

Afghanistan: Still Wrong After All These Years

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President Obama said when he took office that Afghanistan would be his number one foreign affairs priority. It looks like it may become his number one foreign affairs nemesis. General McChrystal's counter-insurgency plan will call for thousands of new troops and an increased prolonged engagement to enable Afghan security forces to achieve proficiency. It also will call for more development funding, increased civilian presence and improving an Afghan government that is weak on administration but strong on corruption. President Obama has said that he is not going to make new commitments until he is sure that the plan is the correct one. He said that he will not commit U.S. forces to stay in Afghanistan ad infinitum. In this, he is correct. At the same, McChrystal and others point out that we can win the war in Afghanistan, but in order to do this we need firm, long-lasting commitment.

The bewildering array of clocks that deal with Afghanistan all tick at different speeds, but none of them seem to tick slowly enough for victory. Our American political system is geared towards elections, meaning that the administration will face a litmus test on Afghanistan at the time of the mid-term elections next year. Mature observers know that a much longer time frame is needed before lasting positive results will appear in Afghanistan. However, more than half of the American people no longer wish us to be there. The same is true in many of the other countries which have troops in Afghanistan. The German bombing in Kunduz put Chancellor Merkel in difficulty as Germany moved toward elections, and the deaths of five Italian soldiers in Kabul last week led to an immediate strong negative reaction in Italy. The British and Canadian publics are growing increasingly weary of a war in which they, along with the U.S., bear the brunt of the casualties.

Pakistan remains the more serious problem one which a failure in Afghanistan could ignite in ways that none of us wishes to see. The Pakistani military finally took action against Taliban groups in Swat, with press reports now alleging in turn that they have committed human rights violations. They still hold back from taking concerted action against the tribal territories along the Afghan border, however. Pakistan is a tinderbox of social discontent, regional resentment and fundamentalist activity. It is also bankrupt, has a weak government and possesses a nuclear arsenal that it already nearly used against India.

In Afghanistan, the scandal of the elections, however it works out, has already seriously harmed the clouded reputation of the Karzai government as well as that of the international community. A second election round is logistically difficult even if the government were to agree, which it has not yet done. I'll come back to that later. But now I'd like to present a kind of holistic picture that traces some of what went wrong in Afghanistan and places Afghanistan in a regional and

historical context that can help us understand why things happen as they do. What is new to us may be very old news to people who live there.

A little over seven years ago, I arrived in Kabul to be the United States Ambassador. When I stepped off the plane at one end of the runway, security personnel quickly took me by both arms to keep me from stepping off the tarmac. We carefully picked our way through mines, unexploded ordinance and piles of destroyed aircraft and armaments, and proceeded along the road that led from the airport to the American embassy. The scene was not unfamiliar to me from previous assignments in war zones: burned out buildings, destroyed infrastructure, the litter and left-behinds of military campaigns. What caught my eye, however, were the carefully painted new signs along the road. They advertised tire repair, welding, machine shops, and other unglamorous basic services that were going on in the primitive shops behind them. I thought to myself, "Well, these people have spent what little money they have on these signs. They have nothing, but they have hope and they have commitment." I knew that the mission in Afghanistan would be difficult, but not how difficult it would be. I knew that it would be costly, but not that Afghanistan would be short-changed all along the way. And I knew that it would depend on the belief of the Afghan people that change could and would come and bring a better life and peace to Afghanistan.

For the first few years, it appeared that the promise would be fulfilled. The Taliban withdrew, and it seemed in 2003 that the actual fighting would lessen or disappear within a year or so. The optimism this produced encouraged a "light-foot approach" to Afghanistan that took as its starting point a belief that only a little needed to be done and the problems of Afghanistan would take care of themselves. Very wrong. And Washington did little to get rid of the warlords it had allied with out of expediency to get rid of the Taliban. Instead, they were cultivated and remained in positions of power. Wrong again. Washington diverted its attention and its resources to Iraq, and Afghanistan has paid the price in a number of areas, as neither sufficient funding nor personnel were made available. Now things are much worse and will cost much more to repair.

One of these neglected areas is the lack of civil and structural development. From the beginning, Afghans have complained about the lack of visible development and failure of government, and the response has mainly been to fund the military. In Afghanistan, the need for both civil and military input grew geometrically, with funding always arriving later and less than needed.

Since the effort in Afghanistan began, the gap between development need and funding has been fairly consistent. The international community pledged half of what the Afghans needed and then actually delivered only half of that. In addition, most of that funding actually was spent outside of Afghanistan, particularly U.S. funding. U.S. law requires U.S. firms to receive much of the contracting, so a tiered system has developed, where the United States Agency for International development (USAID) contracts to American firms who then contract to other firms, perhaps Turkish or Pakistani, who in turn then contract to Afghan firms. Each firm takes its cut of the contract, say fifteen percent. The result is that actual funds disbursed in Afghanistan to Afghans are substantially less than the amount of money disbursed for Afghanistan. Afghans resent both the presence of highly paid foreigners and their inability to be masters in their own house.

The world community arrived in numbers, as soldiers and government officials, members of non-governmental organizations and traders from neighboring countries. All arrived with visions, missions and physical demands exceeding resources and personnel. To date a mixture of progress and failure has occurred. Partly, geography has determined destiny. The physical difficulties of Afghanistan, a large, mountainous country whose few roads were destroyed, make basic communication and transportation difficult and expensive propositions. In the former Yugoslavia, good roads and substantial housing, a developed infrastructure and an educated population made refurbishing after the war a relatively simple proposition.

In Afghanistan, what geography didn't limit, sparse funding did. Bosnia-Herzegovina received over \$279 per capita in the first two years after peace was made, and East Timor \$256. In Afghanistan, the figure was \$67. According to the Congressional Research Service, spending for Afghanistan through FY 2009 comes to about two hundred billion dollars, of which 94 percent has gone for military spending and only 6 percent for embassy programs and development assistance. Lack of development is one of the major complaints of Afghans. There was a failure to train competent government officials in a land destroyed by war and where a whole generation of government employees had been educated in a Soviet-command economy. The Afghan government fell back on traditional tribal leaders and untrained, often illiterate personnel to manage the countryside. Not surprisingly, they proved to be both dysfunctional and corrupt.

What is more, millions of Afghans have returned home from Iran and Pakistan, the largest refugee return in history. Some four million have come back, but millions more remain abroad, in poverty and now unwelcome. Iran has been pushing refugees back into Afghanistan in the last year, and Pakistan has begun to do the same. In addition, there are now large numbers of Pakistani refugees from Pakistan who have fled the fighting and Taliban takeover there. The country they have come to is desperate. Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries on earth before thirty years of war, and remains at or near the bottom on almost every human indicator. Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan said that it would be a great success if the international community could, in ten years of work, move Afghanistan up to being only the tenth poorest country in the world.

Still, in many measures, Afghanistan has made remarkable advances. Income has trebled, to about \$365 per year, compared to \$527 in its neighbor Tajikistan, and \$900 in Pakistan. 80 percent of Afghans now have access to some kind of health care, although life expectancy is still only 43 years and 16 percent of Afghan women will die during childbirth. Infant deaths have declined 18 percent, but one of four children still dies before the age of five. In 2001, there were only a few thousand mostly non-working phones in Afghanistan, now 55 percent of the population has access to a cell phone and 38 percent report access to a television. Electricity is extremely limited however, even for those who are connected to the grid. There are now over five million children in school, some 60 percent of school age children. In primary school over fifty percent of the students are girls, but in secondary schools, that falls to five percent.

The Bonn program of elections and a constitution was implemented, a national army that shows promising signs needs much more work, and a number of governmental institutions are in place. When one compares Afghanistan in 2009 to Afghanistan in 2001, there is really much that has been done. There is even more that has not been done. Gains in women's rights and a free press

remain fragile, and even seem to be moving backward. Recent events make this particularly clear.

The Presidential election is a prime example of what is wrong. Months ago there were reports about false registration and preparations for voter fraud. Press reports flagrant cheating in the voting process, and not just on the part of the Karzai supporters. Calls for a national government that would have former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah work together with Karzai have been so far rejected by Abdullah. The voting fraud reports focus on whether Karzai actually got over fifty percent of the votes, thus eliminating the need for a second round of voting. If the tainted election commission rules that he does, broad civil unrest is a distinct possibility. If there is a second round, with Karzai running against Abdullah, there are logistical and security problems inherent there as well. International observers claim the election cannot take place before the winter comes, but there is a measure of false anxiety in that. Many of the disputed votes come from areas where voting could take place all year. I would suggest that partial re-voting is also a possibility in those areas. Not to be partisan, but it also seems fairly clear that Karzai, even if one eliminates all the fraudulent votes, did win far more of the vote than Abdullah. In the end, there is every likelihood that he will remain in office and the world community will have to deal with him. Needless to say, his legitimacy and that of his government will be tarnished even more. The Taliban will use that in their propaganda, but they have already called the Kabul government illegitimate.

The security situation in Afghanistan is visibly deteriorating. The Taliban now are present or in control of some one-third of the districts nationwide, and have shown that they can strike virtually anywhere. High profile attacks cause strong reaction, especially when foreigners are involved. General McChrystal's counter-insurgency plans will not prevent such attacks in the short run, but he believes that he can win in the long run. A short-term commitment will not be enough, and the Taliban and al Qaeda count on the growing weariness of their enemy and the Afghan people.

Pakistan is now essentially threatened by the same militant activity as Afghanistan. The Pakistani military finally took action in the area of Swat, but, according to Pakistani expert Ahmed Rashid, still hold back from attacking in the tribal areas along the border where they have been unsuccessful in the past. According to Rashid, the Pakistani military is still fixed on the Indian border and a possible attack there. In addition, Baluchistan, Pakistan's southern border region with Afghanistan, has been in a state or more or less open rebellion throughout Pakistan's history. A failure in Afghanistan will aggravate the serious problems in Pakistan, a weak state with a nuclear arsenal, a fragile government and multiple social, political and economic problems. The result could be a much wider disaster. We ignore the possibility at our own peril.

We must be cautious, but realistic. There are factors in our favor. The Taliban are not one group, and neither is Al Qaeda. Not all the fighters are ideologues; many of them are fighting for economic reasons, or because their tribal leaders make them. There is room for negotiation, and for changing mindsets. The efforts to stop controversial bombings that kill civilians are part of this. So are the efforts to increase security in specific areas.

Polling figures show that Afghans are growing less pleased with the direction in which their country is going, less pleased with the presence of foreign troops in their country and less

pleased with the United States' efforts to help Afghanistan. But they also show that the people of Afghanistan do not want the Taliban and al Qaeda, that in spite of their increasingly vocal complaints about bombing, corruption and poor governance, 82 percent say they still prefer the current Afghan government and only 8 percent say they approve of the Taliban.

Many people in Afghanistan, on all levels of society, told me the same thing. They said, "We want you to be here. We want you to succeed. But many others have come here and did not succeed, and we will always be here. If you do not succeed, and we want you to, we will have to find a way to live anyway." The Taliban are counting on being able to outlast us, to make sure that the people eventually look to them for stability and security. In 1986, Soviet Marshal Akhromeyev told the Soviet Duma, "We have lost the battle for the Afghan people." That is not the case for us in Afghanistan, for many reasons, but it could change.

Afghans look to their own government and the international community for stability, for assurances, political and economic, that they have a future they can move towards, and not a recurrence of the nightmare from which they have escaped. They see the problems and the inadequacies around them, the corruption and waste, and often do not understand how nations so powerful and rich could have been so incapable in resolving these issues.

The problems of Afghanistan are at least as perplexing to us as well. The criticisms of Afghanistan and the Karzai government are now familiar. Lack of governance is one of the main complaints of the Afghan people. Bad governance is another. The Kabul government is often not present in the provinces and when it is, it is most likely to be in the form of corrupt police officials or local power lords who have received a mandate to govern from Kabul but who are in fact simply continuing tribal and group power structures that have existed previously. The Afghan people have long been used to rule themselves through tribal councils and by traditional methods. Trade-offs based on traditional structures however, may reinforce many of the practices which allowed the Taliban to come into power in the first place and others, such as subjugation of women, which are objectionable to many. In the end, like it or not, they may become part of the solution.

After seven years of war in Afghanistan, President Obama brought a clear focus and statement of intent to the issues of the region last spring. The White House initiative is focused on defeat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda and removal of the military threat to Afghanistan which they represent. Additional U.S. forces would go to Afghanistan, but repeated calls on NATO allies to increase their own commitments have mostly gone unanswered, and support for the war is diminishing everywhere. Gen. McChrystal's new report states that defeat is likely if troop levels do not increase. Not everyone in the White House is so sure.

The brunt of the fighting in Afghanistan has been done by the U.S., U.K. Canada, Netherlands and France. Other nations have restricted their soldiers with so-called "caveats," that limit them to defensive, assistance or auxiliary functions. European leaders have not made it clear to their voters that the action is a war, and not a social assistance program. This accounted for part of the outcry in Germany when German planes bombed fuel trucks that were in Taliban hands, killing a number of civilians in the process. Along with the emphasis of the new plan on a concerted military effort to deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan is the recognition that Pakistan and Afghanis-

tan now constitute a shared region of conflict, as Ambassador Holbrooke has also pointed out. The war is spreading, not ending. And time is running out on the clocks that tick for Afghanistan

Pakistanis, however, do not like to be linked with Afghanistan. Pakistani public opinion still persists in regarding the fundamentalist activities in their country as a United States problem. Last spring saw the social disruption caused by the fundamentalist activities in Swat, where Islamic activists targeted the ruling landlord class and either killed or driven them out of the area. This aspect of their activities, a social revolution in a country where hereditary landholdings and an impoverished peasant class are the norm, promised to spread to other areas of Pakistan as well.

When I served in Pakistan twenty years ago Taliban groups were forming and politicians, many of them still active today, were trying to use those groups to thwart their political rivals. It was clear to me then that they would themselves become the victims of these groups, which saw all of them, landlords and industrialists, as bad Moslems and exploiters. Now it is happening.

Pakistan is in a serious state of crisis, with a military which has until recently been ineffectual in fighting the militants and at the same time, in its ISI branch, accused of colluding with them against the U.S. The new American plan includes large sums of money for Pakistan. Who will administer those funds and how they will be controlled is of critical importance. For fifty years, Pakistani officials have told us everything would be OK and it has not been OK. Corruption and misappropriation are endemic in Pakistan. Much of U.S. military funding for Pakistan went for weapons to be used for defense against India, and not for their designated anti-terrorism purposes. U.S. officials met in Islamabad this week to discuss just that with Pakistani officials. I would like to believe that they will get it right this time.

Moving back to Afghanistan, President Obama has also called for a significant increase in the civilian presence in Afghanistan and in assistance for development. The personnel to staff these positions are now in the process of being identified. The office the State Department set up several years to deal with crisis situations was not funded until this fiscal year, so the process is not where it should be. The Secretary of Defense asked Congress in March of 2009 to fund the Department of State to relieve pressure on his personnel. He should not have had to do that. Considering the situation on the ground, an immediately accelerated effort is necessary. A number of commentators have noted the White house plan of last spring, and Gen. McChrystal's new iteration of it, seem more designed to produce a military outcome, but that will be insufficient to eliminate the base conditions that gave rise to the Taliban. The development and Afghan governance parts of the White House plan need quick articulation and implementation. The government knows how many troops will go, where they will go and what they will do. It has not laid out a similar plan for the civilian side. General McChrystal's plan calls for nearly doubling civilian personnel, to 1000 by year's end. So far, only about 75 new civilian personnel have gone to Afghanistan this year, according to press reports. That is glaringly insufficient.

In addition, the McChrystal plan calls for most of these civilian officials to be placed with the military in Provincial Reconstruction Teams, presumably for valid security reasons. To most Afghans, however, since they come from military bases, they will still seem to be military officials. The bottom line is that there is far more attention and planning being paid to military oper-

ations and security concerns than preparing the context- economic, governmental and social – that is critical to the continued viability of Afghanistan.

Having said, that, the training of an Afghan national army and police is obviously an imperative. The army is performing well in coordination with outside forces. The police are doing less well. Time is needed to increase their size and proficiency. Large numbers of trainers are needed. It is a long-term project. In both cases, basic literacy is a problem which must be dealt with if Afghanistan is to have a modern security structure. It is unthinkable that many of the military in Afghanistan are illiterate. How can they be expected to read manuals, keep instructions or even basic accounts?

Along with a modern military, Afghanistan needs an economic structure that can support it. The current planning is for combine army and police forces of 220,000 individuals. Afghanistan's economy simply cannot support that, so other nations need to help Afghanistan do one or more of three things: build a viable economy that can support itself, including the military, solve the security problem, or expect that someone else will pay for its military indefinitely. Aside from the military, Afghanistan needs to pay for itself and run itself if the international community is ever going to be able to withdraw completely. Winning the war is only one part of the issue.

Afghanistan has the potential to become a self-sustaining country, with oil and gas deposits, minerals, transport, gemstones and agriculture. China is investing 3.5 billion dollars in the huge Aynak copper field, and will build Afghanistan's first railroad to connect China through Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Pakistan to exploit the holdings, for a profit. Pipelines to bring oil and gas from Afghanistan's Western neighbors, including Iran to Pakistan and India could also generate income for Afghanistan. A road network that connected Central Asia with the sea through Afghanistan could bring substantial economic benefits for all involved. A truck could go from Tashkent in Uzbekistan to Karachi in 18 hours through a stable Afghanistan, whereas now that truck must travel a week across Central Asia and Russia to arrive at a port. The road connection that India and Iran are building from the Iranian port of Charbahar to the Afghan ring road is another avenue for transport, and may even be used to bring in military material for the war in Afghanistan.

It should be noted that the new agreements made with Central Asian countries and Russia to transport materiel to Afghanistan will come with a high price tag and will not replace the now-fragmented access through Pakistan. In germs of enhancing our security relationships with Central Asia, they serve a useful purpose.

Afghanistan used to feed itself, it can do so again. The Soviets destroyed the orchards, vineyards and centuries old underground canal system that were the backbone of Afghan agriculture. The rise in opium production is one response. In almost every part of Afghanistan, farmers have said they would prefer to grow a different crop. In order to do this they need price supports, alternative crops and a multi-year program to make the transition. As it is, more provinces each year are free of opium production, with the overwhelming majority of producers now in Helmand province, where the Taliban are most prevalent. The production assists for the Taliban war effort and places producers in a questionable relationship with the government. The money is made mainly not by the farmers, but by the traffickers and transporters. They should be targeted first.

One of the most visible failures of the Kabul government is its inability and/or unwillingness to move on this with regard to government officials and, allegedly, relatives of President Karzai.

For the world, the problem of Afghanistan stretches beyond the borders of that country. The proximate reason for the intervention by the United Nations in Afghanistan was the hijacking of Afghanistan by an international terrorist organization. That threat still persists. For us it is a global concern and the action is thankfully far way; for the people of the region it is a direct threat to their own lives. When we look at the maps, we see the dotted lines that denote nation states and think that somehow problems are contained within them. For people who live there, and not just the Pushtuns on either side of the Durand Line, those dotted lines barely exist.

Their history reinforces this. Until quite recently, educated people in the area stretching Iran to India were expected to know Persian, which was the language of literature and culture, and for hundreds of years, the language of government in India. Babur, the famous founder of the Mughal dynasty, came from the Fergana Valley in what is now Uzbekistan. Driven out, he conquered Kabul and then Delhi. But it was to Kabul that he returned when he died. As ambassador, I was able to get some funds to help restore his tomb and garden, which overlooks the valley of Kabul, which he thought was the most beautiful view on earth.

The Dari of Afghanistan is an older and, to Iranians, perfectly comprehensible version of Persian, as is the Tajik of Tajikistan. The great cities of central Asian culture, Bokhara and Samarkand, now in Uzbekistan, were and are Persian-speaking. Herat, in western Afghanistan, is considered one of the main wellsprings of Persian civilization and Rumi, the Sufi poet who is so popular in this country, was a war refugee from Balkh in Afghanistan who fled westwards until he came to Konya in Turkey. His Persian Mesnevi is one of the great books of mankind. People in this region share their culture, and their concerns. We should share them as well.

Modern demarcations do not tell us the whole story. There are more Tajiks in Afghanistan than in Tajikistan, millions of Uzbeks and Turkmen as well, and an ill-treated minority, the Hazara, whose Oriental looks belie their Mongol origin but whose Shia faith attaches them to Iran. As the Russians pushed outward into Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, masses of people fled before them.. Many of the residents of northern Afghanistan and western China have close ties across the former Soviet border. When the Taliban were close to the complete takeover of Afghanistan in 2001, I was ambassador in Tajikistan to the north, where we were preparing refugee camps for the expected exodus of Northern Alliance soldiers, mostly Tajiks. Iranians, Russians and Indians were sending them assistance. During the Cold War, India was a friend of the Soviet Union, and it is no accident that India has since opened its first military base abroad in Tajikistan. In historical terms, Babur went south to conquer India, but Hindu missionaries, scholars and traders went north as well. Even today, there are traces of Indian culture well north into Tajikistan, and the largest Buddha left in Central Asia after the destruction of the images in Bamiyan is in the museum in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, and again, USG money helped pay for their preservation.

Ten years ago, Tajikistan realized that it was turning into another Afghanistan and ended its civil war, with a compromise that gave governmental representation to the Islamic party and brought a measure of stability to that troubled land. Afterwards, Uzbek fundamentalists who had been

fighting in Tajikistan were made to leave. Many of them went south to join up with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Later they fled to Pakistan where they are active with Al-Qaeda. In the fighting in the Bajaur tribal area of Pakistan in 2007, some 150 Uzbek fighters were killed after they tried to impose their harsh Islamic codes. These are the same people. The connections of the area go back much longer and more deeply than we know, important to bear in mind as we try to deal with our problems in this region.

The specter of Afghanistan has overshadowed all efforts for democratic reform in the countries in the region, which see Afghanistan as an example of what can happen if governments do not severely control their populations. They may not be right, but there is no denying their valid fear of politicized fundamentalists.

Both Russia and China have taken positions supportive of the governments of the region, both individually and through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Since its inception in 2001, this organization has taken an increasingly higher profile in the area, including holding joint military maneuvers. One of its concerns has been with the nature of the U.S. military presence in the area. Washington needs to develop a multidimensional policy for Central Asia that would include military and economic cooperation, security dialogue and an open explication of what the U.S. intends to do. Lack of clarity feeds the suspicions of governments in the area and reinforces Russian claims that the U.S. intends to bring regime change. In addition, Central Asia will be an increasingly important strategic area in the new century. Vast, under populated, with enormous energy resources and other potential, it could easily be called "the New, New World." The U.S. needs to know what it wants in the area. As it is, the war in Afghanistan has brought apprehension of both Islamic fundamentalism and the U.S. presence in the region to the Central Asian states and to China and Russia, both of whom regard Central Asia as their sphere of influence. All of these countries, front line states for Islamic fundamentalism, should be included more in solving the problems of Afghanistan.

Mutual recriminations from Pakistan and India that the other is using Afghanistan to its own advantage are correct on both sides. Pakistan has demonstrated that it does not want a strong government in Afghanistan, Afghanistan has refused to accept the Durand line as the border with Pakistan and India has used its relations with Afghanistan to encourage Pakistani nervousness. Even though both Pakistan and India stand to benefit from the economic advantages that trade and energy pipelines could bring to them, they have persisted in using Afghanistan as a playing field in their rivalries. India has clearly won in Afghan popular opinion. Only 8 percent of Afghans view Pakistan favorably, although there is a bilateral trade worth some \$2 billion per year and still several million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

The attack on Mumbai last year is another example of the regional aspect of the problem. The Indian Foreign Minister acknowledged that the attack was designed to ruin Indo-Afghan relations and divert Pakistani military forces from the west to the east, but said that he was not sure his government would be able to remain quiet if another such attack took place. Both India and Pakistan accuse the other of using Afghanistan as a surrogate arena for their regional rivalry. No stability in Afghanistan can last while they play this game. Pakistani military leaders still consider India the prime threat, and keep their forces and strategies directed towards the east, rather than dealing with the security problems in the tribal areas. Calls have been made for an interna-

tional conference to declare Afghanistan neutral and for its neighbors to foreswear interference there. It would be a step in the right direction.

One must add to this increasingly large equation the question of Kashmir. Bin Ladin came to Afghanistan to set up camps to liberate Kashmir, which has been the main problem in relations between India and Pakistan and no final peace in the region can fail to take it into account. The Taliban took over in Swat, then started to move into other areas as well. If they had succeeded they would have had control of the whole swath of territories from the FATA, the Federally Administered Tribal Area through to the border of Gilgit, next to Kashmir. They came to only a hundred miles from Islamabad. Their message was one of societal reform and distributive justice as much as religious conservatism. It is a very serious situation, and accommodation by Islamabad proved to be a failure. However, Pakistani military intervention and heavy-handed methods afterwards led to a million displaced people and human rights concerns. There is a danger that the cure may prove to be little better than the disease. The long-term stability of Pakistan is a vital concern for all.

Iran has also played a role in Afghanistan, both helpful and harmful. In the Bonn process, it played an important role in bringing the parties together and provided help to the military effort as well. It has lost over three thousand police and soldiers fighting drug trafficking from Afghanistan. After its initial cooperation in 2001, Iran bitterly resented being added to the "axis of evil." While Iran can and should, for its own benefit, be helpful in Afghanistan, it has also made clear that it could cause trouble for allied and specifically U.S. troops in Afghanistan whenever it wished. Strained relations with Iran will also impact on the war in Afghanistan. People of the region know that a Persian sword is one which can cut both ways.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries can also play a more active positive role in Afghanistan. It is commonly alleged that Al-Qaida obtains financing from sources in these countries, but these nations can and have played a role in fighting against Al-Qaida as well.

Afghanistan's internal challenges will not go away because Western donors are tired. Externally, it is threatened by interfering neighbors and a global threat. For Afghanistan to cease to be a platform for international terrorists, the military threat to it must be removed, and steps made to ensure that Afghanistan does not fall into the same situation that led to the Taliban takeover. It will be expensive and long-term, and we must prepare for that.

The challenge is now greater than it was in 2001. It is our priority foreign affairs issue, as it should be. Implementation is still largely on paper however, particularly for the non-military parts of the program. The problem is very difficult and getting worse. Many Americans understandably want to find a way out of a situation in which they didn't want to be in the first place. When I left Tajikistan in July, 2001, I told Washington that we did not have as choice about whether to fight Islamic fundamentalism, but only a possible choice about where we would fight it. That is just as true today. We cannot walk away, and it will be very difficult if we stay.