, international aid workers, and coalition forces. The increase in violence was particularly acute between 2005 and 2006. The number of suicide attacks quadrupled, remotely detonated bombings more than doubled, and armed attacks nearly tripled between 2005 and 2006.⁷ Though 2007 is not yet complete, the trends over the year indicate an increase in violence in most every category.

Several provinces around Kabul have also become dangerous. A year ago, I drove by car from Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, to neighboring Wardak Province. The two-hour journey meanders through a parched landscape of sedimentary rocks and jagged mountain peaks. This year, however, I couldn't repeat the journey. It was too dangerous. The Taliban and other insurgent groups infiltrated into Kabul's surrounding provinces. Provinces that I could drive to only a few months ago, such as Wardak and Lowgar, are now off limits except to those willing to gamble with their lives. The Taliban have set up checkpoints along major roads to collect taxes and seize stray Westerners or Afghans who support the central government. Kidnapping has become a growth industry. In southern Afghanistan, where I have visited, the insurgency continues to rage. In Kandahar Province Canadian, other NATO, and Afghan government forces have fought pitched battles with Taliban and other insurgent forces. The Taliban and other forces now operate in a large swath of territory that includes Afghanistan's western, southern, eastern, and parts of central Afghanistan. As one senior NATO official told me, NATO and Afghan forces control at most 20 percent of southern Afghanistan. The rest is controlled by Taliban or a range of sub-state groups.

⁶ RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident Database.

⁷ Pamela Constable, "Gates Visits Kabul, Cites Rise in Cross-Border Attacks," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2007, p. A10.

The Strategic Importance of Afghanistan

There have been discussions among NATO countries – including in Canada – about downsizing or withdrawing forces from Afghanistan. This would be a mistake. The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan significantly impacts the national security of NATO countries, including Canada. The Pakistan-Afghanistan border region is the headquarters of al Qaeda, which is in some ways a more competent international terrorist organization than it was on September 11, 2001. It has close links with the Taliban and is led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, who have been pivotal in the rise of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices used against NATO soldiers in Afghanistan. Other individuals, such as Abu Ubaydah al-Masri, have been involved in a number of European and other international terrorist plots from their base in Pakistan. Al Qaeda possesses a robust strategic, logistics, and public relations network in Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially around the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. This infrastructure has enabled it to play an important role in orchestrating international terrorist attacks and plots, including in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Germany. As a recent National Intelligence Estimate from the United States argued: “Al-Qa’ida is and will remain the most serious terrorist threat to the Homeland ... We assess the group has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), operational lieutenants, and its top leadership.”⁸ Governments across Europe have similarly concluded that there is a significant international threat posed by al Qaeda and other groups based out of the Afghanistan-Pakistan theatre.

Canadian cities are also threatened. As an October 2006 al Qaeda statement warned, Canada faces “an operation similar to New York, Madrid, London and their sisters, with the help of Allah.” Al Qaeda has been involved in an average of six major global attacks per year since 2002, up from one attack per year from 1995 to 2001. These attacks have spanned multiple regions, including Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Al Qaeda is also involved in hundreds of smaller attacks each year in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its modus operandi has evolved and now includes a repertoire of more sophisticated improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks. Its organizational structure has also evolved. This includes a “bottom up” approach (encouraging independent thought and action from low-level operatives) and a “top down” one (issuing orders and coordinating a global terrorist enterprise with both highly synchronized and autonomous moving parts).

Al Qaeda poses a threat to Canada and Canada’s allies in the West, which will not decrease if Canada withdraws. Canada’s values are ultimately at odds with a terrorist organization that is committed to the restoration of the Caliphate in the Middle East and the establishment of a radical

⁸ National Intelligence Council, *The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2007), p. 5.

version of Islam. Al Qaeda needs to be destroyed, not appeased. As the West witnessed in the late 1990s, the Taliban's steady conquest of territory in Afghanistan led to a home for al Qaeda and other militant groups. Afghanistan was where much of the planning and training for the September 11 attacks took place. Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, head of the al Qaeda military committee and Osama bin Laden's principal operative for the attacks, blithely noted following his capture: "I was Emir [commander] of Beit Al Shuhada [the Martyrs' House] in the state of Kandahar, Afghanistan, which housed the 9/11 hijackers. There I was responsible for their training and readiness for the execution of the 9/11 operation."⁹

Governance Challenges

What explains the insurgency in Afghanistan that now engulfs roughly half the country? "The answer is simple," one senior Afghan government official told me in October 2007. "The people are losing faith in the government. Our security forces cannot protect local villages, and our institutions struggle to deliver basic services."

At its core, the insurgency in Afghanistan is not about religion, as some mistakenly believe. Most Afghans in rural villages do not subscribe to the extremist views of the Taliban, al Qaeda, or other insurgent groups such as Hezb-i-Islami – though they have tried to exploit religion. Most locals don't want to establish a radical and rather unorthodox interpretation of Islam, typified by one Taliban sign posted when they conquered Kabul in 1996: "Throw reason to the dogs. It stinks of corruption."¹⁰ Indeed, most opinion polls suggest that the Taliban are not well liked in Afghanistan. A recent poll commissioned by U.S. Central Command, for example, indicated that 15 percent of Afghans favor a Taliban return. In general, the problem is not that most Afghans inherently support the Taliban. It is that patience with the Afghan government is wearing thin.

Indeed, the primary challenge in Afghanistan is one of *governance*. Governance includes the set of institutions by which authority in a country is exercised.¹¹ It involves the government's ability at the national or sub-national level to establish law and order, effectively manage resources, and implement sound policies. An insurgency reflects a process of alternative state building, where insurgents compete to provide governance to the population. Insurgents take advantage of weak governance and assume state-like functions. They tax and set up administrative structures for the population they control.

⁹ Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024 (Khalid Sheikh Muhammad), March 10, 2007, U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Base, Cuba, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 111.

¹¹ World Bank, *Governance Matters 2006: Worldwide Governance Indicators* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), p. 2.

Perhaps the most basic governance challenge in Afghanistan is security. A recent assessment from Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate for Security, concluded that there are too few competent Afghan forces to provide security to the population in rural areas of the country. "When villagers and rural communities seek protection from the police," it concluded, "either it arrives late or arrives in a wrong way." The government's security forces do not enjoy a monopoly of power. Villagers who collaborate with the government, or even openly support it, often put themselves in grave danger. They are threatened or killed, and their bodies are hung in the center of villages. This message is clear and effective. Those who wish to collaborate with the government or NATO forces must stop, or move their families to the cities in search of protection. The result is that key villages have fallen into the hands of the Taliban and other insurgent groups. The villages are gradually emptied of pro-government political forces and individuals. These rural areas become sanctuaries for the Taliban, and the population is left with no choice but to become sympathizers of the insurgents.

Another major challenge is corruption. Afghans have become increasingly frustrated with national and local government officials who are viewed as corrupt and self-serving. This sentiment is just as palpable in rural areas of the country as it is in the cities. There are government officials at the district, provincial, and national levels involved in drug-trafficking, who are more interested in making money than in serving their populations. Indeed, rising levels in the cultivation, production, and trafficking of poppy have undermined governance. It was the collapse of governance that led to the rise of the Taliban in the first place in the 1990s. War-weary Afghans initially welcomed the Taliban because it promoted itself as a force for honesty and integrity, and it was seen as a harbinger of law and order.

Outside Support

Afghanistan has also faced challenges from outside actors, which have undermined governance. The first is a limited NATO role. Its roots harken back to the "light footprint" approach adopted by the United States and other international actors – including the United Nations – in 2001. Senior policymakers wanted to avoid a heavy footprint like the Soviet Union had used in Afghanistan, which, they argued, triggered the anti-Soviet insurgency in the 1980s. In addition, the U.S. war in Iraq shifted attention and resources from Afghanistan as early as November 2001, when planning efforts for Iraq began. The result in Afghanistan has been a light footprint ever since.

In 2007, for example, ISAF was still several thousand troops short of its manpower goal in the RC South, and its ability to sustain current force levels and capabilities over the longer term was tenuous. As NATO General David Richards argued in testimony before the British House of Commons, the level of troop numbers was his most significant concern: "Simply being able to move

their troops from the North to the South would not have been a solution to me at all because we have got just about the right number of troops in the North to contain the situation there, which is broadly stable ... What I was really after was ... an increase in the overall number of troops.”¹² These numbers were particularly insufficient because a number of NATO countries refused to become involved in combat operations.

This practice has been referred to as “national caveats,” and was triggered by several concerns. A number of NATO countries had a different philosophy about how to operate in Afghanistan and how to conduct counterinsurgency operations. They were particularly adamant that stabilization and reconstruction efforts were the recipe for success in Afghanistan. Combat operations were likely to alienate the population, especially if they led to civilian casualties. As a British House of Commons investigation concluded: “In Madrid, we were told by politicians and academics that while Spanish public opinion supported troops working on reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, it would not support a war-fighting role. In Berlin, we were told about the constitutional restrictions on Germany’s military operating abroad.”¹³ In addition, political leaders were reluctant to deploy their forces into violent areas because of low domestic support for combat operations. In a German Marshall Foundation poll, for example, 75 percent of Germans, 70 percent of Italians, and 72 percent of Spanish did not support the deployment of their troops for combat operations in Afghanistan.¹⁴

Second, as has already been noted, most major insurgent groups – including the Taliban – have sanctuary in Pakistan. Several of the Taliban’s key leaders are widely believed to be based in the vicinity of Quetta, Pakistan. The Taliban has a series of financial, propaganda, and other committees in such areas as Karachi and Peshawar. There are also strong indications that elements of Pakistan’s government – including its Frontier Corps and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate – have been involved in assisting the Taliban and other groups. And the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is a sieve for arms, suicide bombers, fighters, material for building improvised explosive devices, and other logistical support to insurgent groups.

Moving Forward

Unfortunately, there are no short-term solutions to Afghanistan’s challenges. Research that the RAND Corporation has done indicates that it takes an average of 14 years for governments to defeat insurgent groups. Many also end in a draw, with neither side winning. Insurgencies can also

¹² UK House of Commons Select Committee on Defence, *Thirteenth Report* (London: HMSC, 2007), para. 46.

¹³ UK House of Commons Select Committee on Defence, *Thirteenth Report* (London: HMSC, 2007), para. 43.

¹⁴ German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy), *Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2007* (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, 2007), p. 33.

have long tails: approximately 25 percent of insurgencies won by the government and 11 percent won by insurgents lasted more than 20 years. If one starts counting in 2002, when the Taliban began conducting limited offensive operations, history suggests that it would take *on average* until 2016 to win. That is a long time for many NATO countries. But it is realistic.

This does not mean, however, that Canada or other NATO countries need to – or should – win the insurgency for Afghans. Quite the reverse. While outside actors often play an important role, victory is usually a function of the struggle between the local government and insurgents. First, outside forces are unlikely to remain for the duration of any counterinsurgency effort, at least as a major combatant force. Since indigenous forces eventually have to win the war on their own, they must develop the capacity to do so. If they don't develop this capacity, indigenous forces are likely to lose the war once international assistance ends. Second, indigenous forces usually know the population and terrain better than external actors, and are better able to gather intelligence. Third, a lead outside role may be interpreted by the population as an occupation, eliciting nationalist reactions that impede success. Fourth, a lead indigenous role can provide a focus for national aspirations and show the population that they – and not foreign forces – control their destiny.

This means that Canada and other NATO countries can be helpful in assisting the Afghan government. Four steps may be helpful.

1. Remove from power and prosecute key individuals involved in corruption and criminal activity, including Afghan government officials.

The root cause of most insurgencies has been the collapse of governance. This is certainly a challenge in Afghanistan. One helpful step would be directly dealing with corruption in the Afghan government, which has contributed to a decline of support. As Figure 1 highlights, an Asia Foundation poll in 2006 found that a striking 77 percent of respondents said corruption was a major problem in Afghanistan; 66 percent believed corruption was a major problem in the provincial government; 42 percent said corruption was a major problem in their daily life; and 40 percent said corruption was a major problem in their neighborhood. Moreover, most Afghans believed that the corruption problem was getting worse. Approximately 60 percent of respondents believed that corruption had increased over the past year at the national level, and 50 percent believed that it had increased at the provincial level. Many had been directly involved in bribery, such as providing cash to a government official. Indeed, 36 percent said they had been involved in bribery with a police officer, 35 percent with a court official, and 34 percent with officials in applying for work.¹⁵

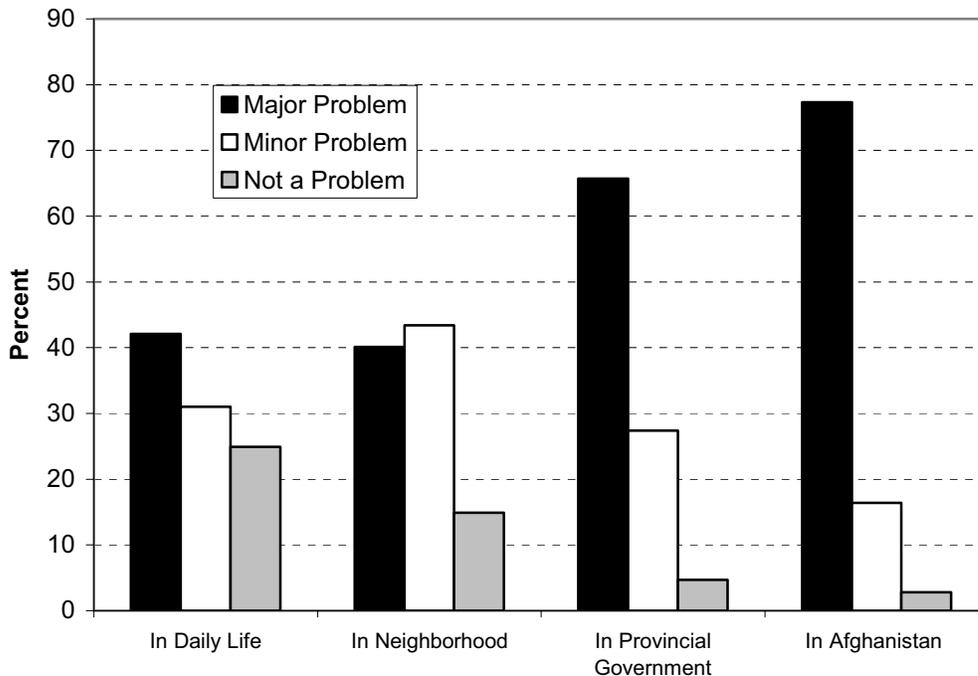
¹⁵ Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2006: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul: The Asia Foundation, 2006), pp. 14-16.

Those in southern and western Afghanistan were most likely to say they had personally experienced corruption. And those in central and northern Afghanistan were the least likely.¹⁶

Corrupt government officials, including those involved in the drug trade, should be removed from office. There is no shortage of intelligence on who they are. The most effective way to do this may be to begin with the “low hanging fruit”: capturing and prosecuting individuals where there is solid evidence of criminal behavior.

Figure 1: Prevalence of Corruption¹⁷

Question: Please tell me whether you think that corruption is a major problem, a minor problem, or no problem at all in your daily life, in your neighborhood, in your provincial government, and in Afghanistan as a whole.



2. Increase NATO and Afghan National Army resources in the south.

The Taliban’s heartland has always been in the south, including in such provinces as Kandahar. This is where the focus of NATO’s counterinsurgency efforts should be, and it is where NATO is most in danger of losing. The south represents the insurgents’ center of gravity. British and Canadian efforts have been Herculean. But they need help in clearing and holding territory. Bringing in NATO countries with limited or no experience operating in the midst of a violent

¹⁶ Stephen Weber et al, *Afghan Public Opinion Amidst Rising Violence* (College Park, MD: Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, December 2006), p. 6.

¹⁷ Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2006*, p. 14.

insurgency would be counterproductive. A better option would be deploying a sufficient number of forces – at a bare minimum 3,000 – from such nations as Australia or the United States, who can conduct counterinsurgency operations.

Also necessary are increased efforts to build competent Afghan national security forces. Deploying a greater number of Afghan National Army soldiers who can help clear and hold territory would be ideal in the south. The Afghan National Police are in poor shape. Most are under-trained, poorly equipped, corrupt, and not always loyal to the Afghan government or NATO. One of the most significant challenges with the police is in mentoring, including in the south. They need help from Royal Canadian Mounted Police and United States, British, and other advisors in the field – at checkpoints, on patrols, and at police stations.

3. Establish a regional approach to Afghanistan, including countering the sanctuary in Pakistan.

In 2001, the U.S. government effectively involved regional powers in negotiating a way forward after the overthrow of the Taliban regime. Senior government officials from Pakistan, India, Iran, Russia, the United States, and Europe were present at Bonn to help put together a stable Afghan state. But this regional approach quickly floundered. In past insurgencies, the ability of insurgent groups to gain external sanctuary and support from outside states has significantly increased their probability of winning. Since the 1979 Soviet invasion and the beginning of Afghanistan's constant state of war, neighbors have played a profound role in sowing discord. An effective strategy is badly needed to involve Afghanistan's neighbors and regional powers in a renewed effort to end the war. This may include reaching out to elements of the Taliban and other insurgent groups behind the scenes. Indeed, numerous insurgencies and civil wars have been settled through a negotiated agreement among warring parties, especially with the aid of a third party such as the United Nations.

One key area is addressing tensions between India and Pakistan, which are a root cause of the problem. Pakistan and India have long been involved in a balance-of-power struggle in South Asia. Both lay claim to the Kashmir region, and have fought several wars over Kashmir since 1947. Since 2001, India has become Afghanistan's closest strategic partner in the region. India has provided more than \$1 billion in financial assistance to Afghanistan since 2001. It has funded a variety of reconstruction projects, including the new Afghan parliament building, and provided assistance to Afghan legislators. India has also established a number of consulates near the Afghan-Pakistani border. Pakistan has accused these consulates of collecting intelligence and helping foment unrest in the Pakistani province of Balochistan.

The Indian-Afghan alliance has left Pakistan deeply insecure. Some Pakistan officials argue that India has surrounded Pakistan on its main eastern and western flanks, which include 80 percent of its borders. This encirclement has caused the Pakistani government to support proxy groups operating out of the tribal areas and Kashmir. Ameliorating Pakistan's security concerns is vital. One way of doing this may be to encourage India to scale back its financial and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. India could also close some of its consulates near the Afghan-Pakistani border. As long as Pakistan sees India as a threat on its eastern and western flanks, it will have significant incentives to establish proxy groups operating in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

The development gap in Pakistan's Pashtun areas needs to be addressed. It is also a root cause of extremism. Government institutions in the tribal areas are weak, and social and economic conditions are among the lowest in the world. Currently, international reconstruction and development assistance has focused on the Afghan side of the border. But this strategy is a half-measure. International assistance needs to be directed toward Pakistan's tribal areas, not just Afghanistan.

As part of this broader development strategy, NATO could also encourage Afghanistan and Pakistan to settle their border disagreement, siding with Pakistan. These negotiations should probably begin in earnest after the next Afghan presidential elections in 2009, since they will be divisive. No government of Afghanistan has ever formally recognized the British-drawn Durand Line, established in 1893, that divides control over Pashtun territories between Afghanistan and what was then British India. The Durand Line continues to be a source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The negotiations should ultimately aim to establish an outcome in which Afghanistan agrees to the current internationally recognized border, the tribal territories of Pakistan are integrated into and receive a full range of services from Pakistan, and the border area becomes a region for cooperative development rather than insecurity.

Pakistan needs to conduct a sustained campaign against key Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other extremist forces residing in Pakistan. This should be primarily a law enforcement and intelligence operation, not a military one. Sustained Pakistani military operations in the tribal areas would be too destabilizing, especially since the tribes often regard outside forces – including the Pakistani military – as unwelcome foreigners. Encouraging President Pervez Musharraf – or any successive Pakistani leader – to conduct a sustained campaign against insurgents will also require finding pressure points that raise the costs of stalling. Perhaps the most significant is tying current American assistance to cooperation. The United States gives Pakistan over \$1 billion in military and economic assistance each year. This assistance covers such areas as health, economic development, trade, and law enforcement. The United States could tie assistance in some of these areas – as well as implicit American support in multilateral bodies such as the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund – to progress in defeating Afghan insurgents and their support network.

4. Establish an institutional arrangement to improve international cooperation.

International cooperation in Afghanistan has been problematic since 2001. There has been little sustained coordination between the range of countries, international organizations (such as the United Nations and World Bank), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the country. Civil-military cooperation has also been problematic. In Afghanistan, there cannot be clear divisions between military and civilian action. NATO recognizes that success requires improvements in governance, including civil administration and justice, and economic development. Since they cannot end their mission without such progress, it is unreasonable to ask that the military stick to fighting. And, in fact, the availability of money to the military makes it a significant reconstruction player in areas where troops are deployed. At the same time, military operations influence where development projects can be carried out and significantly affect the political environment. So it would be equally unreasonable for the diplomats and aid directors not to be involved in such operations.

Fixing coordination problems is challenging. One area that might be helpful would be to establish a command-and-control arrangement for the civilian side of reconstruction and development. This could mean appointing an individual responsible for overseeing civilian reconstruction and development, at least for NATO countries. The individual would be a key interlocutor with the Afghan government, NATO military forces, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Variants of this model have been successfully adopted in the Balkans and other locations.

Moving Forward

Afghanistan is not hopeless. To be fair, NATO operations have had mixed success thus far. But the insurgency will ultimately be won or lost in the rural areas of Afghanistan, not in the cities. Success in ending the insurgency will take time and sufficient resources. It would be a tragedy if the naysayers in Canada succeeded in reducing their country's commitment. The challenge for the Afghan government and its NATO allies is not an easy one. It involves providing security to local villages, especially in strategically important areas of the south and east. It also includes getting a handle on the corruption that is gnawing away at the government and its fragile support base. Most Afghans are not asking for much. They want security and hope, and perhaps something to make their difficult lives a bit better. After 30 years of near-constant war, they certainly deserve it.