

Effective development requires security

Roberta Cohen

POST-WAR AFGHANISTAN is an unfortunate but telling example of how lack of security in a country can undermine economic development. In large measure because of the poor security in many parts of the country, agencies charged with Afghanistan's reconstruction and development have been reluctant to carry out major road building, establish communications networks, repair irrigation systems, and undertake land reclamation projects.

The Tokyo donors' conference in January 2002 that pledged US\$4.5 billion for reconstruction over a five-year period failed to emphasise the critical importance of a secure and

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stable environment for achieving economic and political development. Nor did President Bush, when speaking of a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, mention the need to bolster public security in the country. This unnatural separation of development and security goals has produced what one observer called a Catch-22: 'Without security, the money for reconstruction won't come. Without reconstruction, the Afghan government can neither support nor protect its population.'¹ According to Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, 'It is only logical that without adequate security, reconstruction and investment will stall, encouraging the illicit narcotics and arms sectors to flourish again.'²

It comes as no surprise that to date, less than half of the funds

pledged by donors in Tokyo for Afghan reconstruction in 2002 have been received, and the funds that have arrived have gone largely to relief, not reconstruction and development. Slow bureaucratic procedures and red tape account for some of the delay; so too does Afghanistan's absence of infrastructure. But a major deterrent



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Much of Kabul was ruined during years of fighting, especially during the 1990s, when rival mujahadeen groups fired on civilian areas. Many families still live amid the rubble.

is the lack of security. Development programmes simply cannot go forward in the rural areas when it is unsafe for engineers, truck drivers, merchants, international investors and technicians to travel there freely. 'When we go outside Kabul,' staff members of the United States Agency for International Development told the author, 'we must do so with military escort.'

About 40% of the 2 million returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have crowded into

Kabul, Herat and other cities because it is there that they can find a modicum of security and work. As a result, slums have sprouted up around the capital and tremendous pressure has been placed on its already weak infrastructure. Of those who do return to their villages, many uproot again because of unsafe and unsustainable conditions. Most serious is that this failure to return home has slowed up the rebuilding of farms and the replanting of crops, both urgently needed to restore Afghanistan to food self-sufficiency and free it from dependence on international relief.

For women, lack of security has

undermined their ability to integrate into the economic and political life of the country. Women outside Kabul are reported to be afraid of harassment or attack if they don't wear their burkhas, if they take jobs outside the home, if they participate more fully in civil society. The Minister for Women's Affairs pleaded before the United Nations Security Council in April to expand the UN's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) outside Kabul. Security, she said, is the



Refugees carry supplementary rations from a food distribution site near Herat.

main prerequisite for women's broader participation in public life. Afghanistan's development will certainly be crippled if more than half the population is not able to participate.

The Minister for Women's Affairs is right. ISAF, the UN force, should be enlarged from its 5000 troops and allowed to assume protection functions outside of Kabul. This would

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lend authority to the new central government until a national army and police are put into place, help deter criminal elements, and show the seriousness of the international community in bringing stability and development to Afghanistan. But the Bush administration has actively blocked the creation of an effective international force on the grounds that it would distract from its overall military purpose of defeating the Taliban and al-Qa'ida. Its overwhelming fear of

becoming bogged down in 'nation building' has made it reluctant to acknowledge the deteriorating security situation in the country.

US military priorities have also led to the arming and financing of warlords, or 'regional governors' as they are euphemistically called, because of their help in the war against the Taliban and terrorism. The impact of supporting them has been to undermine the government of President Hamid Karzai, as well as the efforts of the development community to strengthen the central government and foster democratic local government.

Support channelled to warlords has other consequences as well. In many areas of the country dominated by the warlords, especially in the north, there have been cases of humanitarian and development workers being kidnapped, robbed, raped and killed—often by armed groups aligned with or protected by the warlords. Between January and August, the UN documented more than 70 'incidents' involving aid agencies, including cases of rape, looting and firing on UN vehicles.³ The United States and the United Nations periodically

have to shut down their aid programs because of outbreaks of violence between feuding warlords.

The bright spot on the horizon is that the United States has begun to understand better the link between security and reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. To bolster the central government's authority, the United States is training an Afghan army while Germany has begun to train a police force. In the meantime, US special forces and civil affairs specialists are beginning to shift from exclusively focusing on terrorism to trying, in partnership with newly trained Afghan troops, to defuse local conflicts, mitigate inter-factional fighting, and help with the building of roads, schools and other development projects. Most notably, the US Congress has just voted to spend US\$3.3 billion over the next four years for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

More is needed, however, since Washington still refuses actively to promote ISAF's expansion or contribute troops to it even though President Karzai, UN officials and aid agencies all say this is crucial to improving security and development throughout the country. It is time to recognise that the war on terrorism will not be won through military means alone. Long-term stability can only be assured through reconstruction and development in a secure environment. That applies not just to Afghanistan, but to other countries in conflict as well. ■

Roberta Cohen is a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, where she co-directs the Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement.

1. Ian Connacher, 'U.S. Afghan Exit'. NOW Magazine, online edition, 1 August 2002.
2. A. Abdullah, 'We Must Rebuild Afghanistan', Washington Post, 24 October 2002.
3. Country Profile on Afghanistan, Norwegian Refugee Council, Global IDP Database, 26 October 2002.