



Backgroundunder

Executive Summary

No. 1507

December 6, 2001

KEYS TO THE ENDGAME IN AFGHANISTAN

JAMES PHILLIPS

The United States has made considerable progress in its war to uproot Osama bin Laden's terrorist network and the Taliban regime that protects it in Afghanistan. The Taliban's rule collapsed in northern Afghanistan after five weeks of bombing and the subsequent rapid advance of the United Front (or Northern Alliance) opposition coalition. The Taliban has fallen back in disarray to its stronghold of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. This will make it easier to find and destroy bin Laden's terrorist infrastructure—the paramount U.S. goal in Afghanistan.

But the war in Afghanistan is far from over. In fact, the next phase of the war may be much more difficult if the foreign members of the Taliban choose to fight to the death or if the Taliban reverts to guerrilla warfare in rugged southern regions hostile to the Northern Alliance, as some of its leaders have threatened. The American counterterrorist campaign may be further complicated by the intensifying power struggle among the various elements of the opposition coalition, returning exiles, and emerging Pushtun tribal militias and their respective foreign backers, all of whom seek to fill the vacuum left by the Taliban's implosion.

To sustain and build on its initial victories, the United States must press ahead relentlessly with its military campaign to score a knockout blow against the Taliban leadership and roll up bin Laden's network as soon as possible. Washington also must gain the long-term cooperation of non-

Taliban Pushtun leaders in fighting Islamic extremism and building a stable post-Taliban government. The December 5 Bonn agreement between Afghan factions that set up a provisional administration is a good first step.

The challenge for Washington will be to turn the rout of the Taliban into a decisive military victory and then ensure that the post-war political structure that emerges prevents Islamic extremists such as the Taliban and bin Laden from returning to roost in Afghanistan. To achieve these goals, the United States should:

- **Work closely with the United Front and help it maintain its battlefield dominance to defeat the Taliban decisively and eradicate bin Laden's terrorist network.** Keeping the United Front at arm's length and

restraining its military advances to appease Pakistan will only lengthen the war and require a greater commitment of American troops.

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- **Step up efforts to enlist the emerging non-Taliban Pushtun leaders in southern Afghanistan as allies in the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda and include them in the process of building a post-Taliban Afghanistan.** The Pushtun ethnic group historically has played a leading role in Afghan politics, and there can be no lasting political stability without the substantial political participation of this group. The United Front alone is not strong enough to purge Afghanistan of Islamic extremists and guard against their return.
 - **Encourage the building of a decentralized post-war government to give all Afghan groups strong incentives to cooperate and to avoid factional feuding.** The United Nations-sponsored Bonn agreement has laid the groundwork for building a post-war government, but this fragile consensus could be threatened by political bickering. Empowering the provincial governments and giving them substantial autonomy and access to reconstruction aid would reduce the possibility of an all-out power struggle over the control of state institutions centered in Kabul. A decentralized government guided by the principles of federalism also would have the beneficial effect of allowing a new generation of Afghan leaders to advance within the power structure through political competition rather than military domination. Taliban leaders should be excluded from this government.
 - **Ensure that Afghans become active stakeholders, not passive clients of United Nations bureaucrats, in post-war reconstruction.** The United Nations can play a supportive role in Afghanistan's post-war reconstruction, but it should not be allowed to supplant Afghan sovereignty and self-determination. Nor should it seek to apply to Afghanistan the flawed model of U.N. administration practiced in Bosnia. Given the appropriate tools and access to resources, Afghans are capable of cooperating to rebuild their economy and construct a stable government. Genuine nation-building can be accomplished only from the bottom up; it cannot be administered from the top down.
 - **Restore Afghanistan's historic role as a neutral buffer state and halt its neighbors from meddling in its internal affairs.** Washington should press outside powers to halt their intensifying proxy wars in Afghanistan and respect Afghan independence. If possible, it should negotiate a treaty between Afghanistan, all six of its neighbors, Russia, and the United States guaranteeing that Afghan territory would not be used as a base to threaten any other state.
 - **Avoid tying down U.S. troops in any open-ended peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan.** American military power and resources should be focused on the next phases of the war against international terrorism. The Bonn agreement calls for a multinational peacekeeping force to be deployed in Kabul and eventually in other areas. These peacekeeping troops should come from distant Muslim countries. But ultimately, peacekeeping can be accomplished and sustained effectively only by Afghans, not by foreigners.
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The United States has made significant progress in its war against terrorism in Afghanistan. After the start of the bombing campaign on October 7, Taliban forces quickly unraveled in northern Afghanistan, where they had made the mistake of continuing to try to fight a conventional war against the United Front (Northern Alliance). Deployed in easily targeted fixed positions along static front lines, Taliban forces were decimated and demoralized by the cumulative effect of the U.S. bombing campaign. Bolstered by increased logistical support from the United States and Russia and by U.S. Special Forces units that called in precise air attacks against Taliban targets and helped improve its battlefield coordination, the United Front captured Mazar-i-Sharif on November 9 and Herat on November 12 and entered Kabul without a fight on November 13.

The rapid collapse of Taliban rule in northern Afghanistan was not surprising, given the hostility of the predominantly Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara northerners to the harsh rule of the Taliban, which is comprised chiefly of ethnic Pushtuns from the south.¹ In northern cities, the United Front was welcomed as a liberating force. There literally was dancing in the streets to celebrate the rout of the oppressive Taliban, which had banned music and public dancing.

The Taliban regime also was discredited by its increasing dependence on foreign Muslim funding

and militants from Pakistan, the Arab world, Chechnya, and elsewhere. But the Taliban's pell-mell retreat from Kabul, the Afghan capital, was a stunning development that indicated that many of the rank-and-file Taliban do not share the diehard militancy of the Taliban's top leader, Mullah Mohamed Omar.

As Taliban troops fled from the advancing United Front forces, local Pushtun tribal and regional forces mushroomed in southern and central Afghanistan and staked claims to reassert traditional tribal authority in territory abandoned by the Taliban. While some Pushtun tribes reportedly have attacked the retreating Taliban, others appear to be more concerned about the southern march of the predominantly non-Pushtun forces of the United Front and are rushing to establish control over southern towns and villages in an effort to prevent the United Front from consolidating its control.

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1. See James Phillips, "Uproot Bin Laden's Terrorist Network and Taliban Allies in Afghanistan," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 776, September 17, 2001, at <http://www.heritage.org/library/execmemo/em776.html>.

The remnants of the Taliban, clinging to Pushtun-dominated areas near their stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar, now are trying to regroup and reorganize. Taliban forces also appear to be hunkering down in the mountains south of Jalalabad. The remaining Taliban forces are believed to include more than 2,000 foreign Muslim militants, who have more zeal for carrying on the fight and less opportunity to defect to Afghan opposition contacts. The result may be pitched battles fought to the bitter end.

Needed: Relentless Pressure. The Taliban may hope to fight a hit-and-run guerrilla war similar to that fought by the mujahideen (holy warriors) against the Soviets in the 1980s. Although many of the Afghan Taliban have melted away, the foreign Muslim militants that flocked to the Taliban's banner have proven to be more stubborn fighters, and some have fought to the death.

It is critical that the United States and its Afghan allies maintain relentless military pressure on the beleaguered Taliban regime to deal it a mortal blow by capturing or killing its leaders. Taliban forces must be defeated in detail before they can burrow into the mountains and settle in for a sustained guerrilla war. The U.S. should not accept any face-saving deal that Mullah Omar negotiates with anti-Taliban Pushtun forces.

The November 25 seizure of an airstrip near Kandahar and the aerial deployment of more than 1,000 Marines will enhance U.S. options for launching search-and-destroy missions against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces, which have progres-

sively less space to hide in as the territory they control steadily shrinks. The United States is closing in. In a pinpoint bombing raid on November 14, it eliminated one of Osama bin Laden's chief lieutenants, Mohamed Atef, who is thought to be one of the planners of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Recently, bin Laden himself reportedly was spotted by Afghans in a fortified camp near the village of Tora Bora, 35 miles southwest of Jalalabad.² As more and more Afghans defect from the



2. Tim Weiner, "Bin Laden Reported Spotted in Fortified Camp in Afghan East," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2001, p. B3.

NOTE: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED FRONT (NORTHERN ALLIANCE)

Jamiat-e-Islami (Islamic Society), led by ex-President Burhanuddin Rabbani and (until his September 9 assassination by Arab suicide bombers) former Defense Minister Ahmed Shah Massoud. Massoud has been succeeded by his intelligence chief, General Mohamed Fahim. Foreign Minister Abdallah and Interior Minister Yunus Qanoni also are key decisionmakers. Most members of this group, the strongest and most disciplined within the coalition, are ethnic Tajiks.

Jimbush-e-Milli-ye Islami (National Islamic Movement), led by former communist General Rashid Dostum. This group is comprised predominantly of ethnic Uzbeks and Turkmen.

Hezb-e-Wahadat (Unity Party), a minority Shiite Muslim party led by Karim Khalili and made up of ethnic Hazaras.

Harakat-e-Islami (Islamic Movement), another minority Shiite party, led by Asif Mohsini and comprised largely of non-Hazaras.

Mashreqi Shura (Eastern Council), a predominantly Pushtun party, led by Haji Abdul Qadir. This coalition group currently governs four eastern provinces.

Ittehad-e-Islami (Islamic Union), a tiny group led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a close ally of Saudi Arabia. Most of its members are Pushtuns.

The United Front is recognized by the United Nations as “The Islamic State of Afghanistan.” Now united against the Taliban, the groups within the United Front sometimes fought each other when they ruled Kabul between 1992 and 1996.

Taliban and turn against bin Laden, he runs increasing risks of being located and brought to justice. But capturing bin Laden will not be easy. He is surrounded by up to 2,000 Arab militants, many of whom are likely to fight to the death. Bin Laden’s extensive and sophisticated cave complexes are sure to be equipped with many nasty surprises, including chemical weapons and, possibly, a “dirty bomb” (conventional explosives laced with deadly radioactive materials).³

WINNING THE ENDGAME IN AFGHANISTAN

Although the first phase of the U.S. war in Afghanistan has gone well, much more must be accomplished to uproot the al-Qaeda terrorist network and its Taliban protectors in Afghanistan.⁴ Anti-Taliban opposition forces appear to have

seized control of all major Afghan cities with the exception of Kandahar.

But control of the cities does not necessarily bring victory, as the Afghan communists, the Soviets, British forces, and others have learned to their dismay. The Taliban’s support base lies in the southern hinterland, in the teeming Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, and among Pakistani Pushtuns, who comprise about 8 percent of the population of Pakistan and are concentrated along the border. If Mullah Omar survives the current onslaught and goes into hiding in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan or finds sanctuary in the unruly frontier provinces of Pakistan, he could live to fight another day. Although many Taliban fighters discarded their black turbans and joined tribal militias when they saw the balance of power tilt against the Taliban, they could rally behind Mul-

3. Philip Webster and Roland Watson, “Bin Laden’s Nuclear Threat”, *The Times* (London, England), October 26, 2001, at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,2001350025-2001372097,00.html>. See also Bob Woodward, Robert Kaiser, and David Ottaway, “U.S. Fears Bin Laden Made Nuclear Strides,” *The Washington Post*, December 4, 2001, p. A1.

4. See James Phillips, “Defusing Terrorism at Ground Zero: Why a New U.S. Policy Is Needed for Afghanistan,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No.1383, July 12, 2000, at <http://www.heritage.org/library/backgrounder/bg1383.html>.

lah Omar again if the prevailing political winds change in the future.

Afghanistan's politics are notoriously fickle. Alliances among contending factions change like the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope. If the United Front coalition dissolves into factional fighting or overplays its hand and exacerbates the latent hostility of Pushtuns resentful of non-Pushtun domination, Mullah Omar or a successor could rally renewed support. The Taliban also could make a comeback by recasting itself as a Pushtun resistance movement if a post-Taliban government comes to be perceived as a puppet of foreigners. Another source of support for a Taliban resurgence could be the radical *madrassas* (religious schools) in Afghanistan and Pakistan, funded by Arab fundamentalists.

If introduced on a large scale, even in humanitarian or peacekeeping roles, American or British troops could be denounced as an occupying force. This would give Mullah Omar or a successor a renewed opportunity to tap into Afghan xenophobia and Islamic zealotry. Even United Nations peacekeeping troops drawn from Muslim states could provoke a backlash if they were perceived to back a rival faction in a renewed civil war. The Taliban also could be given a new lease on life if a new government comes to power in Islamabad and restores Pakistani support that President Pervez Musharraf withdrew after the Taliban refused to break its ties to bin Laden's terrorist network.

For all of these reasons, the United States needs to score a swift knockout blow against the Taliban's top leadership and permanently eliminate it as a contender for power. Washington must transform the recent rout of the Taliban into an irreversible military and political victory that leads to the eradication of Osama bin Laden's terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan. The United States then should promote the establishment of a friendly and stable Afghan government that can prevent Islamic extremists from using Afghanistan as a base for exporting terrorism. To accomplish these goals, Washington should:

- **Work closely with the United Front and help it maintain its battlefield dominance to defeat the Taliban and eradicate bin Laden's terrorist network as soon as possible.**

With the support of U.S. air power and its Special Forces, the United Front has been an effective military ally that boldly advanced southward against a larger and better-armed Taliban military force. The United States should continue close military cooperation with the United Front to help it keep relentless pressure on Taliban forces and bin Laden's al-Qaeda militants and block their escape. Washington should reward the United Front with enhanced logistical support, economic aid, and food supplies to enable it to offer substantial inducements to broaden its support, particularly among Pushtuns.

The United States should extend this military and economic support while making it clear that this does not imply American backing for the United Front or any faction of it to unilaterally replace the Taliban as Afghanistan's rulers. While it is popular among the Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek minority groups in northern Afghanistan, the United Front does not enjoy widespread support in southern Afghanistan, the homeland of the Pushtuns, which is the single largest Afghan ethnic group, comprising approximately 40 percent of the population. Any future Afghan regime that seeks to exclude the southern Pushtuns would trigger a destabilizing backlash that could be exploited by the Taliban or other Pushtun groups.

Pakistan, which backed the Taliban until recently, opposes the United Front because of its opposition to Pakistani dominance in Afghanistan and its ties to India, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Iran. Both Islamabad and the U.S. Department of State (which often reflects Pakistani views on Afghan politics) convinced President Bush to call on the United Front to halt its southern advance outside Kabul until a provisional government including other groups could be established. Ostensibly, this was done because of fears that possession of Kabul might fuel the opposition coalition's ambitions to rule Afghanistan without southern Pushtun participation.

But this effort to slow the pace of the war to buy time to cobble together a post-war government was unrealistic. The United Front would not stand by idly while the Taliban collapsed because this would allow other groups, possibly backed by Pakistan, to fill the power vacuum. Moreover, slowing the pace of the fighting would lengthen the war, raise the death toll among combatants and civilian refugees threatened by starvation, and increase the number of U.S. troops needed to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

The United States cannot afford to delay military operations that are critical to winning the war in order to buy time to facilitate unrealistic diplomatic efforts to impose a pro-Pakistani post-war government. The overriding U.S. military objective in Afghanistan is to eradicate bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist infrastructure from Afghanistan to reduce the damage that his global terrorist network can inflict on Americans in future attacks.

Acquiescing to Pakistan's appeals that the advance of the United Front be permanently halted would give bin Laden more time to plan and organize attacks to kill more Americans or, possibly, to escape. Slowing the advance of the United Front to appease Pakistan also would give the Taliban a breathing space to regroup, reduce the pressure on wavering Taliban fighters to defect, reduce the incentives for non-Taliban Pushtuns to join the United Front to defeat the Taliban, and raise the political costs of the war to the United States, its allies, and friendly Muslim governments.

The approaching winter also puts a premium on pressing forward with the United Front's current military advantage, because the bitter cold and deep snow soon will impede the mobility and effectiveness of United Front forces and make supply logistics more difficult. Although American air power and Special Forces may remain effective in the Afghan winter, Afghan guerrillas traditionally scale back their operations, returning to home villages and refugee camps to await the spring thaw.

The farther south the United Front can advance before it is bogged down in snow, the more leverage the United States will have to twist the Afghan political kaleidoscope, induce Taliban defections, and enlist opportunistic southern Pushtun tribes to dismember the Taliban, and the easier it will be to hunt down bin Laden and his zealots.

While the United Front forces fought ably on their home turf in northern Afghanistan, their ability to sustain an offensive in southern Afghanistan will be increasingly constrained by extended supply lines, the need to consolidate their control and apprehend Taliban stragglers in liberated areas, the need to divert forces to protect the flow of emergency food supplies and other humanitarian aid, a lack of familiarity with the terrain of potential battlefields, and lack of support from southern Pushtuns suspicious of their political goals. This makes it all the more important that the United States recruit additional help from the Pushtuns of southern Afghanistan, or at least deprive the remaining Taliban forces of the local Pushtun support that they would require for an extended guerrilla campaign.

- **Step up efforts to enlist the emerging non-Taliban Pushtun leaders in southern Afghanistan as allies in the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda and include them in the process of building a post-Taliban Afghanistan.**

After a slow start, Washington should accelerate efforts to recruit the resurgent Pushtun leaders in the war against the Taliban and bin Laden's organization. Charismatic local leaders play a critical role in Pushtun tribal politics. The primary allegiance of most Pushtuns—indeed, of most Afghans—is to their *qawm* (the Arabic word for tribe), a group that shares a common ancestry or territorial homeland. While they may affiliate with larger organizations such as the Taliban or the old mujahideen groups that fought the jihad against the Soviets, the true loyalty of most Afghans is local. They are capable of fighting to the death for local commanders with whom they share

close personal ties, but their loyalties to more distant leaders can evaporate suddenly—particularly if their local commander negotiates a better deal with a rival leader.

Many of the emerging southern Pushtun leaders played important roles in battling the Soviets in the 1980s and could be approached through former U.S. contacts. In return for their cooperation in hunting down Mullah Omar, bin Laden, and their supporters, Washington should offer local Pushtun leaders military support, lucrative financial incentives, economic support for their tribal kinsmen, and the opportunity to participate in a post-Taliban government. It should be made clear that Pushtun leaders who cooperate with the United States in fighting Islamic extremists now can expect great rewards in the future, but those that continue to support the crumbling Taliban regime will suffer for their actions.

Washington's initial efforts to whittle away the Taliban's base of support in southern Afghanistan were undermined when maverick Pushtun leader Abdul Haq was captured by the Taliban and executed on October 26 to deter other former mujahideen commanders from turning against the Taliban. Haq had crossed the border from Pakistan with minimal preparation and no support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. His kinsmen suspect that he was betrayed by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the military intelligence service that helped create and support the Taliban. Hamid Karzai, a supporter of exiled King Mohamed Zahir Shah who was named chairman of the interim administration that will rule Afghanistan for the next six months, has had greater success in rallying Pushtun support.

Pushtun tribal leaders have become increasingly willing to challenge the Taliban since its defeat in the north and the southern march of

victorious United Front forces. Local Taliban commanders, many of whom originally defected to the Taliban when it appeared to be on the winning side, now are returning to swell the ranks of tribal militias.

Afghanistan's tribal militias, encouraged by the string of Taliban defeats, also have grown increasingly hostile to Taliban domination. Emboldened by the turn of events, Pushtun tribesmen led by Gul Agha Shirzai seized the town of Takteh Pol, 25 miles southeast of Kandahar, on November 24.⁵ This action was significant because it occurred so close to the seat of the Taliban's power and helped to ignite a chain reaction among other Pushtun leaders still sitting on the fence. Moreover, the uprising has denied the Islamic extremists the use of the main road to Quetta.

The United States should move more aggressively to encourage additional uprisings and enlist greater Pushtun help in driving the nails into the Taliban's coffin. Pushtun tribal militias also could be helpful in tracking down bin Laden, who is hated by many Afghans for hijacking their country to advance his terrorist agenda.

- **Encourage the building of a decentralized post-war government to give all Afghan groups strong incentives to cooperate and to avoid factional feuding.**

The December 5 agreement between Afghan factions reached in Bonn, Germany, under the auspices of the United Nations set up a transitional administration to prepare the way for a post-Taliban government. Under the pact, Hamid Karzai, an anti-Taliban Pushtun leader, was appointed chairman of the temporary administration, which will take power on December 22. The temporary administration will govern for six months, until a meeting can be arranged for a Loya Jirga (grand assembly), a traditional Afghan council that is convened in time of crisis to forge a consensus on vital

5. Rajiv Chandrasekeran, "Taliban Opponents Seize Land in South, Cut Off Supply Route," *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2001, p. A10.

issues. Former King Mohamed Zahir Shah will play a symbolic role in the Loya Jirga, which will elect a transitional authority to run Afghanistan for two years until a constitution is drawn up and elections are held.

The Bonn talks are a good first step, but much more negotiation will be necessary to build a durable consensus on how to form Afghanistan's future government. A sustained peace can be achieved only through the development of a broad, inclusive, multi-ethnic government with substantial participation from the Pushtuns, who historically have played a leading role in Afghan politics.

Working out a viable power-sharing arrangement will be a complex diplomatic task. The United Front, which has borne the brunt of the fighting against the repressive Taliban, now has the strongest military force. It controls the capital, Kabul, and holds Afghanistan's seat in the United Nations.

The United Front is reluctant to share power with exile groups and politicians who do not control territory or exercise military power inside Afghanistan. Firm American diplomacy will be required to dissuade the United Front from overplaying its hand and stubbornly demanding continued political dominance. This could precipitate a renewed civil war and lead eventually to the Balkanization of Afghanistan, leaving all factions worse off.

Burhanuddin Rabbani—the titular head of the United Front and the former Afghan president who was forced from Kabul by the Taliban in 1996—has recognized the need for a broad, inclusive government. On November 25, Rabbani declared that he was prepared to hand over power as soon as the leading Afghan factions agree on an interim government. Washington should hold him to this promise. Rabbani played an important role in resisting Soviet occupation and Taliban extremism. However, his unilateral extension of his expired presidential term in 1994 and his lack of hands-on leadership have undermined his potential appeal as a unifying leader.

To help ensure that Afghanistan does not disintegrate into factional infighting, as it did between 1992 and 1996, the next Afghan government should be decentralized to give all factions a stake in the central government while permitting them substantial self-determination in their home provinces. Empowering the provincial governments and giving them substantial autonomy and access to reconstruction aid also would reduce the likelihood of all-out power struggles for control of state institutions centered in Kabul.

A decentralized government guided by the principles of federalism also would have the beneficial effect of allowing a new generation of Afghan leaders to rise within the power structure through political competition rather than military jousting. Many of these young leaders—such as United Front Foreign Minister Abdallah, the new chairman of the interim administration, Hamid Karzai, and popular Herat leader Ismail Khan—rose within the ranks during the war against the Soviets and learned to cooperate effectively with other Afghans against a common enemy.

If this new generation of leaders can spread its wings, there will be some grounds for optimism. Afghans are war-weary after fighting among themselves and against the Soviets since the 1978 communist coup.

Afghanistan enjoyed more than 50 years of stability from 1930 through 1978 before external meddling disrupted its internal politics. First the Soviet-supported Afghan communists sought to impose their totalitarian rule on a fiercely independent traditional society by force. Then the Pakistani-supported Taliban sought to impose its harsh Islamic extremism by force. Freed of outside meddling, there is a good chance that the Afghans could reach a consensus on how to share power, particularly if they were rewarded with considerable international aid for reconstructing their shattered infrastructure, economy, and civil institutions.

- **Ensure that Afghans become active stakeholders, not passive clients of United**

Nations bureaucrats, in post-war reconstruction.

The United Nations could play a role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but its role should be a supportive one, such as coordinating humanitarian aid. Washington should not allow U.N. bureaucrats to install themselves as viceroys seeking to micromanage Afghan affairs. Such social engineering would create dependence and resentment that eventually could help Islamic extremists return to power.

The disastrous attempt by the United Nations to engineer the modernization of the clan-based politics of Somalia should not be repeated in Afghanistan. Afghans fiercely guard their independence and could react violently if consigned to the status of a colonial mandate of the United Nations. Nor should the flawed model of U.N. administration practiced in Bosnia be applied to Afghanistan. Unlike the separatist Bosnian ethnic groups, all major Afghan factions reject separatism and seek to remain part of a united Afghanistan. Their quarrel is over who will run the country.

The United States should work to ensure that the contending post-Taliban Afghan factions are all stakeholders in the new leadership structure, with responsibility for the revitalization of their own political system and the reconstruction of the Afghan economy. Genuine nation-building cannot be imposed from outside; it must spring organically from the consensus of the country's constituents. It cannot be administered from the top down by U.N. pashas who arrogate to themselves the role of state sovereignty. Afghans must be free to chart their own course for the future and assume responsibility for rebuilding their own country.

There is a broadly scattered diaspora of Afghan exiles that could serve as a valuable source of technical expertise, management skills, organizational experience, and economic investment once a stable government is installed and law

and order is restored to Afghanistan. Nearly one-fifth of the country's 27 million people have been forced into exile by more than two decades of fighting.

Many Afghans who fled to Europe and the United States have acquired considerable education and work experience and would welcome the opportunity to share it with their countrymen if their safety could be guaranteed. Young Afghan expatriate professionals living in America already have established a nonprofit humanitarian organization, Afghans for Tomorrow, to assist reconstruction by providing professional expertise in the fields of education, agriculture, health and human services, housing and urban development, energy, transportation, and economics.⁶ The United States should encourage the future Afghan government, foreign non-governmental organizations, and international aid organizations to recruit these overseas Afghans and reverse the brain drain that has hurt Afghanistan's development for many years.

Particular care must be taken to reform Afghanistan's educational system to weed out the influence of radical Islamic ideologies that have subverted Afghanistan's tolerant brand of traditional Islam and assisted the rise of the Taliban (whose name means "religious students"). Many of the Taliban leaders were trained in *madrassas* in Pakistan. Some were funded by Islamic organizations associated with the fundamentalist Wahhabi sect based in Saudi Arabia. Others preached a virulent mixture of ideas from the militant Deobandi school of Islam that originated in South Asia.

Washington should press Pakistan to close or reform the "jihad factory" *madrassas* and put them under closer supervision. It should call on Pakistan to use some of its forthcoming debt relief to rebuild its own crumbling educational system to help inoculate students against the appeal of Islamic extremism. Afghanistan will be vulnerable to a resurgence

6. For the Web site of this organization, see <http://www.afghans4tomorrow.com/home/>.

of militant Islam as long as radical *madrassas* turn out thousands of young men each year, providing a reservoir of willing disciples that could be attracted to future charismatic leaders who may try to follow in the footsteps of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar.

Ultimately, these ideological hothouses pose a threat to the stability of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as well. The United States should press the Saudi government to restrict the flow of money from Islamic charities and individual donors to these *madrassas*, whose graduates have been recruited by organizations that seek to overthrow the Saudi royal family.

- **Restore Afghanistan's historic role as a neutral buffer state and halt its neighbors from meddling in its internal affairs.**

The long-term U.S. diplomatic goal should be to facilitate an internal Afghan peace settlement that will protect the interests of all of Afghanistan's disparate ethnic groups and ease the security concerns of Afghanistan's neighbors. Afghanistan should be reconstructed as a neutral buffer state similar to Austria. The United States, Russia, and Afghanistan's six neighbors should negotiate a treaty similar to the 1955 State Treaty that set the ground rules for Austrian neutrality. All of them, and the new Afghan government, should pledge not to use Afghan territory as a base for military attack, terrorism, or subversion against each other.

Afghanistan's instability over the past 25 years has been exacerbated by interference from its expansionist neighbors. The Soviet Union played a destabilizing role in backing the April 1978 communist coup that shattered the country's political equilibrium. In 1979, Moscow invaded Afghanistan in a failed effort to prop up its communist clients. Following the 1989 withdrawal of Soviet troops and the 1992 collapse of the Afghan communist regime, Pakistan sought to extend its influence over Afghanistan through Islamic extremist mujahideen groups such as Hezb-e-Islami

(Party of Islam) and, after 1994, through the Taliban.

In addition to these ideological client organizations, Afghanistan's neighbors have sought to gain influence inside the country through various ethnic and religious groups that straddle Afghanistan's borders. While Pakistan has tried to mobilize Afghanistan's Pushtuns, Uzbekistan intermittently has supported militias drawn from northern Afghanistan's more than one million Uzbeks, and Iran has cobbled together a coalition of Hazaras in the center of the country who share its Shiite faith. Russia, Iran, India, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all have funneled aid to various elements of the Northern Alliance to prevent the Taliban from consolidating its control over Afghanistan.

The United States should cooperate with this incipient coalition and encourage China and Turkey, both of which are concerned about Taliban meddling in their internal affairs, to add their weight to this group. The goal should be to uproot the Taliban movement and the extremist Islamic *madrassas* that support it in order to encourage the emergence of a stable Afghanistan that poses no threat to its neighbors.

Pakistan, which until recently sought to cement its hegemony over Afghanistan through the Taliban, is likely to be the chief immediate obstacle to such a settlement. Islamabad still seeks to salvage some of its investment in the Taliban by including "Taliban moderates" in a future government, but this phrase is an oxymoron. No high-level Taliban leaders should be considered for leadership positions in the future Afghan government. Low-level Taliban members should be allowed to participate in future governments only if they publicly and explicitly denounce the Taliban.

The United States historically has deferred to Pakistan, an important Cold War ally, when crafting its policy toward Afghanistan. This made sense during the Soviet war in Afghanistan because Pakistan was an indispensable

front-line ally that was taking considerable risks in opposing the Soviet invasion of its neighbor.

Since the Soviet withdrawal, however, Pakistani and American interests have diverged significantly. Pakistan sought to install the Taliban regime in Kabul to help tilt the balance of power against India. It wants a subservient Afghan government that will allow it to use Afghan territory to gain strategic depth in the event of a war with India. Pakistan favored the radical pan-Islamic Taliban because it would play down Pushtun nationalism and help Islamabad escalate the Muslim separatist insurgency in Kashmir.

Washington should work to reduce the sense of alarm experienced in Islamabad regarding its loss of influence in Afghanistan. The United States could help to defuse tensions between Pakistan and India by offering its good offices to encourage both sides to undertake confidence-building measures and discuss their differences over Kashmir. This will encourage Pakistan to see Afghanistan less in terms of the strategic depth it could provide in a confrontation with India and more as a conduit for trade to Central Asia.

Finally, Washington can help mitigate the loss of Pakistani influence in Afghanistan by compensating Pakistan with economic aid and help in refinancing Pakistan's \$38 billion international debt. The Bush Administration already has pledged to provide Pakistan with \$1 billion in economic aid, restoring Pakistan to the position of the third largest annual recipient of U.S. foreign aid (after Israel and Egypt), a position it also held during the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

The United States also should pressure Afghanistan's other neighbors to refrain from fueling factional conflict. The war in Afghanistan has provided an impetus for improved Russian-American relations. Moscow has been battling Chechen separatists, some of whom are supported by the Taliban and bin Laden, since the mid-1990s. Hundreds of Chechen

Islamic radicals are reportedly fighting on behalf of the Taliban and bin Laden in Afghanistan.

Washington and Moscow now are cooperating much more closely in fighting Islamic terrorism, but the surprise deployment of several hundred Russian Emergency Ministry personnel to Kabul in mid-November, in part to assist the reopening of the Russian Embassy, is reminiscent of the surprise deployment of Russian troops to stake a claim on the airport in Pristina, Kosovo, on June 12, 1999. The Kabul deployment could be a prelude to a stronger reassertion of Russian influence in northern Afghanistan.

Washington should coordinate policy with Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to prevent the establishment of zones of influence in northern Afghanistan. Such a development would eventually discredit the United Front and lead to the partition of Afghanistan. This would be a formula for continued civil war and instability.

Iran also may be tempted to exploit the overthrow of the Taliban regime, which was hostile to Shiite Iran and to Afghan Shias, whom the Taliban denounced as heretics. Tehran was close to going to war with the Taliban in 1998 after nine Iranian officials were executed by Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan. Instead, Iran increased its aid to Hazara Shias and the Tajik faction of the United Front. Now that the Taliban has imploded, Iran may try to parlay this support for the United Front into influence over the formation of the next government.

Washington should seek Iranian cooperation in helping the Afghans to build a stable government, but it should not expect much help. Iran's polarized political dynamics give its foreign policy a schizophrenic quality. Tehran long has been the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism because of the radical policies of hard-liners, led by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who control Iran's defense and security establishment. Yet Iranian

President Mohammad Khatami, the leader of the reformist camp who is waging an uphill struggle to restore the rule of law, continues to call for better bilateral relations.

Conflicting signals are coming even from within the reformist camp. Khatami's government has offered to help rescue downed American pilots but continues to criticize the U.S. war in Afghanistan. It is doubtful that close Iranian-American cooperation is possible in Afghanistan until reformers wrest control of Iran's foreign policy away from Iranian hardliners who have a long record of supporting terrorism.

- **Avoid tying down U.S. troops in any open-ended peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan.**

The December 5 Bonn agreement calls for the deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force to Afghanistan while a multi-party Afghan force is created. The peacekeeping force would deploy first in Kabul, then to other areas "as needed." The agreement does not define the size or composition of the force. While American troops may be required to assure the security of Kabul until a new government can be organized, they should not participate in an open-ended peacekeeping operation. Once American troops have accomplished their military objectives in Afghanistan, they should be redeployed to other theaters of the war on terrorism. American troops that are stationed in Afghanistan after the Taliban is defeated would be lightning rods for terrorist attacks from Taliban sympathizers for years to come.

The failed American peacekeeping deployments in Lebanon in 1983 and Somalia in 1993 should underscore the dangers of open-ended peacekeeping missions in close proximity to virulently anti-American Islamic radicals. In Lebanon, on October 23, 1983, 241 Marines were killed by a truck-bomb attack carried out by Hezbollah (Party of God), an Iranian-inspired and Syrian-supported terrorist group that sought to drive Western influ-

ence out of Lebanon. The Marines were part of a multinational peacekeeping force that had deployed in Beirut in 1982 to stabilize Lebanon following the assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel.

In Somalia, American military personnel initially were deployed by the first Bush Administration in November 1992 to provide emergency food relief to the starving populace, but the mission was expanded by the Clinton Administration into an ambitious nation-building experiment that led the United States into a confrontation with Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed. In October 1993, 18 U.S. Special Forces personnel were killed in an aborted raid to capture Aideed. The Somalis who ambushed the Rangers were reportedly trained by Osama bin Laden's lieutenant, Mohamed Atef.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for peacekeeping operations, but one uncontested requirement is that there must be a peace to keep. Washington should seek to delay any deployment of peacekeeping troops in southern Afghanistan until the war has ended and bin Laden and Mullah Omar have been brought to justice. Otherwise, the deployment of peacekeeping troops could freeze the existing military situation and prolong the Taliban's rule in Kandahar, or interfere with American operations to hunt down the extremist leaders.

The multinational peacekeeping force should be recruited from distant countries in the Muslim world such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, or Turkey. This would reduce the incentives for possible terrorist attacks and reinforce the Bush Administration's declaration that it is fighting Islamic extremist terrorism, not Islam itself, in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

To score a decisive victory in the war against Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan, the United States must work closely with the United Front and emerging Pushtun forces to swiftly uproot the Taliban by rounding up its leaders before they can

regroup for guerrilla warfare. Although the Taliban has sustained a severe military defeat, many of its fighters have merely “changed turbans” and could rally once again for the Taliban or a successor movement if the prevailing political winds change in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

The United States cannot afford to relax military pressure on the Taliban to appease Pakistan. It should be kept in mind that Pakistan played a role in the emergence of the Taliban problem in the first place. Nor should the U.S. military be diverted from its paramount goal in Afghanistan, which is the elimination of Osama bin Laden and his terrorist bases.

The United States must win the war in Afghanistan as quickly and decisively as possible to set the stage for subsequent campaigns in the global war against international terrorism. The Afghan model of deploying American Special Forces and air power to provide strong support for opposition forces dedicated to overthrowing a regime that sponsors terrorism could be replicated against Iraq, Sudan, and other state sponsors of terrorism. The demonstration effect of the war in Afghanistan could raise perceptions of the costs of supporting terrorism, deter attacks against the United States,

and even induce some states to stop exporting terrorism.

After winning the war, the United States must consolidate the peace in Afghanistan to prevent the future return of Islamic extremism. Washington should work with Afghanistan’s neighbors to encourage the development of a broad, decentralized, multi-ethnic government. To reduce the incentives for external meddling, Afghanistan should reassume the role of a neutral buffer state that poses no threats to its neighbors.

The United Nations can play a supportive role in Afghanistan but should not establish itself as a sovereign authority that interferes with Afghan self-determination. International peacekeeping forces should be drawn from distant Muslim countries, not from the United States, whose first priority is victory in the war against international terrorism. Ultimately, only Afghans can provide effective peacekeeping forces and prevent their country from being re-infected with the virus of Islamic extremism.

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