

Building Peace and Civil Society in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States have led to increased international interest in Afghanistan. While some of the circumstances described in this report have changed since the conference of May 2001, the Asia Society and the Carnegie Council believe the report contains information that is relevant to the current situation and will be of interest to the public.

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We wish to thank Barnett Rubin, who acted as an adviser to the symposium and who delivered the opening presentation. His remarks form the basis of this introductory section.

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Remarks quoted throughout this report are from various symposium participants.

Executive Summary

This report draws on a two-day symposium, “Building Peace and Civil Society in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities,” held in New York on May 17 and in Washington, D.C., on May 18, 2001. The symposium, cosponsored by the Asia Society and the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, was attended by activists, NGO practitioners, and UN and U.S. policymakers working to bring about sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Participants discussed and explored the immense social costs of the conflict—exacerbated by the policies of the ruling Taliban regime—and the range of the local, regional, and international communities’ responses. Finally, the symposium considered U.S. and international policy options on Afghanistan and focused on the mechanisms to support reconstruction efforts there.

The political, social, and economic institutions in Afghanistan have disintegrated as a result of the ceaseless civil war that has torn apart the country for some twenty-three years, with no end in sight. The war has resulted in an estimated two million deaths, six million people displaced, and three million disabled. The current drought has led to severe food scarcity threatening the lives of over three million more Afghans. To make matters worse, the Taliban continue to create obstacles for the delivery of humanitarian assistance by foreign aid groups by curbing their activities or expelling them from the country for alleged illegal activities. However, participants of the symposium concurred that there are openings for development that go beyond emergency humanitarian assistance and that investment in the long-term development of Afghanistan is not only desirable, but also feasible.

The following points summarize the major issues discussed during the course of the symposium.

- The current international focus on single issues in Afghanistan, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and economic interest in oil and gas, does nothing to change the dynamics of violent conflict.
- International and regional leaderships must coordinate to support efforts to resolve the civil conflict as well as develop strategies for reconstruction, including emergency aid and long-term development assistance.
- The Afghan diaspora represents an untapped supply of young educated professionals who can be engaged in providing skills and resources toward rebuilding communities.
- There is a growing awareness in the Afghan population of the need to focus aid in the areas of education, health, crop substitution, environment, de-mining, income generation, and local government.
- Local NGOs and community organizations want to play a bigger role in developing and implementing community-level development projects.
- Creating economic activities that are an alternative to waging war is the biggest priority for local organizations.

Local Leadership Structures in Afghanistan: Shuras and Jirga

The word *shura* comes from Qura'nic/Arabic origins and means "deliberation." The term was popularized by mujahideen parties during the Soviet occupation in order to coordinate their military operations inside Afghanistan, and since then has been commonly known all over the country. In some areas, shuras were locally established, while in other places aid organizations were instrumental in their establishment to ensure local participation in aid programs. The shura is a representative body that attempts to resolve internal and external conflicts and take care of communal chores. In addition, in some areas other structures such as jirga have traditionally been involved in arbitration and dispute-resolution efforts with established rules and norms among Pashtun tribes.

Mohammed Ehsan Zia, *Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: International Rhetoric, Local Reality: The Strengthening of Local Capacities for Peace*, "Dissertation, University of York, Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit, 2000.

Introduction: Rethinking Afghanistan

International policy toward supporting a sustainable peace in Afghanistan should be developed with the objective of creating a coherent strategy for reconstructing society, building a secure state, and ensuring a sound livelihood for the Afghan population. The current focus by the United States and other donor governments on single issues such as halting drug trafficking, countering terrorism, and providing piecemeal humanitarian assistance will do nothing in the longer term to change the dynamics that have perpetuated this conflict. Protracted civil conflicts such as in Afghanistan are given low priority by the major international development organizations, and countries involved in conflict prevention and developmental aid have ignored Afghanistan for too long. The widespread human rights abuse and the economic, environmental, and regional security implications of the conflict are easily on a par with those of other conflicts that have received greater international attention. Yet the immense costs paid by the Afghan population through the loss of over two million lives, the continued lack of food security, the displacement of approximately six million people and the disabling of three million more, in addition to the severe reduction in social services, continue without any recourse.

Attempts at building peace and rebuilding society in Afghanistan require that the international community rethink the terms in which the conflict is presently understood. This necessitates a shift in perspective to include those who do not have a particular stake in the outcome—the noncombatants—as well as a more nuanced understanding of the background to the conflict that will allow real responses to be found. A change in view is particularly crucial concerning the role that other regional and international powers have played and continue to play in perpetuating the present situation. Attempts by outsiders to intervene in the conflict on a purely political basis have excluded the citizens in whose interest it is to rebuild Afghanistan. Such interference has denied Afghans the opportunity to live in a country at peace.

The oversimplified way in which the conflict is presented in the international media does little to contribute toward a balanced view of the current crisis; this inadequacy is enhanced by the current regime's uncooperative attitude toward the foreign media and international aid organizations. Islamophobia and sensationalism pervade reportage on affairs in Afghanistan. The mythology surrounding the Taliban, the ruling group that dominates the majority of the country, has given rise to the view that the Taliban and Islamic fundamentalism—and even terrorism—are synonymous. Too often a single, inadequate perspective frames the discussion of events in Afghanistan, be it that of terrorism, fundamentalism, or gender relations, including violence and discrimination against women.

The narrow view of Afghanistan resulting from minimal and episodic international media coverage is mirrored in the lack of international political attention given to the country. There is little knowledge of local realities facing the Afghan population; nor is there much international commitment to improve the lives of ordinary people living in the midst of a fractured society. The UN mission has so far been unsuccessful in bringing about an intra-Afghan dialogue. A recent attempt at a solution, the Loya Jirga peace plan (named after the traditional tribal leadership structure in Afghanistan) proposed in 1999 by the ex-king of Afghanistan, Mohammad Zahir Shah, was criticized by symposium participants for lacking clear political scenarios for the future. It remains unclear how the international community can be engaged more positively in bringing the war to an end.

The problem at the heart of the crisis in Afghanistan lies in the collapse of institutions and the resulting loss of personal security and the means of livelihood for the Afghan population. The international community's traditional strategy of trying to bring an end to the conflict by backing a proposed winner does not take into account precisely those people who, unlike the warring factions, have a stake in the rebuilding of institutions and the creation of a state responsive to their needs—a state with which they can interact as citizens. Rather than encourage a political-military solution that would be directed toward a small military elite, international policy should immediately address the principal problem of how to provide long-term aid that helps to engage whole communities in order to arrive at sustainable peace. Pilot projects, such as those of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Norwegian Church Aid, can provide models for working toward peace at the community level. The Afghan diaspora can play a role in providing some of the skills, such as teaching, that are at present sorely lacking in the country.

"I believe not enough thinking has been done to solve the crisis."

Part One: Political Interests in Afghanistan

National Leadership

The Taliban came into power after taking the capital, Kabul, by force in 1996 (see sidebar). It is estimated that the Taliban controls at least two-thirds of the country, while the northernmost region is still in the hands of the former Afghan defense minister and ethnic Tajik commander of the Northern Alliance, Ahmed Shah Massoud. It should be understood that the Taliban is not simply an overgrown terrorist outfit but rather a movement that grew out of the social disorder that Afghanistan has experienced over the past twenty-three years. The Taliban movement was the response of the marginalized, impoverished, and radicalized people in the Afghan refugee camps. At

“What has the international community done to allow the Afghans to make the right choice?”

present, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan provides an elementary form of stability after years of civil conflict that rapidly dissolved what remained of the country’s political and social institutions. However, the Taliban have done little to ensure the welfare of citizens. The leaders lack direct accountability toward their people; the citizens have no

national institutions to represent them; the Taliban, in turn, do not rely on the populace for political support or economic sustenance.

While the term “conflict” in Afghanistan implies the disruption of an already existing social order, it is apparent that a new social order has emerged from the ongoing struggle for power, one based on violence and not meant to ensure the livelihood of the Afghan population. At the center of the conflict is an ongoing struggle to define “Afghanistan.” The political players in the Afghanistan conflict have long been struggling over which religious, ethnic, or other ascriptive identities are to shape the concept of an Afghan nation. While all the different factions with claims to power in Afghanistan adhere to the notion of a united Afghanistan, their ideas of what form this should take and how power should be shared are very different. The Taliban have failed to answer basic state-building questions: for example, whether Afghanistan will be a broad-based, multiethnically defined state or a religiously defined state shared with religious minorities. In addition to deciding ethnic and religious make-up, if the Taliban want to re-create themselves as a legitimate government, they will need to address the strategies and methods to immediately provide for the welfare and livelihood of Afghanistan’s citizens.

However, the question remains as to whether the Taliban’s goal is to reconstruct Afghanistan or to serve as leaders of a transnational Islamic movement at the expense of ordinary citizens of Afghanistan. Mullah Omar, the head of the Taliban, has been quoted as stating that half of Afghanistan has already been destroyed and that he was willing to destroy the other half in order to protect Osama Bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the bombing of two American embassies in Africa. The recent affair of the Bamiyan Buddhas was further instructive in this regard. (See sidebar on page 6.) According to symposium participants, while few Afghans supported the bombing of these ancient relics, the Taliban seemed unmoved by any opposition to their actions. The Taliban leadership stated that the Buddhas were destroyed as a response to the continued lack of international interest in starving Afghan children. Yet the human catastrophe in Afghanistan does not deter the Taliban leaders from carrying on the fighting—the source of the greatest misery for the people. Plans for a summer campaign against the Northern Alliance, the main anti-Taliban forces led by Massoud, are still going ahead. Drought is said to be affecting an estimated thirteen million Afghans at present, and three million Afghans face starvation; yet the Taliban’s primary interaction with its citizens continues to be its recruiting for the full-scale fighting expected to return to the north of Kabul and in North and West Afghanistan. These actions seem to indicate that the Taliban regime does not consider the development of the country to be its foremost priority.

The Taliban

Since 1994, when the Taliban (literal translation, “students of Muslim religious studies”) was made up of about 50 southern mullahs led by the Mullah Omar, the nature of the Taliban has been transformed. Hundreds of foreign fighters, especially other ethnic Pashtuns from neighboring Pakistan, have joined the Taliban ranks. Most of these young men received religious instruction and military training in rural-based madrasas or religious schools in the Pashtun-populated areas within Pakistan. By the end of 1998, the Taliban succeeded in capturing all the major cities in the country, including the capital, Kabul. The Taliban have implemented an Islamic government led by Mullah Omar. However, since 1998 the central government has met secretly and carries out decrees without open discussion.

The Taliban also face the charge that they shelter terrorists and allow the functioning of their training facilities; these alleged camps were the targets of the U. S. cruise missile attack in 1998. Until very recently, the Taliban and their government were officially recognized only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Afghanistan’s United Nations seat is held not by the Taliban but by members of the ousted Rabbani government.

The Taliban and Restrictions on Women

In 1996 when the Taliban captured the capital, Kabul, edicts were issued forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or even leave their homes without a male relative. If a woman does leave home, she must be covered from head to toe in a burqa, with only a mesh opening to see and breathe through. Women are also not allowed to wear shoes that make noise. Also, women must not be seen through windows, and houses and buildings must have their windows painted over if females are present.

While international pressure has led to some lifting of these harsh decrees, Taliban enforcement and implementation of their policies continues. In the fall of 2000, when the Taliban were trying to improve their image in the eyes of the world, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Taliban government, Abdur Rahman Zahid, was quoted as saying that Taliban officials now let women work in health services, in the Interior Ministry, at airports, and for certain UN agencies like the World Food Program. However, more recently, in June 2001, CNN reported

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Regional and Transnational Interests

The conflict in Afghanistan is not simply an “Afghan” problem but a regional and even transnational one. What we now call Afghanistan was once a buffer zone between the British and later the Russian empires, and regional realignment and the struggle for power continue to be played out in the country. Given Afghanistan’s crucial position in the region, regional powers must be encouraged to help bring an end to the conflict and invest in the reconstruction of the country. The key player is Pakistan, where Taliban networks run the deepest.

Given its transnational roots, the conflict now contained within Afghanistan will probably spill over its borders. Indeed, in some ways it already has. Ethnic Pashtuns, many of whom are from the southern part of Afghanistan, make up the majority of the Taliban and have strong ties with the Pashtuns across the border in Pakistan’s government and military. Pashtun smuggling networks, particularly in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, have spread the conflict even farther afield. The Sunni/Shia sectarian conflict within Afghanistan has led to Iran’s policy of solidarity with the Shias across borders. In addition, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, new nation-states such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which share ethnic ties with groups within Afghanistan, have emerged on Afghanistan’s borders. Russia, which accuses the Taliban of supporting rebels in Chechnya and itself supports the opposition alliance in Afghanistan, will also have to play a part in bringing an end to the conflict.

Economic interests also play a role in the new reconfiguration of the region. Control over oil and natural gas resources, which will eventually determine which power becomes predominant in the region, is in the strategic interests of Iran, Pakistan, and Russia. All three of these dominant neighbors are in competition for the control of the pipelines currently under construction from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Also essential to the peace-building process will be the Central Asian republics and the Six-plus-Two group, composed of Afghanistan’s six neighbors—Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China—plus Russia and the United States, who have pledged to work toward pressing the various Afghan factions toward a negotiated settlement. Despite their public pledges, it is commonly known that some of these countries still provide military assistance to different factions in Afghanistan. Clearly, if there is to be an international effort to end the conflict in Afghanistan, it must take into account these economic and political interests and must seek to involve all the countries in the region to promote peace.

International Interests

While the role of Afghanistan as a former stage for conflict during the Cold War has changed over time, perceptions of and engagement with the conflict have not similarly evolved. Afghanistan may not appear to be central to international policy today, but when one takes into account the current instability in Pakistan, the Kashmir crisis, the growing Islamic resurgence in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and the significant export of opium from Afghanistan, it immediately becomes clear that the regional implications of the ongoing Afghan conflict have been underestimated. International policy with the objective of a peaceful Afghanistan must include a strategy for enhanced regional stability.

The Taliban regime—and, by association, Afghanistan—is considered an international pariah, and the Taliban leadership, in turn, distrusts the international community. The Taliban perceive such international policies as the UN sanctions as unfair and inconsistent. [See sidebar on page 7.] Taliban spokesmen focus on the fact that a seat at the UN has been denied to the Taliban, while one was immediately granted to Laurent Kabila after a similar military campaign led to his rise to power in the Congo. The Taliban also feel they have not received enough recognition for measures they have undertaken to address some of the major concerns of the international community. Some of these actions include the banning of the cultivation of opium poppies, which the UN Drug Control Program acknowledges has begun to take effect.

“Lack of education is actually the main problem in my view. . . . Can we solve the deep problems in the country with only sixth-grade education?”

The recent bombing of the Bamiyan Buddhas has in some ways marked an abrupt reversal of strategy. The bombing was said to have support from Taliban leaders, mullahs previously seen as moderates within the regime's ranks. It would seem that the Taliban have hardened in reaction to their increasing isolation and ostracization by Western governments, particularly as a result of the U.S. government's stance concerning Osama bin Laden. Since the UN Security Council sanctions on the Taliban, bin Laden has made two television appearances, a clear sign of defiance by the Taliban.

In short, sanctions and the censure of Western governments have not yet succeeded in making the Taliban more cooperative; they in fact seem to have pushed moderate circles within the Taliban movement toward taking a more extreme stance. Thus, the conflict continues, leaving the Afghan population in the midst of civil and political strife and without recourse either within or outside the country.

Part Two: Afghan Communities in Conflict

Social Costs of the Conflict

The conflict in Afghanistan remains unresolved, and the associated costs of the war on the lives of ordinary people continue to escalate. The current leadership gives the recruitment of fighters priority over improving the living situation of the people, and there is little hope that the situation will improve. As living conditions continue to worsen, more men must fight because it is their only economic opportunity. Women are disengaged economically and politically. Reports of forced marriages have become commonplace, as new soldiers, even those from abroad, want to have homes and wives in Afghanistan. For the increasing number of women who have been forced into becoming the heads of households because of the death or incapacitation of the men of their families, begging is one of the few means of survival. One local NGO working in the country reported that women were selling blood outside hospitals to earn money for food.

Along with the deaths of more than two million Afghans, another devastating effect of the conflict has been the displacement of people, both abroad and within the borders of Afghanistan.

“[Donors] say, ‘Women aren’t allowed to work, so why spend money on education?’”

The United Nations has declared Afghanistan to be the major site of human displacement in the world today. According to the UNHCR, the crisis has engendered the world's largest-ever refugee load, the count at times running as high as 6.2 million persons. The situation in the refugee camps is said to be critical, particularly in the case of new arrivals who lack shelter, food, water, and health

care. According to local NGOs, the refugee camps in Peshawar, Pakistan—Jalozai and Nasir Bagh—are the worst: disease is widespread and few have access to or can afford medicine.

Natural disasters, including earthquakes in February 1998 and May 1998 and a severe drought beginning in the summer of 2000, have exacerbated the situation within the country. Although international and local development programs are providing some services and conditions vary within the country, basic infrastructure has been destroyed and services are generally lacking. UN indices for health care and education put Afghanistan almost last in the world.

Ongoing deficiencies in health care, education, and social services throughout the country continue to disrupt the lives of ordinary Afghans. The economic base of the nation has been destroyed and in many cases criminalized as foreign traders attempt to circumvent sanctions and restrictions through smuggling and warlords exact heavy duties for passage through the country. The economy, previously reliant on Soviet aid and the export of natural gas and agricultural products, has shifted to the export of opium poppies (although this is slowly decreasing) and the construction of the natural gas pipeline. There is also the problem of continued sanctions against Afghanistan, which have restricted some supplies and led to a perception among Afghans that they are isolated and demonized by the outside world.

An estimated 90 percent of the educated population have left the country. The resulting lack of human capital has had a profound impact on the local skills available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. One NGO participant, for instance, reported women's literacy at 15 percent in urban areas and 5 percent in rural areas. The concern, therefore, is not simply to provide

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that a decree had been issued preventing female aid workers from driving.

A recent Physicians for Human Rights report states that of a sample population of over 1,000 Afghan men and women interviewed, 90 percent strongly support the rights of women that are currently restricted by the Taliban. Over 80 percent believe that women's movements should not be restricted and that Islamic teachings do not limit women's human rights. Respondents were said to strongly endorse “equal access for women to education and work opportunities; freedom of expression, legal protection for the rights of women, participation of women in government; and to believe that women's human rights should be included in peace talks.”

See Barbara Crossette, “Taliban Open a Campaign to Gain Status at the UN,” New York Times, September 21, 2000.

CNN, “Taliban Bars Women Aid Drivers,” June 1, 2001.

Physicians for Human Rights Report available online at: www.phrusa.org/research/health_effects/exec.html

The Bamiyan Buddhas Affair

On February 26, 2001, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban leader, ordered the destruction of all statues in the country, including ancient pre-Islamic figures, in spite of an earlier edict by Omar that Buddhas were to be protected and were part of the national heritage. A Taliban envoy during a 2001 visit to the United States stated that the destruction of the Buddhas had resulted primarily from the offer of mostly European envoys of a substantial sum of money to protect the Buddhas at a time when little attention (much less financial aid) was being given to the humanitarian crisis there.

For more information see the Special Report entitled "Taliban: What Prompted Bamiyan?" on www.asiasource.org

emergency relief, but also to start the process of long-term development, particularly in the fields of education and health. Without education for the populace, it is doubtful that a secure future can be established. Two generations of young Afghans have not experienced learning and the ability to function in a stable country. Most participants in the symposium agreed that without an educated populace, a secure future for Afghanistan remains in doubt.

The collapse of family structures and the general social fabric of the country during the war is another devastating social impact. The society has become increasingly militarized. Employment opportunities must be developed alongside education opportunities in order to build a civil society out of what is essentially a war economy. Attitudes and values in Afghanistan have become more radical, but the prevailing mores with regard to gender relations, marriage, homosexuality, and adultery have also emerged from the society itself, transformed as a result of the war, and not only because of Taliban policy as international consensus would hold. Participants stated that educating Afghan civilians would provide incentives for those who have a stake in rebuilding society rather than empower the regime as claimed by some international analysts.

Local Responses to the Conflict

There is a growing awareness among Afghans of the need to rebuild the infrastructure of the country. In some ways this is actually a positive change from the prewar situation. Educational projects, for example, were met with resistance in many parts of prewar Afghanistan, whereas now there is a demand for schools among local people. An NGO working on education projects in the Nuristan region reported persistent local demands for more schools. Likewise, a recent visitor to southern Afghanistan was met with universal expression from Afghans of the need to develop infrastructure and begin development projects in the country.

There are a number of international and local nongovernmental organizations working in the country, some of which were represented at the symposium. A representative of the United Nations Development Programme described the Afghanistan PEACE (Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment) Initiative, begun in 1997, which developed a model for establishing community-based organizations. Based on a UNDP Report on the initiative, the project attempts to demonstrate that sustainable grassroots rehabilitation programs can make a substantial contribution to creating, at least at the community level, an environment of peace. (A copy of the report on the project is available on the UNDP Afghanistan Web site at www.pcpafg.org/Organizations/undp/.)

Many of the represented organizations worked on issues of women's health and education, including the establishment of a women's hospital, a high school for girls, and a basic literacy program. Others focused on income-generating activities, limited to carpet weaving, lacework, and handicrafts because of the restrictions on women's activities imposed by the Taliban. One NGO working on establishing links between Afghans in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora reported a keen interest on the part of Afghan professionals in the United States in being engaged in the reconstruction of society in their homeland.

CARE, a U.S.-based NGO with programs in sixty countries, started work in Afghanistan in the 1960s. Operations now are limited to the southeastern part of the country, which is controlled by the Taliban. CARE's projects include running a food program for widows, building water systems, and getting food and medical supplies to remote areas. Norwegian Church Aid is another international NGO working principally on community-based peacebuilding.

In some parts of the country traditional mechanisms of local government do exist (see sidebar on page 2), such as the elected shura councils in South and East Afghanistan, which provide local people with a means of representation and social and political leverage. Such local structures also provide development programs with an avenue for working with existing communities and addressing their needs more effectively. Projects such as the UNDP PEACE initiative have had some success in working with shuras in selected areas, but the current number of shuras in Afghanistan remains small. Furthermore, the degree to which these shuras are able to act independently of the authorities and the degree to which they are truly representative and allow broad-based participation remain unclear.

"It's not always an emergency situation—we don't just need bags of wheat."

One of the major themes that emerged from discussion was the need to integrate local NGOs more fully into international donor and development programs. International NGOs were criticized for their “top-down” approach that often neglects to engage local populations and therefore fails to address the needs of these communities. Engaging local participation was deemed to be a particular concern in Afghanistan, where the collapse of social and political institutions and the current regime’s restrictions on the activities of women mean that information concerning the needs of targeted communities is often very difficult to obtain. Engaging local populations and creating a sense of local ownership for development projects would help

“If there is no aid supplied in the meantime, we are responsible for what transpires between now and then.”

avoid such problems as reinforcing existing social inequities or creating new warlords. International NGOs must work with communities to ensure that health and education, including peace education, are available to all.

Local NGO representatives suggested the use of already existing local structures and institutions as the most effective way to give local communities ownership of development initiatives.

Shuras, traditionally recognized mechanisms for discussion and decision-making, would work at a village level. District peace forums are conceived by Norwegian Church Aid as local citizen forums for the promotion of peace and development; they would deal with broader issues, working through community structures such as local mosques, schools, and NGOs.

It is widely recognized that international and local NGOs in Afghanistan face many obstacles, with the Taliban placing severe limits on grassroots and development-based projects or charging them with alleged un-Islamic activities. An NGO running the only girls’ high school in Afghanistan complained of constant interference by the Taliban, who viewed the school’s activities with suspicion and wished to interfere in the setting of curricula. An NGO that supplies water to 3,500 families in Kabul reported that six of its female workers were dragged from a van and beaten. Women’s organizations also complained of the lack of donor funding dedicated to women’s projects in Afghanistan. These organizations reported that donors considered projects aimed at working with women to be unrealistic in their goals and therefore outside their giving priorities.

A particular problem arises for those international organizations that work with women or employ female workers on their projects. These organizations face a constant moral dilemma as to how much to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise with the local authorities. This issue arises out of the larger question of whether development programs providing services within the country are in some way endorsing and even upholding the Taliban regime. For example, when authorities banned women from working in its office, one NGO decided that it was more important to continue supplying water to Kabul than to abandon the project in order to uphold its standards of gender equality in the workplace. The experience of some development programs has shown, however, that a lack of uniformity in Taliban policy does leave some room for negotiation. The same NGO reported that it was able to negotiate successfully for office space for its female staff in all-female zones of some clinics. At one point there was even talk of allowing female staff to return to their offices.

Looking Forward: A New Approach for the International Community

The Taliban regime and its policies represent a major obstacle to constructive engagement with Afghanistan. However, peacemaking requires not just direct political negotiations but also the creation of conditions that would support the rebuilding of the country’s civil society.

The Afghan population, faced with a social order based on conflict and violence, has several formidable challenges to reconstruction. The lack of an educated populace; the lack of employment opportunities outside of the military; the Taliban’s restrictions on the activities permitted to women; and the continuing contentious relationship between the Taliban and international development and aid organizations are serious problems that need to be addressed.

Nonetheless, opportunities exist for international engagement. This engagement should involve the leaders of Afghanistan’s community organizations, across ethnicities and religions, including NGOs and local activists as well as local Taliban leaders who have an interest in

UN Sanctions on Afghanistan

UNSCR 1267 of October 15, 1999:

- Imposed an air embargo on Ariana Airlines, with the exception of humanitarian flights and flights for the hajj pilgrimage that have been approved by the UN sanctions committee on Afghanistan
- Froze the overseas assets of the Taliban

UNSCR 1333 of December 19, 2000:

- Imposed an arms embargo on the Taliban, which also banned military “technical advice, assistance or training” and called on states to withdraw military advisers (the resolution also says this provision does not apply to “supplies of non-lethal military equipment intended solely for humanitarian or protective use”)
- Called on states with diplomatic relations with the Taliban to reduce their staffs at Taliban missions and restrict the movement of Taliban diplomats in their countries
- Called on states to close all Taliban offices within their countries, as well as all offices of Ariana Airlines
- Froze overseas assets of Osama bin Laden and his associates
- Banned the sale to the Taliban of the chemical acetic anhydride, which is used in making heroin
- Reiterated the air embargo

reconstruction and long-term peace. Engaging local community leaders would help to regenerate associational life and civic commitments. The goal should be to change the terms and conditions under which ordinary Afghans live, creating opportunities for communities to establish alternative economic activity in the country and region. In some parts of the country where traditional mechanisms of local government exist, such as the elected shura councils in South and East Afghanistan, these institutions could be targeted for a range of community-level strategies and interventions, such as peace education initiatives and intra-Afghan dialogues with local groups.

There is a growing awareness among the Afghan population of the need to focus aid on specific areas of concern including health care, education, de-mining, and agriculture. Projects in these areas would help to generate economic development of the entire country and shift assistance from arms and emergency aid to long-term development for Afghan communities. There are already local NGOs in Afghanistan working around the Taliban restrictions to provide some educational and health services to women. Furthermore, the existence of a large population of young unemployed Afghans could provide the labor force for the reconstruction of infrastructure. The Afghan diaspora represents an untapped resource of young, educated professionals who can be engaged in providing skills and resources in rebuilding society.

Finally, engaging in reconstruction activities is a deeply political question. Currently, the focus of international donor policy is on emergency relief rather than long-term development. A long-term strategy for reconstruction would need to have the support of the United States and its allies, include regional powers, and address the fundamental political dilemma of how to weigh the concern regarding the Taliban's involvement in terrorism and drug trafficking against the urgent needs of Afghanistan's people. Projects will have to be crafted skillfully to address the needs of the local communities and include them in decision-making. Unconditional aid is not a solution, but neither is non-engagement. The priority of the international community has to shift to include the needs, opinions, and values of the Afghan people, who continue to live in a country in crisis.

“The Afghans, as victims of a war and the destruction of a nation, have lost more than their property and livelihood: they have lost their dignity as human beings.”

ADDENDA

Agenda

New York, New York
Thursday, May 17, 2001

9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Joel Rosenthal, Carnegie Council
Nicholas Platt, Asia Society

9:20 a.m. Latest Developments in Afghanistan

Barnett Rubin, Center on International Cooperation, New York University
Moderator: Marvin Weinbaum, Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois/U.S. Department of State

- 10:00 a.m. **Panel 1: Afghan Communities in Conflict**
 A roundtable made up of people working in the region, in Afghanistan or in border communities, discussing:
- What is the experience of the people?
 - Who are the local communities? How do local communities define their problems?
 - What are some of the human costs of the conflict?
- Discussants: Sima Samar, Shuhada Sadozai Panah, Women Development Program for Afghanistan*
Sayed Sahibzada, United Nations Development Programme
Moderator: Paula Newberg, United Nations Foundation
- 11:30 a.m. **Panel 2: Local and Regional Responses**
 A roundtable discussion with people working locally and regionally for humanitarian and relief organizations, considering the following questions:
- How are problems being addressed or not being addressed at the local level? The regional level?
 - What is the relationship of local communities and those working for these humanitarian and relief organizations to existing power structures? What are the dynamics of this interaction?
 - Are there more effective ways in which both domestic and international NGOs can engage the communities they serve and help to build social capital?
- Discussants: Nadir Atash, Performance Assessment, Research, and Statistical Analysis (PARSA)*
Robert Laprade, CARE
Mohammed Ehsan Zia, Norwegian Church Aid
Moderator: Ana Cutter, Carnegie Council
- 2:00 p.m. **Panel 3: Journalists' Roundtable**
 A discussion of reporting and writing on Afghanistan from the perspectives of regional and international journalists.
- Discussants: Barbara Crossette, New York Times*
Nasim Zehra, freelance journalist
Zahid Hussain, Newsline
Moderator: Elizabeth Neuffer, Boston Globe
- 3:15 p.m. **Panel 4: A Role for the International Community?**
 A roundtable discussion exploring strategies for constructive roles that the U.S. and regional states, as well as international organizations and NGOs, can play in reconstruction efforts and in transforming socio-economic conditions:
- What are the prospects for reconstruction in Afghanistan?
 - What are the opportunities for developing alternative economic activities for the country and the region as a whole? Who are the actors that should be involved?
 - In the assessment of costs of the Afghanistan conflict and the local, regional and international responses to it, what are the lessons?
- Discussants: Barnett Rubin, Center on International Cooperation, NYU*
Paula Newberg, United Nations Foundation
Moderator: Marshall Bouton, Asia Society
- 4:15 p.m. **Conclusions and Closing**
Marvin Weinbaum, Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois/U.S. Department of State

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The Asian Social Issues Program

The Afghanistan symposium is the second in a series on communities and conflict resolution, including the case study of Sri Lanka and a proposed event on Indonesia in 2002. The series is part of a timely new public education initiative entitled the Asian Social Issues Program (ASIP). The ASIP initiative has been directing public attention on the pressing social issues faced by the countries, regions, and population groups that have not participated fully in Asia's economic expansion during the last quarter-century or have experienced detrimental effects of this growth. These developments have obscured a number of social challenges of increasing global significance, such as those concerning civil, ethnic and other types of communal conflict, poverty, the environment, migrations, and human rights. The Asia Society recognizes that these social issues and the strategies used to deal with them will play a large role in international relations in the twenty-first century. To this end, ASIP's multiyear agenda has been highlighting important social issues in Asia and the innovative strategies that have been generated within the region to address these critical challenges. ASIP has instituted a variety of multidisciplinary public education programs that have been bringing together Asian leaders of nongovernmental organizations and U.S. representatives. To complement public programs at Asia Society, the initiative has also dedicated a social issues component to the institution's website AsiaSource (www.asiasource.org/asip.cfm). The resource is currently being developed to serve as a gateway for information on Asian social challenges and their solutions and to facilitate the formation of new networks with Asia and the U.S.