Afghanistan’s Reform Agenda: Four Perspectives

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March 2002
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The Asia Society is grateful to Citigroup for providing the support to make this Asian Update possible.

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Citigroup is proud to be the sponsor of "America’s Crisis: Asia’s Perspectives," a multidisciplinary series of policy, business, cultural and educational programs that explore recent world events from a variety of perspectives.
Even as fighting continues to rage between U.S. forces and Al Qaeda members in the last holdouts in Afghanistan, prospects for peace no longer seem remote. The country has been torn apart by a civil war for over twenty-three years that has resulted in an estimated two million deaths, six million people displaced, and three million disabled. The costs of war have been further exacerbated by the policies of the former Taliban, who created obstacles for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, provided by foreign aid groups, by curbing their activities or expelling them from the country for alleged illegal activities.

However, a plan for reconstruction is finally on the table. In cooperation with international governments, donor groups and international organizations, the interim administration in Afghanistan, led by Hamid Karzai, chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority, is devising a coherent strategy for reconstructing society, building a secure state, and ensuring a sound livelihood for the Afghan population. There are openings for development that go beyond emergency humanitarian assistance; investment in the long-term development of Afghanistan is not only desirable, but also feasible.

The Asia Society is pleased to present this timely *Asian Update*, “Afghanistan’s Reform Agenda: Four Perspectives” which addresses the vision behind the rebuilding process that would engage the international community as well as local actors and stakeholders in Afghanistan. Written in the aftermath of the events following the September 11th attacks and the U.S.’s subsequent war on terrorism in Afghanistan, the authors focus on the essential components of reconstruction in the country, from expanding and securing the rights of women, encouraging trade and investments, building political and economic institutions, and strengthening civil society. Projects in these areas will help to move Afghanistan in the direction of long-term sustainable peace, security and the provision of resources for Afghan communities.

The papers in this *Update* are based on the presentations made by the authors at 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 Afghan 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 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.

We are deeply grateful to Ana Cutter at the Carnegie Council and Meghan O’Sullivan, formerly at The Brookings Institution, who helped organize the Symposium in May 2001 in New York and Washington at their respective institutions. On the Asia Society staff, Rob Radtke, Doris Bacalzo and Julie Yoder played a critical role in shaping this complex, but important project. We thank Barney Rubin and Marvin Weinbaum who served as advisors to this project. We are grateful to all the panelists and participants at the May 2001 events whose comments and interventions formed the basis of the idea for this *Update*. William Kwiatkowski,
a doctoral student at NYU, served as a rapporteur for the May 2001 events. Hee Chung Kim, Richard Fumosa and Lai Montesca have overseen the editing and design of the *Update*; James Grose served as the mapmaker.

The project could not have been possible without the generous support of The Ford Foundation, the United States Institute of Peace and Rockefeller Foundation. We express our gratitude to these institutions for backing a project that proposed immediate reconstruction of Afghanistan, when there was little, if any, international commitment to improve the lives of ordinary people living in the midst of a fractured society.

The Asia Society is grateful to Citigroup, who is the proud sponsor of “America’s Crisis: Asian Perspectives,” a multidisciplinary series of policy, business, cultural and educational programs that explore recent world events from a variety of perspectives, for providing the underwriting for this publication.

This *Asian Update* is meant to reflect four proposed visions of the reconstruction process without necessarily implying endorsement by the Asia Society or the funders.

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Understanding not only the origins of the group that attacked the United States on September 11 but also the events that followed requires understanding the past twenty-three years of Afghan political history.

Afghanistan is a landlocked and severely underdeveloped country in Central Asia. Even before the war with the Soviet Union and the invasion of Russian troops in 1979, Afghanistan ranked among the poorest countries in the world. The majority of the population is made up of Sunni Muslims; approximately one-fourth are Shiite Muslims. The population can also be separated along the major ethnic divisions of Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek, with several other minor ethnicities represented as well. Over the past few centuries, Pashtuns, who make up 40 percent of the population, have been in political control of Afghanistan. Even before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the human rights of all Afghan groups were extremely limited. The situation for women was especially oppressive and unequal.

After the invasion of the Soviet Union and the subsequent ten-year occupation, a state of war, havoc, and destruction became the norm in all of the then twenty-nine provinces of the nation. Countries with various interests in Afghanistan—the oil resources in the North, territorial influence—began to fight a proxy war between each other for control of Afghanistan and for power over each other. Some emerged as winners at the expense of the Afghan people and the destruction of the country. During the past two decades the Afghans have been the collective victims of war. Though one can bemoan the loss of property and means of living, the loss of human dignity is even more tragic. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is still a community where people are loyal to their land, and it would be wrong to assume it is a country made up entirely of warlords and ruthless men.

The common people of Afghanistan never exported terrorism, nor did they become a nation of murderers or the world’s leading source of illicit drugs and smuggled goods. It was the commanders who took Afghanistan in this direction, all for personal profit and at the cost of the nation’s integrity. Moreover, a cruel interpretation of religious fundamentalism was introduced to the country during these same years of conflict. Fundamentalism was new to the Afghan people, and was imposed on the population by neighboring countries involved in the cold war.

As always, the main losers of the foreign-backed wars in Afghanistan have been civilians, mainly women and children, who have had no part in the hostilities. As one faction after another gained power, women saw their homes destroyed, their sons and daughters killed, their futures ruined, and their dignity as human beings taken away. Although traditional Afghan customs did not offer much status to women and children, the situation became much worse following the Soviet invasion. Arms are usually carried by men, and power as well as justice and injustice is exclusively in the control of men in Afghan society. This situation solidified, and even more power was allocated to men, who, enjoying this status, victimized women and children even further in the name of upholding Afghan culture and traditions and observing Islamic values.

The countries that were planning and carrying out the wars in Afghanistan (often with the excuse of fighting communism) supported the creation of religious schools,
called madrassas, in all the refugee camps. Children were taken away from their homes and kept as boarders at these schools. As Afghan families traditionally have many children and are, oftentimes are unable to feed them, they were ready to give their children to these schools to get food.

In several madrassas, the children received military training in addition to their education in an orthodox version of Islamic theology. The boys (girls were not allowed to attend schools) were isolated from their families and kept in seclusion. Unfortunately, the UN agencies and international NGOs were not interested in supporting formal education as an alternative to the madrassas; the emergency situation and the presumed respect to Afghan culture and tradition allowed the situation to continue.

No attention was paid exclusively to the plight of Afghan women. There was no health care, no educational facilities, not even income-generation programs. And the focus exclusively on men. For example, only the Mujahidin, along with selected family members, could use the available hospital facilities. There were no funds available for women's projects; even talking about women's health problems was considered un-Islamic, putting the person who did so under threat. Talking about a project such as a hospital for women was considered a criminal act.

It was the same situation in the area of education. Girls were not allowed to go to the madrassas. Education was also not considered important for refugees. In Afghanistan, the area that was under control of the pro-Russian government included schools, but the quality of that education was inferior. In areas under control of the Mujahidin, there were no schools at all. The fundamentalist Islamic party in power was not interested in educating the children (they preferred their own children to go to the madrassas). If civilians were interested in the education of boys and girls, there were few, if any, options.

In 1992, when Dr. Najibullah Ahmadzai’s regime collapsed, all the Mujahidin went to Kabul to take part in a government in Islamabad, which did not include women or the wide range of ethnic groups living in Afghanistan. When the Mujahidin took power, the fighting started between various factions; Kabul and the other big cities were destroyed in the process.

The first “gift” to Afghan women from the Mujahidin government was the hejab, or scarves, which were especially oppressive for the women who had had the opportunity to work outside of their houses. Before this period, half of government jobs were held by women, and 15 percent of doctors were women. There were female members of parliament and cabinet ministers, and 65 percent of teachers were women. Moreover, 65 percent of the students at Kabul University were women. Women were allowed to work outside of the house, and girls had access to education. After 1992, most of the girls’ schools were looted and destroyed by fighting between different political parties.

These political factions had no respect for human rights and women's rights, and violations of both were common by their members. Complete anarchy reigned in the country, and the so-called government cared more about keeping power than rebuilding the government.

Interest in Afghanistan on the part of Americans and other Western countries soon faded. The Soviet Union had collapsed, the cold war was over, and no one cared about Afghanistan. Foreign aid decreased, and some countries stopped their support to Afghanistan altogether. When the United States stopped its aid and the U.S. NGOs
left the area, the people of Afghanistan were left under the domination of the political parties made and supported by the United States and other Western countries. No job opportunities were available, except to join one of the political parties, which meant fighting to live and to feed the family. The country became the biggest producer of opium in the world, and the killing of citizens and looting of houses and property became accepted activities for most members of the political parties.

In 1994, when the Pakistani government decided to send some goods to Turkmenistan, a convoy of trucks was stopped by political representatives in Kandahar. One of the parties emerging at that time was the Taliban. They fought to release the trucks, and to the surprise of no one, took power in Kandahar just a few days later. Their first edicts for the women of Afghanistan were closing the girls’ schools and the public baths for women and forbidding women to work outside of the house. When women protested, some were arrested; others were beaten, and their husbands were punished for allowing their women to march in the street.

The Taliban took control of other Pashtun areas without fighting because the people were exhausted from the terror, the looting, and the anarchy. The Taliban took Herat in September 1995, reaching Kabul in September 1996. In spite of the Taliban’s brutal denial of education, health care, and the right to work outside the home for women, the United States and most of the international community did not act upon the early warning signals. When the Taliban financed their regime with the sale of opium and the invitation to terrorists to use Afghanistan as a training ground, once again action was not taken. When the Taliban finished destroying the Buddhist statues of Bamayan, a part of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage, in March 2001, the international community finally began to take notice. But still no one took the destruction of a hospital in Bamayan seriously; no one paid attention when 12,000 homes were burned in Bamayan; no one saw the denial of health care to women and their subsequent loss of health as a form of terrorism. Afghanistan was at a point of no return on September 11. The rest is history. The cost of providing international aid when Afghanistan needed it would have been a lot cheaper than the price the international community has been paying since September 11. The Afghan people are paying a high price once again for a crime of which they are not guilty.

Now is the hour for action. The way forward requires a plan made for and in Afghanistan, with Afghan leadership. Plans for Kosovo or Rwanda are not the plans needed in Afghanistan. Plans made by people who don’t wish to understand Afghanistan or listen to the Afghan people are doomed to failure. Specifically, there must be a plan for recovering and rebuilding the lives of Afghan women in order for there to be true reconstruction in Afghanistan.

On December 5, 2001, the formation of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) was announced in Bonn, Germany, as the product of UN-sponsored negotiations between the different factions. Two women were among the thirty cabinet members announced; this author was named deputy prime minister and minister for women’s affairs, and General Suhaila Seddiqi was named minister for public health.

Since this author took office on December 22, there have been many statements of support from the U.S. and other governments, as well as the United Nations, for the restoration of women’s rights, but the actual resources necessary to make real
improvements in the lives of women have been almost non-existent. One month into our six-month administration, the Ministry for Women's Affairs was still without an office. There are very different views about the power and the authority that the Women's Affairs Ministry should be allowed. Some within the new government may want to see only a symbolic Women's Affairs Ministry with only a handful of staff, with the goal of pacifying demands for the rights of Afghan women without anything meaningful occurring.

Symbolism will not give Afghan women back their rights; it will not bring education to girls nor help women make a living so that they can feed themselves and their children. It will not provide desperate women with shelter when they have nowhere else to turn, nor will it house girl orphans whose lives are at stake and who risk being abducted for purposes of sex trafficking.

The Ministry for Women's Affairs needs the same resources as the other ministries; the Ministry's job is to help more than 50 percent of the population who have been the most devastated by the past two decades of war and oppression. The Ministry for Women's Affairs must have a Legal Department to ensure that women's rights are in the constitution and in the law, and to provide legal services and shelters to protect women. The ministry needs an Education Department to provide adult literacy for women, computer and English classes, teacher-training courses, and special programs for girls who were forced to leave school under the Taliban. A Vocational-Training Department is needed to provide technical training in making handicrafts, tending livestock, and teaching agricultural techniques and other skills to women, and especially widows, so that they do not have to resort to begging to support themselves.

The Women's Ministry should also have a Women's Health Department to provide information and services for women's reproductive health. The ministry also must have the authority to work with all other ministries to include women's programs and women in leadership roles in all aspects of Afghanistan's reconstruction.

But the Ministry for Women's Affairs needs real, not token, funding to make this plan happen. It is estimated that an immediate $67 million is needed to begin this work and carry out these programs throughout the country. The ministry needs at least a sufficient staff to start up, with the goal of eventually becoming a full-fledged ministry with 700–800 staff. It must have offices in all thirty-two provinces of Afghanistan in order to bring help to women and girls in both urban areas and in villages.

Overall, a reconstruction and humanitarian-aid plan requires attention to the following issues:

1. The international community must not withdraw simply because a new government is in place. The presence of international peacekeeping troops is essential to moving toward a peaceful, democratic Afghanistan in which the rights of women are restored. The size of the peacekeeping force—and its peacekeeping and disarmament activities—must increase inside Kabul and be extended throughout the rest of the country. Without security, it will not be possible to rebuild our country. More women must also be included in these peace troops to serve important roles and to provide models for women's full participation in society.

2. Massive amounts of financial aid must be made available for rebuilding Afghanistan. Money is needed immediately to enable the new government to be strong enough to begin rebuilding. The international community must make a long-term
commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan, which will take many billions of dollars; resources must be committed toward programs to help women and girls, and assistance must be conditional on women's participation.

3. A made-in-Afghanistan humanitarian aid and reconstruction program must be created according to the needs and requirements of the people. Equal participation of all ethnic groups and both sexes must also be assured.

4. The NGOs and donors must coordinate their aid to make sure that all areas of the country will benefit. It is not enough to provide aid, for example, selectively to the north or to the south.

5. Education must be the first priority. Girls and boys as well as men and women must have access to all levels of education, including technical education, particularly for the young people who have known nothing but war. Primary, secondary, and post-secondary education are also important.

6. Respect to culture and religion is important, but must be interpreted accurately, especially as it applies to women. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has written an interpretation of shari'a law that protects women. Atrocities in Afghanistan have often been dismissed as cultural or religious when they are, in fact, neither. It is critical that the backward movement on women's rights over the past years does not now become institutionalized based on the excuse that the restrictions that were imposed on women by the Mujahidin and the Taliban are now a part of Afghan culture.

7. A plan that does not include employment opportunities is also doomed to failure. Job creation in agriculture as well as all of the infrastructure—roads, communication, construction—must be considered in the plan. Moreover, there are many trained Afghan women in Afghanistan and in the refugee areas who are very skilled and are in desperate need of jobs. Employing these women rather than relying only on international NGO and UN staff is necessary to rebuild the country and strengthen the role of women.

8. Capacity building is not the only issue. Afghans have the capacity to repair their infrastructure, to administer an education system, and to recreate a health-care system. All of the “capacity building” in the world will amount to nothing without real money for Afghans, especially Afghan women's NGOs, to run the programs needed to provide a future for Afghan women and their families.

9. Health care must also be a priority. The people of Afghanistan are exhausted, sick and traumatized. They require immediate help to build their own health system. Medical clinics, hospitals, and a public health service need to be institutionalized to take the country forward.

10. Women and girls must be given priority. Ethnic groups must be given equal opportunity. Women and members of ethnic minorities must be allowed to represent themselves in all decision-making bodies. The Ministry for Women's Affairs has called for the loya jirga (grand assembly) to include 50 percent women.

This ten-point plan may seem costly and challenging, but research has shown that a country cannot get back on its feet without these basic needs being met. The world has learned a costly lesson from Afghanistan. At the end of the day, Afghanistan is part of the global village, and if one part of the planet is sick, the virus will spread. The Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls, deserve peace, health, and prosperity. If September 11 taught us anything, it is that global peace, health, and prosperity is an all-for-one-and-one-for-all requirement.
A "Marshall Plan" for Afghanistan and Central Asia, or Free Trade?

Between October 2001 and February 2002, estimates of the cost of reconstructing Afghanistan grew sixfold, finally topping out at $30 billion. Add to this the bill for massive infusions into the economy of Pakistan. Then include the essential aid to Afghanistan's immediate neighbors to the north. The grand total for the region is staggering, surely no less than $50 billion. Judging by the actions of donor countries and institutions at the Tokyo meeting in January, however, nothing remotely approaching this amount will be forthcoming.

Why so large a sum? Afghanistan itself lies in ruins and the countries along its borders have suffered gravely from a generation of warfare. But reasons go further. For the international development-assistance field, the 1990s were a golden age. National and international agencies as well as private foundations poured unprecedented amounts into projects of every description. Thousands of professionally staffed NGOs sprang up, each seeking to do well by doing good. The many sophisticated new approaches to development demanded an arcane new vocabulary, the mastery of which separated insiders from outsiders like a password among Freemasons.

This burgeoning entrepreneurial and development community has responded to the crisis in Afghanistan by putting forward the full complement of its "best practices" with little regard for the total cost. On the assumption that all initiatives are equally valuable, it has bundled them into a kind of Marshall Plan.

Many of the specific proposals for renewing infrastructure and rebuilding schools and medical services have real value. Those proposals designed to foster village-level agriculture in the most impoverished mountain areas of Afghanistan and neighboring countries are especially meritorious. After all, the worst poverty, the deepest alienation, the most violent conflicts, and the most fertile ground for narcotics trafficking are all to be found in the remote mountains of this region. Until farmers there are able to return to their land and feed their families there will be no peace.

Acknowledging both the excesses and the insights of the development professionals, the fact remains that they have largely ignored the one measure that is most likely to alleviate poverty in Afghanistan: the reopening of regional transportation and trade. And not just in Afghanistan. The opening of long-sealed transport corridors will unleash a tremendous infusion of trade and investment that will immediately benefit the whole of Central Asia, as well as Pakistan and eastern Iran. And, unlike the more grandiose development projects being put forward, this one can be achieved at relatively little cost. The reason is simple: A program to expand regional trade will depend for its success not on NGOs and agencies with little or no prior experience in the region, but on market mechanisms whose efficacy in all the countries involved has been proven for more than two millennia.

The Neglect of Trade as an Instrument for Development

The modern age is ill-equipped to recognize the economic potential of the trade routes centering on Afghanistan and embraced what might be called the "broader Central Asia." Most available maps marginalize the region by showing it as the edge of something else rather than an economic and cultural zone in its own right. Broader Central
Asia might appear on the far right side of a map of the Middle East, the left side of a map of South Asia, or on the bottom of a map of the former Soviet Union. In spite of its name, it is rarely depicted as being central to anything.

Alexander of Macedon shared this misperception. When he invaded Afghanistan he believed, thanks to inaccurate briefings from Aristotle, his adviser, that he was literally at the end of the earth, with only the World Sea beyond. He soon realized that he had arrived instead at the navel, or omphalos, of a vast network of transportation and trade that connected the Middle East with India and China, the West with the East, north with south. Before long, silk for Roman togas was passing this way, as were precious metals from the Mediterranean, swift horses, and even musicians, all bound for the East, which is why Marco Polo later passed through Afghanistan en route to China. Afghanistan was also the knot of South-North interaction. Buddhism reached China from India by passing first through Afghanistan and Central Asia. Mughals and other invaders of India all passed this way as well.

The vast trading zone centering on Afghanistan went into eclipse after 1500 A.D. Political instability and the rise of sailing ships turned the region into a backwater. Russian and British imperialists further weakened the basis of trade by treating the area as a buffer zone. The final blow fell when Joseph Stalin cut the region in half and created, on the USSR’s southern flank, the longest and most closed border on earth. The revolution in Iran, the Red Army’s invasion of Afghanistan, and the gradual decay of Pakistan’s economy destroyed what little trade still lingered.

If the fall of the Taliban and the reestablishment of a stable government in Afghanistan lead to a reopening of the great trade routes of Central Asia, these events will mark the most fundamental change in the region’s fate in the past half-millennium. Overland trade will again flow from India all the way to Iran and the Middle East, as well as to Europe. China and India will be able to trade with ease, as will the new states of Central Asia and the entire Indian subcontinent. Chinese trade with the Middle East will also be facilitated. Remote regions of Siberia will have access to the southern port of Karachi, and Russian-Pakistani and Russian-Indian commerce can flourish as never before.

Establishing a Free-Trade Zone in the Central Asian Region: Four Prerequisites

How might this occur? To unleash such a heady possibility, four prerequisites must be put in place:

1. Bridges and tunnels must be rebuilt and, in some cases, constructed anew. This is a big task but not insurmountable. Several of the most costly and time-consuming engineering projects are already in place and require only to be rehabilitated. The Freedom Bridge linking Afghanistan and Uzbekistan at Termez and the Salang Tunnel further south on the same trunk route fall into this category. The product of former Soviet aid programs designed to draw Afghanistan into the Russian orbit, these solid blueprints can now foster a more equitable form of regional integration. Another successful example of foreign aid money used to construct road infrastructure are the impressive bridges along the Karakorum Highway linking China’s Xinjiang region with Islamabad in Pakistan.

Hundreds of bridges and several tunnels must be rebuilt if trade is to reopen. The effort should begin with the trunk lines but then extend to feeder routes that will facilitate the marketing of farm goods from deep
in the hinterland. While large international construction firms might undertake the projects, these ventures could be carried out at far less cost by firms from the new states of Central Asia and other neighboring countries. Several have the necessary experience at seismic and high altitude construction.

It is worth noting that even during the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan that several neighbors showed interest in expanding overland trade across that country to South Asia (China’s Karakoram Highway has already been mentioned). With financial assistance from the United Arab Emirates, Iran was on the verge of reconstructing bridges along the Mashad-Herat-Kabul highway when the September 11 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., occurred. Impelled by similar logic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdulaziz Komilov of Uzbekistan declared two years ago that "the key to Central Asia is Afghanistan," and began exploring the possibilities of opening the trunk roads that would make it possible for Uzbekistan to trade with Pakistan via Afghanistan.

Further stages of several new routes should be constructed as well. Thus, a road that directly links the northern areas of Pakistan with the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan and Tajikistan would create an opening to the region’s poorest mountain territories. In this case, much of the preliminary route analyses are already in hand, thanks to the work of a Pakistani commission formed by Benazir Bhutto to foster trade across Afghanistan to the new states to the north. However, the number of such possible new roads is small, because nearly all of the region’s key arteries have existed for centuries.

(2) Basic security must be established along these routes. Truckers must be free from the constant fear of hijacking to get their rigs from one place to another. Three types of potential hijackers must all be constrained: (a) Existing warlords and local criminal groups have already found it expedient to hijack some of the few trucks that are venturing across Afghanistan’s roads, stealing their content, and holding drivers for ransom; (b) new professional mafias will quickly arise and begin to function on a regional basis. These already exist along some of the highways of Pakistan and India’s Rajasthan, as well as in former Soviet Central Asia. It is likely that these mafias will seize the opportunity to extend their reach as soon as it is possible to do so; (c) underpaid and unsupervised government officials, as well as rogue military units, can all too easily become part of the problem.

Truckers everywhere know that there is safety in numbers, and that real security will come only when traffic is greatly expanded. To reach that level, it will be important to increase the likelihood that attacks will be reported and that road security becomes a regional rather than a purely national issue. This can be achieved through the establishment of well-paid and coordinated patrols along the highways, the opening of regional consulates, and by coordinating all reporting and action through some kind of bilateral or multinational entities. It is worth noting that Turkmenistan maintained what were in effect two consulates in Afghanistan throughout the Taliban years, and Uzbekistan has already opened a consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif to handle trade issues as they arise.

(3) Effective and uncorruptible national agencies must be established to collect tariffs and imposts at border crossings, which will be far more difficult to achieve than it may seem. When the Islamist forces of the United Tajik Opposition joined the government at the end of the civil war there, one of their few demands was for control over the Customs Ministry. They correctly saw this
as a means of self-enrichment, not only by siphoning off fees, but also by extorting payments from shippers and by taking bribes from drug traffickers. Soon the ministry’s parking lot in Dushanbe was filled with expensive, imported automobiles.

One of the areas in which foreign assistance would be most useful is in the creation or upgrading of customs agencies throughout the region. Because customs duties are likely to be one of the single largest sources of income for the poorer governments in the region, the stakes are high. Only with international help will the various states, and particularly Afghanistan, be able to manage the necessary incentives and threats of punishment in such a way as to produce effective customs collection.

Even the existence of professionally staffed customs agencies in the participating countries will not assure the easy flow of trade throughout the region. Unless the states involved are willing to extend preferential transit fees for regional transport and to coordinate those fees with one another, the new transport web will prove stillborn. Uzbekistan recognized this when its cabinet of ministers recently voted to establish favorable rates for commercial cargo being shipped to and from neighboring countries. But their resulting rates are still high and will remain so, until all respective countries come to realize that the only way they can maximize income is by lowering levies and increasing volume. This realization will not come easily nor will it come unilaterally, for each country will view low rates on its border as a gift to its neighbor’s treasury.

Some kind of international consultative body will be needed, a regional agency where information concerning customs policies can be exchanged and, over time, coordinated. This could be accomplished through one of the existing entities, the newly refashioned Central Asian Cooperation Organization, the Shanghai Six, or even the long moribund Economic Cooperation Organization. However, a new interministerial entity would probably be more effective and could be established with support and assistance from international donors.

**Trade Initiatives: What Is Not Required**

These, then, are the four prerequisites for reopening regional trade in Central Asia. Although they are not simple, it is worth noting what is *not* included on this list. For example, the issue of road surfaces. This is certainly important; at some point roads must be checked and rebuilt. But broader Central Asia already boasts tens of thousands of hardy truckers who are accustomed to getting their rigs over the most gruesome terrain, as long as the main bridges and tunnels are open. It would be a waste of time and money for international donors to create a system of Afghan or Central Asian autobahns when so much less is required to get traffic moving.

Nor do donors need concern themselves with any of the infrastructure besides bridges and tunnels. Gas stations, repair facilities, and all other necessary services will arise on their own, as has already occurred wherever traffic has expanded. The roads west from Herat into Iran, from Quetta in Pakistan to Kandahar, from Dushanbe east to Badakhshan, or the entire Khyber Pass, may all be extremely primitive, but they do not lack in essential services, thanks to private entrepreneurs.

**Further Prospects in Transport and Regional Commerce**

The opening of key roads will revive trade and expand security. Equally important, it will create conditions under which other forms of international transport and commerce will become attractive. The first to follow will be the railroads, which in most
cases geographically parallel the highways. Although a basic railroad network will still need large investments, this network is already in place and can be revived and expanded once general conditions improve. Hard on the heels of railroads should be the structures necessary for the transport of energy throughout the region. Even during the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the government of China was exploring the possibility of reviving the old Unocal-Bridas project to construct a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Multan in Pakistan and, potentially, to India. Several groups are considering how to revive that project and even to expand it to include an oil pipeline. If this project does happen it will lay to rest fanciful Indian schemes for building an underwater pipeline from Iran to Gujarat or a mountain pipeline from Turkmenistan clear across Tajikistan and into India via Xinjiang.

Still another important source of future regional commerce is hydroelectric energy. This field should become an important magnet for long-term international investments. Uzbekistan has already revived the sale of electricity from gas-driven plants to northern Afghanistan, along with gas and heating oil. The hydroelectric potential of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan ranks close to the top worldwide. Its development awaited secure access to markets, especially those in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Because these upland countries lack gas and oil, their ability to sell hydroelectric power may be the key to their ability to purchase urgently needed hydrocarbon fuels.

Energy is not the only sector likely to attract outside investment. Prominent Indian manufacturers touring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1997 stated that they would move immediately to develop activities in former Soviet Central Asia “as soon as we can get trucks up there from Bombay.” Now this prospect is coming into view. It is inconceivable that Indian and Pakistani investors will not find opportunities in the lands to the North, as Chinese investors have already done.

Benefits and Costs of Trade
What is the likely economic value of all trade and investment that will result from the revival of land transportation and trucking through the broader region of Central Asia? Even though the Bhutto-era commission in Pakistan attempted to estimate the amount, any figure would be merely a guess. What is known for sure is that the opening of regional land-transportation systems will help Central Asia, including Afghanistan, overcome an economic isolation that has only deepened. During these years nearly all trade from the ancient centers of Central Asia was inefficiently channeled northward through Russia. Though it is true that Afghanistan shipped fruits and vegetables to Russia before 1979, the reciprocal, balanced, and many-sided exchange of goods and products that is the hallmark of a healthy trading system did not exist. Nor did it exist among any other border in the region, be it Pakistan-Afghanistan, Iran-Afghanistan, India-Pakistan, China-Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan-China, and so on.

The result was an economic isolation that even now imposes a kind of “distance tariff” on all goods and products entering or leaving the region.

For Afghanistan and all its neighbors to the north, the key to overcoming this isolation will be easy access to the port of Karachi. Most world centers of wealth are ocean ports, or are at least closely linked or situated near them. Just as the Indus River valley was the “switch-point” for trade and cultural contact as early as the Harappa culture, it will again become so, with Karachi as its link with the sea. China recognized this
truth when it recently committed itself to help in the construction of new port facilities west of Karachi.

Though the full economic impact of renewed trade in Central Asia can only be guessed, we can speak more confidently of the social effects. Free trade will create markets, which will then create jobs. The cost to remote mountaineers of seeds, livestock, equipment, and other necessities will decline. Farmers in the Ferghana Valley and further north in Kazakhstan will be able to market their products in India, as they did four centuries ago in Mughal times. Trade will generate governmental income from taxes and tariffs, which will help support security forces, basic human services, and education. As all this comes to pass, those conditions that have given rise to a culture of violence, religious fanaticism, and narco-business across the region will begin to fade.

These benefits will not come without a price. Everywhere on earth trucking and overland trade offer tempting opportunities for corruption, especially in the sphere of tariff and tax collection. Smuggling, too, has always been a huge enterprise in the broader region of Central Asia and remains so today. Until the establishment of freer trade and lower tariffs, smuggling will, doubtless, continue, and with it will come the criminal gangs that feed on it. Hijacking will thrive until national and international controls are strengthened. Even more ominous is the further spread of AIDS, which is proliferating along the highways and trade routes of Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, thanks to widespread prostitution and intravenous drug use.

**Geopolitical Benefits of Expanded Trade in the Broader Region of Central Asia**

However great the economic and social benefits of renewed regional trade across the broader region of Central Asia, they are fully matched by the huge gains in world security that will flow from these changes. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any other practical and simple steps anywhere that would bring about greater geopolitical benefits for all.

There are ten different areas in which these improvements will be quickly felt:

1. The revival of regional trade will do more than any other single measure to rebuild the Afghan economy, generate state income, and enable the government to provide security and basic human services to its people. This in turn will undercut the appeal of extremist and criminal activities. And it will do so in a way that reinforces Afghanistan’s need to maintain cordial relations with all its neighbors.

2. Trade with Afghanistan and the broader region of Central Asia, as well as with India and Iran, will stimulate the flagging economy of Pakistan. The port of Karachi will become a regional hub and Pakistani businesses will be able to exploit new opportunities in every direction.

3. Indians will not choose to remain aloof from this opportunity, even if the price is improved relations with Pakistan. Although this will not in itself resolve the conflict over Kashmir, it will improve the climate in which the parties address that thorny problem.

4. Through regionwide trade to the northeast and east, Iran will reclaim its traditional vocation as a pragmatic trading state. This will tip today’s fragile balance between mullahs and merchants in favor of the latter, hastening positive political change in that country. It will also cause Iran to look eastward and will distance it from the messy and seemingly intractable problems of the Arab world.

5. By renewing trade with their old-age partners to the south and southeast and by gaining direct access to the nearby port of...
Karachi, the new states of Central Asia will become economically more viable and sustainable. Although regionwide trade will benefit all five of these states, the impoverished mountain countries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will see the biggest gains as they acquire the ability to market their most valuable product, hydroelectric power.

(6) Trade will encourage all the Central Asian leaders and their governments to work with, rather than against, each other because these economic benefits can be reaped only when harmonious and productive relations prevail among the regional states.

(7) In the five new states, as in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, trade and investment will favor the formation of an independent middle class and undercut the appeal of radical Islamist movements. As the new governments gain in confidence they will be able to tolerate greater openness and participation by members of the public. This will in turn strengthen their identity as moderate Islamic societies ruled by secular states. As such, they will present an alternative model of modern development to the entire Muslim world.

(8) Through the opening of trade relations with their natural partners to the south and access to the port of Karachi, the new states of Central Asia will shed their one-sided dependence on Russia and reduce that country’s ability to control their overall destinies. Stated differently, free trade will do for these countries what multiple pipelines will do for the oil-producing countries of the Caspian basin.

(9) The growth of stability in Afghanistan and the broader region of Central Asia will address what Russia has, for a decade, identified as its number one security concern. Free trade with the south all the way to Pakistan and India will stimulate the flagging economies of the Urals region as well. All this will cut the ground from under those in the Russian military and intelligence services who feel that they must somehow regain a deciding voice in Central Asian affairs. The waning of neo-imperial sentiment will in turn enhance the prospects for more open public life in Russia.

(10) The establishment of stable and prosperous regimes in neighboring Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and the fading of radical Islamist currents there will address China’s major security objective, namely, that these countries not become transmission points for destabilizing movements within Turkic and Muslim Xinjiang. While this will not resolve the question of Xinjiang autonomy (any more than it will resolve the analogous issue in Kashmir), it will at least improve the climate in which it can be considered.

America’s Decisive Role in Building a New Central Asia

Reviewing this list, it is clear that the establishment of free trade throughout the broader region of Central Asia promises benefits for all and liabilities for none. This is a policy that is not directed against the interests of any state in the region. On the contrary, it is a policy that promotes the long-term objectives of all the states and their peoples.

The regional transformation described above will take place on its own, without any major push from any quarter. Supporting this claim is the fact that the changes in question are neither new nor revolutionary. Rather, they will bring about the reestablishment of certain relationships that proved their value over the course of several thousand years. The first steps along these lines are already visible, lending further credibility to this argument.

At the same time, the region in question poses unique dangers. No other area on the planet is surrounded by four, possibly five,
nuclear powers and a sixth power, Turkey, a NATO member. Nowhere else do the tectonic plates of several great civilizations and economic zones grind so directly against one another. So while the opening of freer trade may somehow be in the natural order of things, the risks of the process going awry are enormous. And were that to happen, it would put at risk not one but several of the relationships on which world security is grounded.

Therefore, however distant the United States may be from this region, it cannot be indifferent to any conflicts that arise because they would inevitably involve major powers with which it maintains vital relationships. It necessarily behooves America to do what it can to bring about the transformation described above. To fail to do so would be to throw away all the potential good that can flow from its Afghan intervention.

But there is another, and yet more decisive reason for the United States to assume a firm position of leadership in this matter. We have argued that every country in the region has reason to support the reestablishment of the historic trade and culture zone of Central Asia. Yet, at the same time, if any one of the regional powers or even any subgrouping of them were to seek to assume leadership in this process, it would arouse understandable anxieties among the others. The most basic truth regarding this emerging region is that no single power or pair of powers can provide the security umbrella that the region as a whole so urgently needs. Unilateral action by any one or group of the participants, even if it is in the name of a common good, would be seen as an attempt to gain unilateral advantage at the expense of the others.

For this reason, the president of the United States should convene an international conference to be held in Washington to consider the needs of trade and investment throughout the region of which Afghanistan is the center. The limited purpose of this conference should be to address the four prerequisites enumerated above. In taking this step, the United States would declare at the outset that it seeks no further role for itself in this matter. However, the United States must stand ready to provide financial assistance to put in place the four prerequisites, or to lead an effort to raise the necessary money from other countries and donors. In comparison with the price tag on a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan and all of Central Asia, the cost of this important initiative will be modest. And it is far more likely to work.
A virtual international consensus exists around the proposition that unless Afghanistan embarks on the road toward early reconstruction, both economic and political, the circumstances that produced warlordism and the Taliban, and promoted terrorism and drug cultivation, are likely to reappear. Many inside and outside Afghanistan remain deeply concerned that the international community will retreat from its commitments of assistance once military objectives are realized and the recovery process confronts the inevitable impediments. Those who are skeptical point to the loss of interest in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the Soviet military in 1989 and the fall of the Afghan communist regime in 1992.

There are some obvious similarities between then and now. A decade ago, the collapse of the communist regime had also left behind an autocratic regime trying to impose its rigid, partly alien value system. Opposition political figures, analogous to today’s Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), who had stubbornly persisted against great odds, promised a new kind of leadership. The country was fired up with the expectation that a new governing arrangement would be more representative of the country’s people and its traditions. Afghans in this era also looked hopefully to outside assistance to embark on a long-awaited national recovery. International agencies and bilateral donor countries appeared to be gearing up to resurrect the country after years of destructive warfare.

Afghanistan in the 1990s regressed into further civil war, first among the militias of the victorious Mujahidin, and then against the emergent Taliban movement. Rehabilitation and reconstruction were put on the backburner by a post-communist regime unable to pacify the country or extend its writ far beyond the capital. Prospective foreign benefactors lost interest in aiding a recovery. Any lingering feeling that the West was indebted to the Afghans for a resistance in the 1980s that helped topple the Soviet Union disappeared with the factional in-fighting. Nor was the advent of the Taliban, a regime dedicated to fighting and enforcing their religious edicts, any more conducive to beginning a rebuilding process. The Taliban created obstacles that constantly tested the patience of organizations providing assistance, even for those attempting to deliver humanitarian aid. Though generous offers of international development aid remained on the table, they were contingent on the attainment of a cease-fire and a political compromise by warring parties.

An alternative approach to assistance during Taliban rule might have sought to capitalize on popular demand for programs by a population desperate to rebuild their lives. A strategy concerning reconstruction that sought to bypass the Taliban could probably have marginalized this regime by establishing its irrelevance. In time, this policy might have led to an erosion of followers in an essentially shallow movement. Leaders in Kandahar correctly feared that they were vulnerable to any force that might be better able to meet the basic needs of the people. But in order to succeed, such a strategy would have required a convincingly strong
commitment of resources by the international community and nations’ willingness to bear with the possibility that it might initially be seen as rewarding the Taliban.

The military collapse of the Taliban has cleared the way for what is generally conceded to be an unrivaled opportunity to revive the Afghan state and society. The Bonn agreement of November 2001 charted a political reconstruction through an interim administration, transitional government, national elections, and loya jirga, (grand assembly).

Without an international presence at Bonn that offered encouragement and applied pressures, the accord probably would not have taken place. The accord gave testimony to a new level of international engagement for at least the immediate future. Subsequent meetings among donor countries and international creditors have given additional indication that a credible and substantial commitment of assistance is in the offing. The reconstruction process is not expected to proceed smoothly due to domestic and foreign detractors who are determined to try to undermine or exploit it. But in early 2002, at least, the prospects look reasonably bright for expanding emergency relief and for progress in coordinating long-range programs of reconstruction.

Although this essay is mainly about the rebuilding of the Afghan economy and physical infrastructure, an underlying theme here is that Afghan political and economic reconstruction mutually reinforce each other. Though both concerns need not proceed at the same pace, a serious lag in one will eventually jeopardize the other. Plainly, humanitarian relief cannot wait for political issues to be resolved, and longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction may have to be set in motion before permanent political institutions are in place. Rehabilitation and resettlement activities may strengthen transitional political institutions by providing direction and purpose. Moreover, investment in human and physical capital can be the political tool that induces cooperation among political actors. Control over the resources of reconstruction furnishes blatant rewards to win over those reluctant or resistant. Material incentive is a critical element in inducing regional and local “strongmen” to keep security and to feel a stake in the projects under way in their areas of control. An Afghanistan with energies devoted primarily to its rebuilding can, in time, transform political realities, creating the political space in which new political figures and interests can emerge.

Because reconstruction is intimately tied with governance, little or no progress is possible in delivering short and long-term development programs without a reasonably secure environment. Aside from policing, the rule of law requires a rejuvenated judicial system that, as in the past, was both codified and shari’a-based. These practices will additionally give the assurances needed to encourage private-sector investment. Above all, sustained development demands that all Afghans be full participating partners in identifying the priorities for reconstruction, particularly at the community level. For decisions to be realized, a system of representation is required that not only allows people to gain confidence in their leaders but also to see earlier evidence of the fruits of their participation.

**Governance and Administration**

Afghanistan for the foreseeable future will be a weak state. As history has instructed, Kabul should not try to exert intrusive rule. The fate of the communist regime in 1978-79 reminds us what happens when Afghan rulers try forcefully to penetrate the society...
with their ideologies. There is wide agreement, then, that programs must be funded at the provincial and district levels. A decentralized distribution of resources offers the best chance for maximum impact on the largest number of people, giving the most promise that projects will meet real needs identified in the community. As much as possible, the effort must work through local institutions where they exist, and induce their formation, where they do not. Dispersing assistance directly to the local level will obviate the need for a large, centralized aid bureaucracy in Kabul, itself a recipe for serious corruption and mismanagement. Nevertheless, even with the dispersal of political power, a viable central government must exist for reconstruction to go forward, even if that center exercises only limited authority. Ideally, national institutions are best positioned to provide oversight and coordination to projects. The involvement of finance, foreign affairs, revenue, and customs ministries may be indispensable. The former king and a loya jirga can be useful in providing legitimacy by giving externally funded programs an Afghan stamp of approval. Furthermore, aid agencies and the creditor community, not to mention other states, are accustomed to working with central governments. At a minimum, international and Afghan state actors need some national entity and officials to hold responsible.

Admittedly, reconstruction channeled locally provides valuable patronage, enhancing the power of local leaders. Those with access to funds and the ability to use them will acquire influence that carries beyond the reconstruction process. To the fullest extent possible, efforts should be made to keep these influentials from diverting the resources. Assistance channeled through experienced NGOs can minimize that outcome. Where they exist, it may also be possible to work mainly with shuras (local councils).

Some siphoning off of recovery aid can be tolerated and, to a degree, controlled. There is a price to pay for gaining the cooperation of local commanders and others. But it must have a material basis. Most need a stake in the reconstruction process if it is to go forward. It may also be possible to coopt these individuals by allowing them to become part of the economic planning of their areas. The hope is that they will conclude that their influence and political clout, not to mention opportunities for personal gain, are better served with economic development that also enriches their communities. Strong popular demand for recovery in the countryside may work best to deter locally powerful figures from concentrating solely on smuggling or drug trafficking. Over time, many traditional authority and military figures may not be able to compete for development resources. A new social and political order could emerge and bring to the fore leaders better equipped to manage the reconstruction.

The delivery of services and completion of development projects require some demobilization of militias and efforts to disarm the population. For some time, it may be impossible to confiscate any but heavy weapons. While multinational troops will initially provide protection for leaders and some relief operations, they must also assist early on in the recruiting and training of an urban police, a force of gendarmes assigned outside the cities, and eventually the absorption of anti-Taliban fighters into a national army. Gendarmes and the army can participate in public works projects and de-mining operations. In the short term, they can help with food-delivery assistance and over the long term be trained with development-related skills that they can apply as civilians.
Programs
The price tag will be high because much of the rebuilding must start from scratch. Recovery will absorb between $1 and $1.5 billion yearly, and will require from five to ten years of outside direct assistance. After meeting emergency humanitarian needs, the emphasis is expected to be on those programs that are income-generating, and are focused initially on the country’s infrastructure. Programs must be fast-dispersing, and, where possible, labor-intensive. As already noted, community-level development projects seem best designed to maximize returns on the investment.

Planners hope for a more or less seamless transition from humanitarian relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction. Many programs with longer-term goals can be incorporated into those designed to meet immediate basic needs. The rebuilding of the road system must receive the highest attention among reconstruction goals. Housing, water, and electricity must also be of priorities. Agriculture will obviously be important to create employment, and a counter-narcotics strategy will try to discourage poppy growing through crop substitution. Rebuilding the country’s irrigation systems and providing access to credit for farmers are indispensable, as is de-mining if agricultural projects are to go forward. In time the rebuilding of schools and hospitals must also be on the agenda, as well as small industry, eventually. By also focusing on civic education and support for civil society, people ordinarily will be able to participate in the political discourse and be employed to aid in decision-making, setting priorities for reconstruction.

No programs can be successful if they do not allow the large majority of refugees to return to their home areas. Aside from the internally displaced persons, there is the daunting problem of repatriation of refugees from abroad, all of whom should be encouraged to return no faster than they can be safely and effectively absorbed. The first priority concerning refugees is to feed the returnees and provide some shelter. Women must be targeted for health, education, and employment, as well as efforts to ensure that resources get to remote areas, including the central highlands. (See Afghanistan’s Minister of Women’s Affairs, Sima Samar’s essay in this Update.) Because many refugee families have spent a generation in camps, separated from their land, those returning to agricultural pursuits may not have basic farming skills and may need assistance to survive. Land-tenure disputes are inevitable, and mechanisms of adjudication are needed.

The Afghan diaspora is expected to make a contribution to reconstruction. Many of those returning from Iran will have strong skills in the construction industry, and large numbers from Pakistan are experienced in entrepreneurial activities. Those better-educated Afghans who have settled in Europe and the United States can bring back special skills and financial resources, but only a relatively small proportion are expected to return for any but short periods. The most immediately available pool of talent for reconstruction as well as administrative roles resides in the many dedicated and skilled Afghans who have worked with NGOs, most of which are foreign-sponsored. There are at least a thousand individuals who can be enlisted in a reasonably short time.

The International Role
The funding of programs will come from bilateral contributions from donor countries, multinational grants, and the international financial agencies. No recovery program carries a good prognosis without some assurances of long-term commitment by the major donors toward a fund that is large
enough to be credible and also demonstrates international confidence in those who have assumed power in Afghanistan. Many argue for a single trust fund for development aid. To have multiple funds is to invite duplication and waste and, potentially, competition from various countries for influence. A single fund does not have to detract from efforts to inaugurate quick-dispersing, high-impact programs aimed at the community level. International conferences of potential donors have already begun to focus on the mechanisms and organization of reconstruction activities.

Many argue that the UN is a necessary catalyst for reconstruction, ideally within a unified UN structure such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UN would take the lead in attracting donor countries and supervising the larger effort. A UN-named reconstruction czar could provide visibility and ensure better coordination of programs. (At this date this has not occurred, though Lakhdar Brahimi has a good assistant and the AIA has named Ashraf Ghani for this task). The World Bank and regional banks also expect to be brought into the planning and financing, especially over the long run. Many NGOs, accustomed to coordinating with UN agencies, already have in-country experience and will be delegated responsibilities for the delivery of assistance. National aid organizations, with their experiences in large-scale engineering projects, may be indispensable for major construction projects such as roads, bridges, and power systems. The idea of having individual countries “adopt” a ministry for providing technical assistance has its advocates. Although there is a history of linking ministries and programs with particular donor countries, the concern is that a bilateral approach may fragment the new government. On the other hand, if assistance is sometimes useful to encourage domestic cooperation, international development agencies and NGOs are not as comfortable as bilateral aid donors with using aid as a political weapon.

Regional states will, of course, be tempted to continue to pursue their commercial and national interests in Afghanistan, and geopolitics will not disappear in the postconflict period. However, for all neighboring countries, political stability in Afghanistan is currently preferable to the civil turmoil of the recent past. For the short term at least, these neighbors seem content to support Afghan recovery and accept assurances that governments in Kabul will not be unfriendly. No neighboring country has territorial designs on Afghanistan that aim at absorbing those with crossborder ethnic and religious affinities, though they are likely to defend the right of minorities to be treated equitably. All the same, regional states may try to steer reconstruction on behalf of ethnic or sectarian interest groups.

Afghans have no problem with foreign assistance; they have always welcomed those who have come to assist them, and know the difference between those who seek to help and those have come to dominate them. Often, outsiders who have stressed Afghan independence and xenophobia as barriers have exaggerated these features to excuse their unwillingness to make a commitment to fund aid programs.

**Conclusion**

International assistance is indispensable to Afghanistan if it is to avoid falling back toward the anarchy of a warlord system. Though the initial focus must be on meeting humanitarian needs, only a sustained international commitment on several dimensions of reconstruction offers any hope for political stability and real improvement in the
lives of the Afghan people. Furthermore, without progress in the country's rehabilitation, Afghanistan seems likely to become once again a source of threat to its neighbors and to raise global concerns over terrorism and drug production and trafficking.

Some will contend that law and order must be largely restored before a full-scale reconstruction effort can get underway. Pockets of resistance to the interim government, from remnants of both the Taliban regime and the disaffected elements that fought them, are likely to be present for some time. Certainly, projects that cannot be given protection will be discouraged or abandoned, and the full benefits never realized. But serious delays in commencing programs will undermine the country's new rulers and raise doubts about the international commitment. It may, therefore, be necessary to push ahead with reconstruction under less than ideal conditions as the best means of creating new political stakes and a constituency dedicated to building the institutions of responsible government. By stimulating legitimate economic activity, a strong counterforce can be created to check or transform the country's political rogues. A reviving economy stands a good chance of displacing those who view the spoils of war as their preferred option.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan can have regional economic implications. Realization of a healthier economic life can energize trade region-wide. An Afghanistan that will be subsidized for many years from international sources should become a market for many of the goods and services available in the region. With roads improved and secure, commerce can move freely across the land and, of course, there can be a revisiting of the idea that the country could serve as a site of gas and oil pipelines, to the benefit of all parties.

Even with the promised contributions of bilateral and multilateral international donors and the dedicated activities of UN agencies and NGOs, the principal responsibility for rebuilding will fall to the Afghans themselves. Afghan reconstruction will fail to meet its aims if a reasonably inclusive, responsible political system does not emerge along with economic improvements. The post-Taliban period is bound to leave many disappointed with the degree of political and social integration attained, and the quality of civic activity and popular participation. Yet, there must be some progress in these areas if the economic and human benefits of recovery are to be widely felt. The country's leaders will have to intelligently manage contentious issues arising from a foreign dependency, unsettled social mores, and ethnic sensitivities for the reconstruction process to stay on track. The Afghans and the international community have received another chance to accomplish what escaped them a decade ago. As of early 2002, they are off to a good, albeit slow start.
Introduction
The Bonn agreement of November 2001, which was reached between warlords and political elites, provides a framework for building peace in Afghanistan; it must be maintained and implemented in its entirety. The agreement also provides for civic participation in the process of peace-building and recovery. Practical steps, however, are needed to ensure the realization of a lasting peace for Afghans, and the subsequent development of their country.

What does “civil society” mean in the Afghan context, and who are the actors and stakeholders that need to be involved in the process? Civil society in the context of Afghanistan is a vague concept, because the country has never had democracy and democratic institutions. Peace is a process that requires a social foundation capable of maintaining itself through permanent self-nurturance.

The first section of this essay centers on the development of peace as it pertains to a civil society. The second section analyzes the questions: How can civil society in Afghanistan best be strengthened for peace-building? And what role can the international community play to encourage peace within Afghanistan? The last section presents context-specific strategies for peace-building.

I. Civil Society
Civil society in its modern conception primarily refers to citizenship and social relations between people and state, and has been defined by Kees Biekart in his *Politics of Civil Society Building* as the “totality of intermediate associational (public) realm between the state and its citizens.” This realm is populated by organizations that are separate from the state, but enjoy autonomy in relation to the state.

Civil society is now recognized as an important and legitimate actor in the realm of peace-building and democratization, along with the government and the private sector. Strong civil-society institutions, interacting with the state, can create innovative solutions to complex social and economic problems. A vibrant and diverse civil society can also provide an atmosphere of accessibility so that poor and marginalized people are able to participate in their own social, economic, cultural, and political development.

The strengths of civil-society organizations largely depend on their respective constituencies. If these organizations are formed voluntarily by citizens outside the government, chances are that such organizations will gain strength, become vibrant and inclusive, and will survive the political turmoil that may occur.

In totalitarian societies, Saunders argues in *A Public Process*, most organizations are spawned and controlled by a single dominant, quasi-official political party. When totalitarian rule collapses, those organizations are dismissed, and in some cases, the initial vacuum is filled by armed groups vying for control.

During communist rule (1978–92), Afghanistan witnessed a large number of civic organizations that were established mainly by the government in order to serve the interests of the regimes rather than to promote or protect any social value. With the collapse of the regime, these organizations have also disappeared. The exposure of
Afghans to the outside world has created a new set of civil-society organizations that participate in the delivery of humanitarian aid and rehabilitation efforts. Jawwed Ludin argues, however, that most of these efforts do not begin at a grassroots level and are indistinguishable from other foreign NGOs working in Afghanistan. At present, the majority of Afghan NGOs more easily identify with international organizations than with Afghan society. This is because a majority of these organizations have been established by those in exile; their organizational growth and institutional development have been hampered by insufficient funding and the lack of a secure national environment. However, Afghan NGOs, along with other international actors, have played an important role in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and will continue to actively take part in the recovery process.

**Shuras**  
Afghanistan is also witnessing the emergence of social institutions at the community level, which, according to Sima Wali, President of Refugee Women in Development, is largely due to the collapse of state institutions in the last twenty-two years. In some areas these social institutions, known as Shuras, have provided services within their communities. The word Shura has Qura’nic/Arabic origins and means “deliberation.” The term was popularized by the Mujahidin political parties during the Soviet occupation and pertained to military operations inside Afghanistan; since then the word has been commonly used. The traditional function of the Shura is to resolve internal and external conflicts and to take care of communal chores. But the absence of state institutions as well as with the need for local representation in aid agencies, have led the Shura to become increasingly involved in the implementation of aid programs. In some areas, Shuras were established locally without assistance, while elsewhere aid organizations were instrumental in the establishment of the Shuras to ensure local participation in their programs.

Although the establishment of other civil society organizations with more formal structures will take time, for example, trade unions, women’s groups, teachers’ associations, youth groups, farmers’ associations, existing structures such as NGOs and, most important, the Shura should be mobilized and their capacities strengthened to ensure Afghan ownership of reconstruction and peace-building.

However, a word of caution: the Shura is entirely a male forum and runs the risk of isolating the female population, which can play an even more significant role in the process of peace-building. Concerted efforts are required for the creation of space and opportunities so that women’s organizations can begin to flourish and participate in the process of peace-building and development.

**II. Capacity-Building**

At present, there is a growing recognition of the dire need for capacity-building at all levels. Given the social, political, and economic devastation and, in particular, the collapse of state institutions, capacity-building is an enormous task.

The term “capacity development” was only recently introduced into development jargon. One peace scholar sees the term as broadly used, stating that it may “encompass any outside intervention or input aimed at increasing the organizational or technical capacity of an NGO” for better implementation of its programs. Along the same lines, another sees capacity development as “strengthening people’s capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to organise themselves to act on these.”
For peace-building, capacity development has to be defined along the same lines, because in any context it should enable men and women to organize and to bring about positive changes in their lives. Capacity development should therefore “stimulate self-confidence of a community, and faith and its ability to recognise its potential” to achieve social justice, security, and constructive transformation of conflict.

Capacity development for peace-building has to be part and parcel of social, economic, and political recovery rather than an isolated activity. It must be a response to the social and institutional devastations of war. At the social level, capacity development should deal with attitudinal change in order to overcome fear and distrust; facilitate a safe space for social interaction and mutual cooperation; and create a capacity for peaceful resolution of conflict. At the institutional level, capacity development should underpin existing institutions and create new ones capable of building peace and fostering development, social justice, and human rights.

The first step should be the encouragement of the creation of a representative Shura that could symbolize the needs and aspiration of the entire community. Such a feature would signify the community’s cohesion, solidarity, and trust of the population. Yet the Shura must have sufficient authority to maintain unity within the community and to mobilize people for the common good.

The second step is to put the Shura into the delivery position, that is, to involve them in the implementation of aid programs (see box). Such a step also enhances the Shura’s authority to demand compliance with and respect for social norms and values from the local population as well as to prompt their participation in and contribution to recovery programs. Active involvement of the Shura in recovery programs has, in a number of cases, been instrumental in transforming a potentially violent conflict into a joint venture.

**Reconciliation through Development Interventions**

The Khas Urozgan district is located in southwest Afghanistan and has a mixed population of Pashtuns (65 percent) and Hazaras (35 percent). During the war a local dispute resulted in armed conflict with many losses of life and property on both sides.

The Afghan Development Association (ADA) was separately approached by the Shuras of both communities for the reconstruction of an irrigation canal. The ADA, being aware of the relationships of the communities, responded positively and made a deliberate choice to use the opportunity and help people overcome their differences. A tripartite agreement between the ADA and the two Shuras was signed concerning the

—joint use of canal;
—contribution of the communities toward the project;
—safety of the project labor and ADA staff members;
—joint supervision and monitoring.

When the actual work started, fear and mistrust were replaced by a sense of interdependence and cooperation as communication between the communities was gradually restored.

*Source: ADA Annual Report 1998*
The third step is to develop the capacities of local Shuras, in managerial issues, development, leadership, conflict resolution, and problem-solving. As discussed above, capacity development in a village context should be more than a one-time event. Training must be complemented by actions that help the trainee put new learning into practice. The problem-solving workshop is an appropriate tool for capacity development in the context of peace-building. The workshop does not solely focus on content transfer, but it initiates a process through which participants are given the opportunity to work on real problems affecting their lives. To ensure a positive impact, trainees at the initial stages should work together with the Shura members on resolving local conflicts and continue to support them in the long run.

It is important to remember the role of village mullahs in Afghan society. Because of their position, they are able to influence positive outcomes at the community level, provided they are involved in the process of recovery and peace-building. The recent experience of the capacity-building efforts of the Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), an Afghan NGO, is indicative of the fact that mullahs have been instrumental in the dissemination of acquired knowledge and skills on village-level peace-building and have actively participated in constructive resolution of conflicts facing these communities.

The prerequisites for capacity-building for the Shura are the existence of institutional competence for peace-building and the promotion of participatory development, social justice, and human rights within the operational agency.

The reality in Afghanistan in regard to the presence of competent NGOs is, unfortunately, not very promising. Many aid organizations suffer from a lack of institutional competence and developmental and management skills. Apart from a few NGOs, there is general unfamiliarity with the concepts of peace and peace-building in the aid system working in Afghanistan. This is because of political conditionalities of aid and lack of investment in human resources development in Afghanistan, on the one hand, and the notions of peace, peace-building, and conflict resolution, on the other hand, have only been recently added in the humanitarian jargon. Particularly, the how of peace-building in the humanitarian context is not yet well articulated by the literature, nor are there shining examples from other similar situations.

For a sustained peace, as well as for development and reconstruction, to flourish, the capacities of not only the public sector but also that of aid agencies (including the UN and NGOs) and civil society at large must be strengthened. International participants can play an active role in this endeavor. They can not only provide funding for capacity-building, but can also train and provide accompaniment to the internal actors on effective management of recovery programs and promotion of internationally accepted norms of social justice, human rights, and democracy. Another major contribution that international actors can make to strengthen civil society is to facilitate exposure visits of Afghans to the regional countries that have undergone postwar transitions. One area that is least developed in Afghanistan and needs higher attention is advocacy, which is crucial for the strength of civil society.

The conclusion of the Bonn agreement has in fact stimulated the emergence of numerous Afghan organizations and associations formed voluntarily outside the realm of government. Such organizations are in dire need of support for capacity-building and institutional development to become viable.
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civil-society organizations. One strategy for capacity-building of these new civil society organizations might be to have operational NGOs enter into joint ventures with the new civil society organizations to enhance their job-training skills. These organizations also qualify for direct funding that can help them gain experience and grow institutionally.

The current practice of most donors putting their money into big NGOs should, at the very least, be questioned. This trend has greatly diminished the space available for small organizations, which are more genuine in both nature and mandate than the large NGOs.

The best way to address the pressing need for capacity-building on a long-term basis in Afghanistan is to establish an institution capable of providing training, consultancy, and accompaniment in the fields of management, development, social justice, human rights, leadership, peace-building, conflict resolution, and financial management.

III. Toward an Effective Strategy for Peace-Building

Peace-building strategies should be informed by both the context of conflict and the understanding of the notions of peace and peace-building. Conflict in Afghanistan is characterized by the disintegration of state institutions; the manipulation of political power; militarized politics; devastation of social and economic spheres; and a prevailing culture of violence. A theoretical understanding of the notions of peace and peace-building that pertain to current conditions of life in Afghanistan can help shape an effective strategy for dealing with these conditions.

Conceptual Definition

What Is “Peace”?

A working definition of “peace” is: the existence of workable relationships, active associations, and planned cooperation among persons and groups for achieving greater aims such as justice, security, and constructive transformation of conflict.

The word “peace” is commonly known as the “absence of war,” but peace scholars almost have always defined the “absence of war” as “negative peace,” a condition in which the potential and means of violence exist in the society and continue to block the positive development of a disenfranchised population. In contrast, scholars who stress the need for “positive peace” do not offer a unified description of the term, which involves more than the absence of war. This essay focuses on definitions of a “positive peace.”

Adam Curle describes “positive peace” as a relationship that on a personal scale means friendship, and as an understanding sufficiently strong to overcome any differences that might occur on a larger scale. Peaceful relationships would imply active association, planned cooperation, and intelligent effort to forestall or resolve potential conflicts. Along the same lines, James O’Connell refers to “positive peace” as free cooperation among persons and groups for aims that include security, justice, and freedom.

Peace articulates the need for building the associations in civil society, by which people and groups are able to actively relate and cooperate with each other. Conventional political settlements often fail to heal historic wounds. However, the refocusing of misperceptions can transform enemy stereotypes into human beings and revitalize shared interests. This can be achieved through a sustained process of peace-building based on the participation of all segments of society.
What Is “Peace-Building”?  
“Peace-building” is a concept widely debated in peace literature and is often broadly used to include a wide range of activities aimed at building peace. There is general agreement among scholars of peace research on the ultimate goal of peace-building. However, owing to different theoretical understandings of peace, no unified definition of peace-building can be made. This essay only presents definitions that are in line with the working definitions of peace discussed above and that can realistically inform the practice.

—Peace-building is defined by Jonathan Goodhand and David Hulme as the “promotion of institutional and socioeconomic measures, at the local or national level, to address the underlying cause of conflict.”

—John Paul Lederach suggests that peace-building be understood as “a comprehensive term that encompasses the full array of stages and approaches needed to transform conflict toward sustainable, peaceful relations and outcomes.”

—Harold H. Saunders states: “Peace-building and immunizing a society against renewed conflict require both strengthening, restructuring or restoring the relationships that fragment as conflict looms and then reconnecting them to make peace.”

Common patterns can be observed in these interpretations. They include the specific issues of: developing institutional capacities for the constructive transformation of conflict and maintenance of peace; and the promotion of peaceful relationships that lie at the heart of “positive peace.” Here, peace-building is seen as a process that must be carried forward by people and social institutions. Islamic teaching similarly regards peace-building as an unending human challenge “to eliminate fitnah (elements of war) and reinforce certain values such as Adl (justice), Ihsan (benevolence), and Rahmah (compassion). These principles constitute a solid foundation for peace in society.

Based on definitions presented above and on the Islamic perspective, a workable definition of peace-building is as follows: a building and strengthening of social, political, and economic structures for constructive transformation of conflict and the promotion of social values such as benevolence, compassion, cooperation, and justice among persons and groups.

Community-based Peace-Building
Parallel to political negotiations, community-based peace-building is an alternative that has to be considered. The community-based approach is primarily concerned with strengthening the role of local people and their institutions or, in other words, promoting sociocultural resources for peace. Humanitarian organizations need to incorporate the creation and strengthening of sociocultural resources vis-à-vis their relief, rehabilitation, and development programs. The following objectives will constitute the basis for a comprehensive strategy for peace-building:

Objectives:

—to develop and strengthen the capacities of community institutions and that of operational agencies for constructive transformation of conflicts and promotion of respect for human rights;

—to increase the competence of community institutions and that of operational agencies on participatory approaches, human rights, and peace-building;

—to facilitate translation of knowledge into action through systematic coaching, process consultancy, and accompaniment;

—to empower local educational institutions to promote peaceful attitudes and coexistence among younger generations by the incorporation of peace education into the educational curriculum;
—to establish a mechanism (involving local Shuras and operational agencies) for conflict transformation.

The Afghan NGO, Cooperative for Peace and Unity (CPAU) is actively pursuing the above objectives by offering workshops that deal with conflict resolution. (For details of the Working With Conflict training model, please see the last section below).

Another crucial element of peace-building strategy is peace education. The widespread violence and warfare of the last twenty-one years have replaced the social norms and peaceful values of the society. Moreover, the existence of violent messages in school textbooks used in Afghanistan justifies an urgent response to the need for the promotion of a peaceful learning environment and peaceful sources of learning for Afghan schoolchildren.

Why Peace Education?

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.
—Preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO

Peace education is another realistic step to be taken in the context of a protracted armed conflict such as that in Afghanistan. Even in a normal situation, people learn aggressive behavior from their environment and their interaction with others. As Ian Harris observes:

"People learn warlike behavior from parents, friends, teachers, cultural norms, social institutions, and the mass media. Violent images promoted in the culture reinforce violent behavior and instill the belief that aggression must be regulated through violent means."

Peace education should, therefore, promote the desire for peace and also teach peace-making skills so that human beings can learn nonviolent ways of handling conflicts.

American peace educator Betty Reardon defines peace education as “learning intended to prepare the learners to contribute toward the achievement of peace.” This definition views peace education as a continuous process, because conflict is an integral part of life and of peace itself, according to many scholars. Peace is never completed but is always in the process of being made.

Peace education has to contribute to the social growth of all children if it is to help them develop characteristics essential for the attainment of peace: a sense of dignity and self-worth, confidence, communication skills, ethical awareness, and empathy. Peace education in war-torn societies should focus on strategies to achieve attitudinal change at both individual and communal levels.

Peace education in the context of Afghanistan has to confront directly the forms of violence that dominate the society at large. It must be able to deepen understanding of the forces and factors behind the ongoing war and the elements that may create social imbalances in the future, as well as the ways and means to peacefully confront such factors. Thus, the major task of a peace-education program must be to prioritize the institutionalization of the program. This task would entail introducing an alternative policy with a strong peace component, that would help to replace current attitudes.

Fortunately, a number of steps have already been taken by two Afghan organizations—CPAU and Sanayee Institute of Education and Learning (SIEL)—to jointly implement peace-education programs in the refugee schools in Peshawar, Pakistan. Peace educators have been trained, educational
material has been developed, and actual implementation in a large number of refugee schools has begun. To expand the program into the educational institutions inside Afghanistan, further investment on curriculum development, and teacher training as well as negotiations with local authorities needs to occur. Concerned governmental institutions, school authorities, parents, education experts, the UN, and NGOs should all be involved in curriculum development for peace education at the national level. Steps are also needed at this stage to familiarize the concerned authorities with ongoing programs and to develop their capacities for future implementation.

A special institution that is responsible for the administration of nationwide peace education must be established. As a strategy, peace education relies on widespread support in order for civil society to develop the capabilities for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

**Working With Conflict – A Training Model Operated By the Cooperative for Peace and Unity (CPAU).**

The course on Working With Conflict/ Do No Harm (WWC/DNH) consists of three main concepts: tools, concepts, and skills.

1. **Tools for Conflict Analysis:**
   - **Conflict Square:** To analyze a conflict in relation to goals and behaviors (compatible and incompatible) of the parties.
   - **Conflict Triangle:** This tool helps us to analyze a conflict situation in relation to attitudes, behaviors and context.
   - **Conflict Mapping:** Mapping is used to visualize a conflict situation in terms of parties, their supporters, and their possible allies.
   - **Conflict Style:** Refers to problem-solving, compromise, avoidance, control, and accommodation. In addition to helping us become aware of our own style of conflict, this tool enables us to see the need for problem-solving as an ideal style and, depending on the relationship, utilize the need to use other styles, too.
   - **Fire Analogy with Conflict:** This tool guides us to see the different stages that a conflict goes through. It also enables us to become aware that conflict is not bad, as it is the basis for growth and development.

2. **Concepts:**
   - **Wars:** The aim of this session is two-fold: a) to enable the participants to broaden their understanding of war, its nature and root causes; and b) to analyze the social impact of the ongoing war on Afghan society, as well as to examine the role of aid in addressing the “social impacts.”
   - **Conflict:** The aim is to broaden our understanding of what causes a conflict, with the main emphasis on the fact that conflict is an inevitable part of our lives, and the challenge for us is how to transform it peacefully rather resorting to violence.
   - **Violence:** In this session types and levels of violence (individual/group and structural) and nonviolence are discussed.
   - **Peace:** The objective is to identify the link between negative peace, which is the absence of war, and positive peace, which is the absence of violence, and discover how we can move toward positive peace. The existence of negative peace in many parts of Afghanistan should be taken as an opportunity to work for positive peace—this means equality, social justice, and the eradication of all forms of violence from society.
   - **Power:** The aim is to create an understanding of how power can best be used in relation to peace-building and conflict transformation.
   - **Identity:** The aim is to create awareness on the elements that make up our identity and why a threat to any of these elements leads to conflict.

3. **Skills:** Skill development is one of the
main components of the training workshops. The sessions on skill development include communication, negotiation/mediation, and facilitation skills. Different methodologies are applied to make sure that learning takes place by doing.

4. Do No Harm (DNH)
The do-no-harm part of the course (DNH) concerns the concept of learning theory by practicing. The analytical framework, developed by the Local Capacities for Peace Project, is a tool to help aid workers think creatively concerning the administration and delivery of aid in light of local capacities for peace. At the very least, it helps aid organizations minimize the negative impact of their aid programming on conflict/tension.

5. Strategy Development
The last part of the course is devoted to developing strategies for participants to use what they have learned and then put this into action. Strategy development is very much a result of the process of mutual learning between the CPAU and the participating agency. The main objective behind strategy development is to guide a process whereby the participants identify the areas for practical application of the course into their work, in partnership with CPAU, which will, to the fullest extent possible, support their initiatives.

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Further Reading


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Marvin G. Weinbaum is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and in 1999 assumed the position of analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State. He is also currently an adjunct professor at Georgetown University. He joined the Illinois faculty in 1965 and served for fifteen years as the director of the Program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. He has held Fulbright Research Fellowships for Egypt (1981-82) and Afghanistan (1989-90), was a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (1996-97), and Scholar-in-Residence at the Middle East Institute (1998-99). He received awards from the Social Science Research Council, the Ford Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, IREX, the American Political Science Association, and others, as well as having won several teaching awards at Illinois, including the Luckman award, the LAS College award, and a Burlington-Northern faculty achievement award. Dr. Weinbaum’s research focuses on issues of political economy, democratization, and national security. He is the author or editor of six books, including *South Asia Approaches the Millennium* (coedited with Chetan Kumar, 1995), and *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Resistance and Reconstruction* (1994), and has written numerous essays about Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, as well as Egypt and Turkey. Recent publications include an essay on Afghanistan for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and chapters for forthcoming edited volumes dealing with the history of modern Afghan-U.S. relations, human rights in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, and reconstruction politics in Afghanistan. He has a Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Mohammed Ehsan Zia has been Manager for Human Resources Development at Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) since 1998. In this capacity, he designs programs for organizational and institutional development of NCA and partner NGOs geared toward peace-building and promotion of the concept, "Do No Harm," in the aid community working in Afghanistan. Prior to his current position at NCA, he was a program manager there (1994-98). In 1993, he was Administrative Manager for the German Afghan Foundation. From 1994 to 2000, Zia worked on four initiatives toward peace-building and development in Afghanistan, the most recent being a community-based pilot project that seeks the integration of development and rehabilitation activities with peace-building. Other initiatives include the establishment of Co-operation for Peace and Unity where he served as chairman (1996-99). He has also been involved in initiatives on urban recovery, local capacities for peace/Do No Harm, NGOs, and peace-building in Afghanistan. Zia’s other areas of expertise include community development, human resources development, conflict analysis, and NGO-management development, among others. He received his master’s degree in Postwar Recovery Studies at the University of York, U.K., in 2000. He speaks English, Urdu, Dari, and Pushto languages.