

TESTIMONY OF

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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The letter of invitation from Senator Lugar is correct to note that there have been significant accomplishments in Afghanistan since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom. It is also correct to raise concerns, as does the letter, about the continuing security and political and economic challenges of reconstruction in Afghanistan. The overview, assessment, and recommendations which follow are based upon my continuous experience with Afghanistan, which began 40 years ago, and the 7 trips I have made to that country since the installation of the first Karzai government in late December 2001.

In the nearly 30 years of war and instability which preceded the swearing-in of this government, nearly every element of Afghanistan's infrastructure, human and material, was significantly destroyed or displaced. Most of those services and resources, upon which Afghans had come to rely in the years leading up to that tragic period, are still not available to Afghans.

And yet, there can be no denying the many positive developments I observed in my most recent trip a month ago.

The population and commercial centers of Afghanistan are being resuscitated. The bazaars of Kabul, Qandahar, Herat, and Mazari Shareef are well-stocked with food, essential goods, and an amazing array of commodities. The people are in the streets in colorful clothing. They bargain for their purchases, shouting above the cacophony and gridlock created by the four-wheel vehicles of donor nations and organizations, the

other means of transport drawn by humans and animals, and the ubiquitous music blaring from loudspeakers in the bazaars.

Most noticeable is the look of hope and anticipation in the eyes of a nation where none existed three years ago. There is a building and rebuilding boom in these centers – a demonstration of confidence that perhaps the long national nightmare of Afghanistan is coming to an end.

The expression of confidence is further fueled by a number of demonstrable developments in several key sectors of Afghan society.

Education is being pursued by Afghans with a vengeance. This follows years of little or no access. More Afghan schoolchildren, over 4 million, are in school than at any other time in Afghan history. Education is the only national effort that reaches into all the provinces and districts of Afghanistan. The Center for Afghanistan Studies is proud to be a partner with USAID, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, and the Afghan Ministry of Education in this effort.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan's **ground transport** infrastructure is improving access of Afghans to their government and regional commercial centers. Afghanistan's "Ring Road" is being rebuilt. The Kabul-Qandahar corridor is reopened, reducing travel time from nearly two days to 5 hours. The Salang Tunnel through the Hindu Kush Mountains is repaired and reopened, again reducing travel time from Kabul to the north from several days to 5 or 6 hours. Donors have been identified for each of the remaining sectors.

Road reconstruction also plays a role in the improvement of Afghanistan's **economy** and its ability to play an integral role in the **trade** between South and Central Asian nations. When asked why Afghanistan is important to regional and US interests, I like to recite the real estate mantra: "location, location, location!"

Astride the arteries of the old Silk and Spice Roads, Afghanistan is already profiting as a transit sector for commercial traffic between its neighbors in South and Central Asia. Should a natural gas pipeline be built from Turkmenistan to Pakistan, it will likely travel a route above the Heart-Qandahar sector of the Ring Road. In essence, Afghanistan has begun the process of rejoining the world economy.

The economy of Afghanistan, according to a recent statement by US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, grew by 29% in 2003. The traditional exports of Afghanistan, fruits, nuts, textiles and carpets, jewelry and precious stones, are once again being shipped abroad. In 2003, America bought over 14,000 square meters of hand woven carpets, 13 tons of dried and fresh fruit, and almost 600 tons of licorice root(!).

Unlike Iraqis and many others in the Muslim world, Afghans have previous history with **constitutional, democratic process**. During the decade under the Constitution of 1964, Afghans elected national officials and governments and turned them out with votes of no confidence. Afghans retain this “democratic experiment,” as it is often called, in their collective memory. Many believe that a democratic process is their legacy and their right.

After years of being a stateless nation, a system of governance is being rebuilt. In a series of efforts beginning with the Bonn process in December 2001, Afghans have taken several steps towards reconstituting a national government. The constitution approved in January of this year is regarded by many observers as among the most progressive and enlightened in the Muslim world. It mandates a strong central government and presidency, with a two-house national assembly, and an independent judiciary. National presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for this September.

These positive developments have been obtained despite what most analysts characterized as a slow, distracted, and sometimes inept start on the part of US and Coalition forces. The donor conference approach has proven to be disjointed, inconsistent, and largely unmanageable. Pledges are late in coming; some do not come at all. US leadership in the process has often been solicitous rather than forthright. In the face of US involvement in Iraq, Afghans have questioned whether the US is committed over the long-haul to reconstruction of their country.

A number of recent developments have helped to assuage these concerns of Afghans. The first is the arrival of Zalmay Khalilzad as US Ambassador. He is the best person for this job at this critical juncture. He knows most of the Afghans in national and regional leadership roles. He is considered credible and tough by those who share US and Afghan aspirations for a

stable Afghanistan. Needless to say, these favorable opinions are not shared by terrorists, war lords, and drug lords.

Khalilzad can speak to leaders and common citizens effectively; he is fluent in Dari and Pashto. He has good connections to the White House and Congress. His relations with Hamid Karzai and other key Afghan leaders are constructive.

Another positive development centers around the growing number and effectiveness of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Lieutenant General David Barno's vision for the PRT process is solid, anchored in community-based reconstruction. Members of the Center for Afghanistan Studies have observed particularly successful PRT efforts led by New Zealand forces in Bamiyan and British forces in Mazari Shareef.

The new, imposing American Embassy and adjoining residential and office buildings are nearing completion. They have gone up in a remarkably short time. Afghans note that the investment required to construct these buildings suggest the Americans are, indeed, in for the long haul. This builds confidence.

Challenges

The continuing security, political, and economic challenges to the reconstruction of Afghanistan remain formidable. The most critical is **security**. It negatively affects all other factors. The lack of security is perhaps the only factor that might ensure a return of a stateless society to Afghanistan.

The three primary security threats are terrorists, drug lords, and war lords. These are holdovers, protagonists, and allies from the period of protracted civil war in Afghanistan. Though routed out of their strongholds and camps after 9/11, replenished and reorganized elements of Al Qaida and the Taliban remain at large and constitute a threat, both real and symbolic, to the overall reconstruction effort. They gain financial support from drug interests.

These elements threaten Afghan teachers, students, election workers and other government workers, even shopowners and farmers. They threaten them with death or other bodily harm if they teach, go to school, register to

vote or assist the election process, or appear to side with the government. International assistance workers and military forces are also threatened; some have been killed. The continuing capacity of these terrorists to intimidate slows and even terminates reconstruction efforts.

Recommendations:

- 1) Increase the military capacity to provide security in the rural areas of Afghanistan through expanding the PRT program.
- 2) Go after Usama bin Ladin, Aiman Zawahiri, Mullah Muhammad Umar, and Gulbudeen Hikmatyar with “deck-of-cards” intensity. They remain the real and symbolic leaders of the terrorist networks and organizations whose activities are the cause of the periodic alerts in the US and around the world, not those adversaries in Iraq. The fact that they remain at-large undermines the confidence in US policy among Afghans, reduces the credibility of the Afghan government and international reconstruction efforts, and sends the wrong message to Afghan and Pakistani tribes in their respective border areas.
- 3) The pace and financial support for the creation of adequate Afghan security forces should be increased.
- 4) The US government should intensify pressure on Afghanistan’s neighbors and Persian Gulf nations not to aid and support forces connected to the security threats to Afghanistan.
- 5) Afghan Vice President Hidayatullah Aminarsalah has suggested that, instead of going at the terrorists, war lords, and drug lords in sequential fashion, a concerted effort be made. His argument is that a sequential approach permits those sectors not targeted to aid those that are. His idea of following a more concerted approach against these threats has merit.

Though an unprecedented number of Afghan school children are now in school, a number of challenges confront the **education** sector.

- 1) More teachers are needed. This should be a priority of the Afghan government and donors.
- 2) More in-service teacher training is necessary to bring some standard to education throughout the country. Many current teachers do not possess any manner of formal training.

- 3) The delivery of textbooks and teachers kits is flawed. Though millions of textbooks have been produced, many classrooms remain without books.
- 4) Vocational education is essential for the unemployed and underemployed. The Afghan government has set a target to demilitarize 60,000 Afghan men from militia forces in the near term. What will they do for employment? They are not likely to go to regular primary or secondary schools. Vocational education in the basic construction and office management skills would attract large numbers. The need is severe. Currently, there are thousands of foreign workers in Afghanistan due to the lack of trained Afghans. For many, vocational literacy would also be essential.
- 5) The pace of the physical reconstruction of schools is slow; many schools are still without water and sanitation.
- 6) Security threats continue to impede the attendance of girls in schools.
- 7) Higher Education, an area in which the US was the leading donor prior to the Soviet invasion, remains neglected. Few laboratory resources remain at Kabul University. This sector within education is the stepchild, with priority accorded primary and secondary education by the Afghan government and donor nations.

Most Afghans do not have access to reliable **health care**. This is particularly critical for mothers and children. Afghan infant and maternal mortality rates are the highest and second highest in the world, respectively.

Most of Afghanistan's trained medical personnel left during the war years. The only credible college of medicine was located at Kabul University. Its facilities are woeful; the nearby teaching hospital was destroyed during the wars. Complicating these factors, the College of Medicine is embroiled in an academic struggle on how it will be reconstituted and currently is not able to provide adequate education and training.

Rural reconstruction lags far behind that of the reconstruction moving forward in population centers. This greatly enhances the power of war lords and handicaps the reach and influence of the central government. The crowding of Afghans into population centers, coupled with the inflationary presence of international organizations, leaves many Afghans

without any real option; they cannot stay in the neglected rural areas and cannot afford to relocate in the centers where services are available. The men in particular are vulnerable to those who would employ them away from the process of reconstruction into the militias of war lords and the cultivation of poppies.

Window of Opportunity

On balance, in spite of a slow and inconsistent start, the window of opportunity for all involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan remains open. These factors constitute significant assets.

- 1) A credible political process has been launched without the uncertainties that plague Iraq. The Afghan government is gaining capacity. It is true that its reach is often limited to Kabul and, tenuously, to other population centers. At the same time, it must be noted that almost all members of the government had little or no experience in the governance process before their current assignments. They literally had to learn on the job. There are legitimate complaints stimulated by evidence and rumors of corruption and incompetence. Yet, some in this new cadre of Afghan civil servants are learning well and have helped to restore a measure of credibility in the restoration of an Afghan state.

The leadership of this government has been identified and confirmed by a national assembly. President Hamid Karzai, though not without detractors, and even implacable enemies among Afghans, is largely well-known and well-regarded. He understands and is a believer in human rights. He pursues consensus, perhaps to a fault; he learned this skill from his late father, a highly regarded tribal khan. His likely reelection in September should enhance stability and provide continuity to a delicate process.

- 2) Afghans are very clear about the way they feel about Americans; they want them in Afghanistan. They want American leadership and assistance in the reconstruction process. There are no armed insurrections in the towns and villages, no demonstrations.

Afghans have never regarded Americans as their enemies. To the contrary, they appreciated our development assistance in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. They appreciated American support in their war against the Soviet Union and in the war, though belated, against terrorists. They now see us as their primary allies in the reconstruction of their country.

I have attached copy of my favorite Dari poem “Rose and Clay” which Afghans often use in describing to me how they feel about Americans.

Conclusion

The whole world, especially the Muslim world, is watching. If we do **not** try to “do” Afghanistan on the cheap and in piecemeal fashion, we can work with the Afghans in this cooperative venture. We will acquit ourselves admirably in our own eyes, in the eyes of Afghans, and in the eyes of others around the world.

If we muddle through, we will probably still prevent Afghanistan from returning to its status as a haven for terrorist camps. It will cost us more, take a longer period, and not really gain the credit we would deserve by doing it right. We might also lose an already unstable Pakistan in the process.

Much effort has been expended. We have learned much in the process. Assets are available and in place. We **can** do this right. The window is open; the choice is ours.

Omaha World-Herald

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Afghan optimism

It's widely known that Afghanistan has experienced upheaval during decades of internal fighting and the current transition away from Taliban rule. Statistics

from a new report, though, show that the stresses on that country have been particularly extreme.

One in three people now living in Afghanistan has been a refugee at one time or another, according to a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, D.C.

The report also notes:

■ Since U.S. forces toppled the fundamentalist Taliban regime in late 2001, the country, with an estimated population of at least 22 million, has had to absorb an influx of 2.4 million people.

■ Over the past two years, the population of the country's capital, Kabul, has doubled to 3 million people. With the return of so many Afghans, the report says, the country's urban areas are nearing the "saturation point."

■ Afghanistan's infant mortality rate is the highest in Asia and one of the highest in the world. One-quarter of Afghan children die before the age of 5.

■ Within the next two years, Afghanistan officials aim to boost school enrollment by 2 million children.

Given the magnitude of these and other problems, the United States and other nations might be tempted, however regretfully, to give up on Afghanistan as a hopeless cause.

And yet the truth is that a strong case can be made for optimism — guarded, but optimism nonetheless.

Afghans take particular pride, for example, that their leaders were able to move beyond their factional differences and agree on a national constitution last year. That was one of the points underscored to Tom Gouttierre, director of the Center

Despite its problems, the country has major new opportunities for progress.

for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, during a recent visit to Kabul. "It's a major accomplishment to get these disparate linguistic and ethnic

groups together," Gouttierre tells us.

Initiatives taken by the UNO center — in textbook creation, teacher training and support for the Fulbright Scholarship program in Afghanistan — illustrate some of the important ways in which that country has moved forward. In addition, a third group of UNO-sponsored Afghan teachers is now visiting Nebraska communities. As a result, Gouttierre says, the Cornhusker State on a per-capita basis likely has some of the most direct involvement with Afghanistan of any U.S. state.

Gouttierre and his colleagues are now investigating whether UNO can help Afghanistan in a new way, by providing vocational education programs. Such efforts help the country in two major ways: by providing skilled carpenters, electricians and masons whom Afghanistan sorely needs, and by creating jobs that can entice young men to leave militias. Part of the initiative, Gouttierre says, would teach basic computer skills to women.

As for the think tank report, it points to a range of additional needs. They include boosting the number of international troops (a third of the country remains too dangerous for aid workers to enter) as well as developing small-scale medical teams to meet the enormous health care needs in rural Afghanistan.

A hopeless cause? No. Afghanistan now has tremendous opportunities for advancement. Progress is possible as long as steadfastness is shown by the Afghan people and the international community — including the many Nebraskans who have done so much to help that country.

Omaha World-Herald

FRIDAY, MAY 7, 2004

Afghans move forward

The news out of Afghanistan often focuses on the negative. Opium-growing, ethnic frictions, violence by warlords and insurgents — such topics tend to be the staples of press coverage of that country.

If one pauses and takes stock of the country's economic situation, however, Afghanistan, despite the persistence of poverty, is making notable strides in terms of infrastructure and economic vitality.

Afghanistan, for example, is working to lay a new economic foundation for itself. A top priority is road-building. One-third of Afghans live within 31 miles of the newly completed highway linking Kabul and Kandahar.

The United States has heartened Afghan officials by reaffirming its commitment to fund the construction of more than 800 miles of provincial roads.

Given the magnitude of construction work in Afghanistan, it is hardly a surprise that the country's imports of cement from neighboring Pakistan tripled in 2003 compared to a year before.

Particularly promising is Afghanistan's completion of agreements

Economic improvements provide hope as memories of Taliban fade.

with regional neighbors India and Uzbekistan for duty-free trade in goods and with Iran for 90 percent duty-free exchange. Negotiations are proceeding on a similar measure with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha is exploring how to help Afghans in vocational education. That's an area of need highlighted in a new report on the Afghan economy from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a public policy group in Washington, D.C.

Ideally, Afghanistan would do well to restore natural gas production. At the country's peak of production in the 1980s, exports of natural gas produced annual revenues of \$300 million. Lack of security currently prevents restoration of that industry, but its revival ought to remain a long-term dream — not least if the international community delivers on plans to bolster security and increase economic aid.

After the turmoil of the past quarter-century, Afghans deserve a chance to dream big. The measured economic progress thus far offers hope for a better future.

From the *Gulistan* of Shaykh Muslihudeen Sadi

گل و گل

Rose and Clay

رسید از دست مجبونی بدستم .
که از بوی دلاویز تو مستم .
ولیکن مدتی با گل نشستم .
و گرنه - من همان خاکم که هستم .

گل خوشبوی در حمام روزی
بد و گفتم که : مشکى یا عبیری ؟
بگفتا : من گل ناچیز بودم
کمال جنبین در من اثر کرد

*One day at bath a piece of perfumed clay was passed to me
from the hand of a friend.*

*I asked the clay – Are you musk or ambergris?
because your delightful scent intoxicates me.*

*It answered – I am but a worthless piece of clay that has
sat for a period with a rose.*

*The perfection of that companion left its traces on me
who remains that same piece of earth that I was.*

Translated by
Thomas E. Gouttierre

From the Gulistan of Shaykh Muslihudeen Sadi

بني آدم

Banee Aadam

The Children of Adam

بني آدم اعضاي يك ديگر اند
که در آفرينش زيک جوهر اند
چو عضوي بدمد آورد روزگار
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار

Banee aadam azaayi yak deegarand
Ki dar aafareenish zi yak jowharand
Chu uzway ba dard aawarad rozgaar
Digar uzwaa raa namaanad qaraar

*The children of Adam are limbs of one another,
Created from one essence, each from the other.
When life's calamities to one cause pain,
The other limbs cannot in rest remain.*