Who's In Charge?

Political Fragmentation in Post-Taliban Afghanistan

Emmett M. Bloom

Acknowledgements

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Emmett Bloom

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Preface

The war in Afghanistan has played a significant role in redefining the United States' presence in the world. The war has been criticized, praised, protested and celebrated by people all around the world. It is the longest war in United States history and, at the time of this writing, has no foreseeable end. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the United States conducted the war in Afghanistan and to investigate the effects that had on Afghanistan in the context of that nation's recent history. This paper attempts to answer three main questions: First, what purpose was the US trying to achieve in Afghanistan? Second, by what processes did the US attempt to achieve these purposes? Third, what was the result of US policy on the Afghan government and its president Hamid Karzai?

The war has triggered the writing of a massive wave of literature and scholarly work on Afghanistan. There is an abundance of great scholarship on the subject, but rather few government primary sources due to top-secret classifications. The sources used in this paper have been selected because they convey scholarly professionalism on the topic or first hand experience in the region and in some cases a blend between the two.

Barnett Rubin, author of *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, is the United States' premier scholar on Afghanistan. His knowledge of the country's history and current developments has made him invaluable to the US government as a consultant and to the public as a reliable resource.

Ahmed Rashid is a Pakistani journalist who has covered events in Afghanistan since the 1980s. He is a keen observer and has a unique ability to do interviews with high-level officials that others are unable to do. He has published four books on the subject: *Jihad*, *Taliban*, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, and *Descent into Chaos*; and continues to write opinion pieces in numerous publications.

Nick B. Mills is a professor at Boston University who specializes in Afghanistan. In 2005 Mills traveled to Afghanistan and conducted months of personal interviews with president Karzai. His book, *Karzai*, gives a rare look into the president's past, values, troubles and goals. Similarly, *The Punishment of Virtue* by Sarah Chayes is the story of the author's experience in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2005. Beginning as a journalist for NPR and ending as a NGO employee, Chayes gives a vivid personal account of Afghanistan's security and political climate.

James Dobbins was the American ambassador to the Afghan resistance in 2001. As one of the nation's most experienced diplomats, his experiences, captured in *After the Taliban* and an interview with the author, illustrate the often frustrating nature of policy making. His analysis of US policy is direct and

revealing, and offers one of the few personal accounts from a US diplomat during that critical time.

Bush at War by Bob Woodward is an account of the Bush administration during the first one hundred days after the 9/11 attacks. Woodward was given access to more than fifty National Security Council meetings and conducted over one hundred interviews with people involved in decision making and the execution of the war. This includes President Bush, key war cabinet members, White house staff, State and Defense Departments officials and CIA officials.[1] His observations give the best window into the Bush administration's decision making process in the earliest period of the war. His account of the administration has not been criticized as false or fanciful.

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[1] Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York , NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2002), Rear Inside cover. Hereafter cited as Woodward.

Introduction

On a cold December morning in 2001, Hamid Karzai sat in his visiting room with a group of elders when, after a few words, a 2,000-pound bomb exploded outside his doorstep. Karzai had woken up that morning and stood atop the hill the where the bomb landed with some of his men and local children to warm himself under the sun, as he was cold from Ramadan fasting and the cool winter air. He had an important meeting that morning at which he was allowing several Taliban leaders to surrender to him amid the American invasion. However, the bombing that would have killed him, had he not received his unexpected guests, killed five of his best men, three American Special Forces commandos and several villagers. The bomb had been dropped by an American B-52 which had missed its intended target. As Karzai relocated away from the bombsite and had blood wiped from his head, he received a phone call on his satellite phone. The call came from Germany where the US sponsored Bonn Conference had been at work for the previous week negotiating and forming the structure of the Interim Afghan Government. The leaders at the Bonn Conference had selected Hamid Karzai to be the government's chairman that morning.[2] The irony of Karzai's close encounter with death at the hands of the United States and his selection as the leader of Afghanistan with the support

[2] Nick B. Mills, *Karzai* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007), 177-179. Hereafter cited as Mills.

of the United States foreshadows the turbulent relationship that the two governments would endure for the following several years.

In 2001 after the American invasion, Afghanistan found itself in a unique situation with the opportunity to rebuild and revive itself. Since 1979, Afghanistan had suffered numerous blows to its traditional government from foreign invasion, civil war, and autocratic rule. The turmoil that had unfolded since 1979 has essentially destroyed the systems of traditional Afghan governance and ushered in an era of instability, death and despair for the Afghan people. The major US-led international effort to support Afghanistan in 2001 offered a fresh start for a new Afghan government to form and provide the country with the stability it had lacked since 1978. On the other hand, the enormous international presence and influence, particularly from the United States, forced certain demands on the Afghans, which would further degrade their own sovereignty. The Afghan and American governments had similar goals for Afghanistan, namely ousting the Taliban, destroying Al Qaeda and foundations for terror networks, and creating a stable, democratic government. However, the way in which the United States approached these goals ultimately undermined the efforts of both the Americans and Afghans, leaving the future of the country volatile and uncertain.

Chapter I

A Brief History

The Old Order: Traditional Afghan Governance, 1747-1978

Since the early eighteenth century, two large, rival clans ruled Afghanistan.[3] This longstanding pattern came to be known as the Old Regime or Old Order, in reference to its method of securing legitimacy and authority. The Old Order had always been led by a Pashtun, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, which consists of roughly forty percent of the population. In the eighteenth century, Pashtun tribes, located mostly in the southeast of the country, viewed themselves as the ruling group. They considered themselves rulers and not subjects or citizens of the state.[4] Ahmed Shah Durrani, a Pashtun and the so-called "father of Afghanistan," led his "Durrani confederation" of local tribes to conquer non-Pashtun lands. In this endeavor, he succeeded in uniting most of the Pashtun tribes. However, after the conquest of non-Pashtuns, Durrani had little control over the tribes because each had its own military forces. Consequently, Ahmed Shah and the state had at best minimal and indirect control over the tribes. To consolidate his rule, Durrani worked with local khans in regions throughout the country. Khans, or tribal elders, acted as

[3] Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragementation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 45. Hereafter cited as Rubin, *Afghanistan.*
[4] Ibid, 46.

local powerbrokers because they controlled agricultural resources, and in the eyes of the Durrani state, would act as intermediaries and agents of the central government. However, khans typically governed without any regard to the central authority, since it lacked the military means to force policies on their territory. Still, this did not deter the amirs, who had authority in the central government, from trying to expand its rule. The government waged war on several tribes, many of which had never accepted the authority of the central Afghan regime, and on Pashtun groups that had staged revolts. In an effort to destabilize the tribes' power bases and subsequently cement their own, amirs in the central authority often moved rebellious Pashtun groups to non-Pashtun areas, where they would have no legitimacy as rulers, but would rather become the amir's ally in ruling over the non-Pashtuns.[5] By doing this, amirs weakened their opposition while simultaneously trying to expand the power of the central government. Yet, despite the growing authority of the central government, amirs could not completely destroy tribal power and often could not rule effectively.

In spite of this, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan in the 1880s legitimated his rule over the periphery by creating a new doctrine of sovereignty in which Afghanistan would oppose non-Muslim powers. Abdul Rahman established Sharia courts in every province and numerous sections of society recognized him as imam,[6] the leader of the Islamic community, which heightened his legitimacy

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[5] Ibid., 50.

[6] Imam, as used, will mean the leader of the Muslim community of Afghanistan.

as the ultimate ruler with the regional khans.[7] As imam, Abdul Rahman could raise and lower taxes in the provinces to support the central authority. This became significant because Islam now linked regional khans and the central government. This meant that Rahman could transcend indirect rule and institute official governors in regional provinces who would promote the authority of the central government through taxing. However, these governors "passed fixed amounts of taxes to the center and kept whatever else they took."[8] By doing this, the governors created mini-fiefdoms in which they still held authority, and continued to build upon their own power base. The way in which the central government interacted with non-Pashtun tribes, rebellious Pashtun tribes, and regional governors illustrates typical Afghan governance under the Old Order in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That is to say that the national government was not a powerful centralized institution, and that amirs and khans exercised authority from both the center and the periphery, respectively. This dispersed system of power also reflects the way in which the Old Regime would exercise its power: through patron-client relationships.

These patron-client relationships are best captured in what Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle call "neopatrimonialism." Neopatrimonialism defines government as "relationships of loyalty and dependence to the leader, [which] actually pervade the state's rational-legal institutions, creating a form of hybrid regime." This means that the official positions in bureaucracy had no real

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 51.

authority and that the positions in the field, such as the regional governors in Afghanistan, could exercise power and influence over society that "[do] not serve the public good as envisioned in the formal design." It also "enabled individual officeholders to acquire 'personal wealth and status' - rewards for which the officeholders reciprocated by 'mobilizing political support and referring all decisions upward as a mark of deference to patrons.'"[9] The system of neopatrimonialism in Afghanistan continued into the twentieth century and persisted to limit the central government's power.

Afghanistan saw numerous reforms of government in the twentieth century that attempted to unify the country. Daoud Khan, who became prime minister in 1953, led several reforms and strove to attain military superiority over his provincial rivals. With Soviet military aid, Daoud established a modern and loyal army that he used to forcefully assert the central government's dominance. "He wanted to ensure that the levers of political power remained firmly in the hands of the prime minister and a selected elite." Daoud's use of such authoritarian power in the name of his 'reform' agenda caused revolts and instability and he consequently stepped down in 1963 at the behest of King Mohammad Zahir Shah, who promised democratic liberalization of Afghanistan, with the goal of uniting the country as a formal nation-state.

Creating a distinct and functional Afghan constitution proved a great challenge. The 1964 document, described as "the epitome of eclectic borrowing

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[9] Steve Hess, "Coming to terms with Neopatrimonialism: Soviet and American Nation-Building projects in Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group), July 2010. 173. Hereafter cited as Hess.

from various Western constitutional models" combined "tribal sagacity" and Western liberal politics. It also combined Islamic religious and political ideals with secular Western institutions and laid the base for popular participation at the national and provincial levels.[10] Still, it had a large structural flaw that overemphasized the principle of the separation of powers so the "legislative and executive branches were almost totally isolated from each other." This left the executive, or monarch, in a position where it could not act or had to act without parliamentary approval. Thus, the monarchs had to act outside of the constitutional legal means, and had to work within their own patronage networks to enforce policy. Further, the parliament became "a new battleground for the contending forces of tribal and rural interests and a forum for them to discharge their grievances against each other and the central government."[11] It appears that the 1964 constitution did little to unify the country, and indeed reinforced the divisions between regional tribes and the central government. In other words, the constitution was a façade behind which the practice of neopatrimonialism continued. In fact, "average Afghans held stronger loyalty towards their individual qawm [i.e. extended family, clan, village, ethnic group, etc.] than an overarching Afghan 'nation.'"[12] The loyalty of qawms to the central government "was dependent upon the state's treatment of the qawm" which further entrenched neopatrimonial ties as the basis of authority.

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[10] Leon Poullada, "The Search for National Unity," in *Afghanistan in the 1970s*, ed. Louis Dupree and Linette Albert, (New York, NY: Praeger, 1974). 47.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Hess, 174.

Since the eighteenth century, Afghan leaders had created a society in which authority was exercised between patrons and their clients. This is also true when assessing the international context of Afghanistan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition to their reliance on patrimonial authority within the country, modern rulers grew increasingly dependent on foreign aid. Leaders at the center and the periphery appealed to foreign patrons for support, which in turn would allow these leaders to increase their own power in relation to the other players.[13] Thus, the foreign influence added another tier of patronage to the reform and constitutional movements of previous Afghan leaders. Such internal and external occurrences in Afghanistan rewarded qawms for their local loyalty and further added to the divisions between social groups and between the center with the periphery.[14] In the early 1970s Afghanistan remained a fragmented society in which the central government lacked authority over its surrounding provinces. As little as five percent of the population actually understood the concept of a nation-state, and even these individuals could find themselves recognizing tribal authority over that of the national government.[15]

The split between the national and local authorities meant that governance relied mostly on the personal qualities of leaders rather than laws and the constitution. Afghanistan's patrimonial system meant that not only was

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[13] Hess, 174.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Archaeology and the Arts in the Creation of a National Consioucness," in *Afghanistan in the 1970s* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1974), 204.

authority divided, but also that leaders could only reach out to their social networks, their circles of trust, and perhaps their tribal brethren. The leaders' influence came mostly from their moral authority, charisma and networking skills in addition to whatever sort of external aid they could receive by utilizing the same methods. Authority that is based on qualities, whatever those qualities may be, rather than being based on law, creates a situation in which leaders can exercise power when they feel it is necessary or simply feel like exercising power. That is to say, leaders could implement policies or actions on a whim and could act outside the formal structures of law established by legislation. This not only creates a system that is inconsistent, but one that is also unstable due to the amount of power numerous individuals can hold. As leaders consolidated their power around local tribes and resources, they tried to expanded their reach and conquer other lands from less competent leaders. The large divisions within Afghanistan and its consequent instability left the nation vulnerable to a number of threats, including foreign invasion.

Destroying the Old Order

Invasion, 1979-1989

In 1970s, the Soviet Union began to support political parties in the Afghan central government. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) became the main recipient of Soviet aid throughout the decade, and together the

two groups planned a government takeover. Muhammad Daoud, the former prime minister who had given way to King Zahir Shah in 1963, had retaken power in 1973 and presented an obstacle to Soviet influence and the power of the PDPA. Support from the USSR to the PDPA increased over the years, and in 1978 the USSR "wanted a united, pro-Soviet contender in position when Daoud died or fell from power."[16] In the Sawr Revolution of 1978, the PDPA deposed Mohammad Daoud and took control, establishing what it called the "Democratic Republic of Afghanistan."

Several groups around the country attempted to increase their power when the coup left the country's future uncertain for a short period. Divisions grew quickly in the PDPA, and the Khalq faction of the PDPA that had Soviet support took control of the Afghan government. The PDPA under the Khalqis commanded a USSR backed and trained military that they used "to destroy all competition for social control in all sectors of Afghan society."[17] The Khalqis targeted their repressive measures at the rival intelligentsia and the tribal aristocracy. In practice, the Khalqis used mass arrests, torture and secret executions against political activists such as Islamists, Maoists and rival parties.[18] Additionally, the Khalqis tried to reform the tribal structure of rural society. Issuing two decrees in 1978 that targeted land and marriage reform, the Khalqis tried to replace traditional "clientelism that held families together and knitted them into a qawm [with] ... direct dependence of nuclear families on the party

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[16] Rubin, *Afghanistan*. 100.
[17] Ibid., 115.
[18] Ibid.

and government bureaucracy." The reforms aimed at winning the battle for social control between the state and the rural strongmen, or rural power holders.[19] However, these decrees, while based on spreading socialism, did not give the peasants a choice between domination and exploitation on the one hand and freedom and equality on the other. Rather, their choice was between leaders they knew and trusted or leaders they did not know who believed in an alien ideology.[20] This combined with brutal repression by the military led the tribal leaders to ignore the new decrees. The modern Soviet-style military could not enforce the decrees because the Afghan state had very little governing capacity and ruled only through its temporary military supremacy. In fact, the Khalqi regime quickly folded and crumbled because it overextended the military power on which it relied so heavily during the numerous revolts that had sprung up and persisted throughout the previous year. The result of the Khalqi regime was twofold. First, as the Soviet Union began meddling in Afghan politics in the earlier part of the decade and increased national-state power, the Afghan tribes became increasingly aware of the expanding central power and responded by securing their own authority by sometimes violent means. Further, the increasing military and political intrusion across rural Afghanistan from the center solidified the tribal khans' and peasants' resistance to the expansion of state power. Second, as the Khalq regime began to fail and spin out of control,

[19] 116-118.
[20] 119.

the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to set up a friendly surrogate they could use to solidify their own power.

On Christmas Eve in 1979, the Soviet Union launched a full scale invasion of Afghanistan. The almost immediate surrender of Khalq to its PDPA rivals, Parcham and their Soviet allies ushered in a new era and leadership for Afghanistan. Parcham, led by Babrak Karmal, sought to stabilize Afghanistan and assert the PDPA's dominance over rural tribes and strongmen. In order to do this, Karmal insisted on expanding the number of Afghans participating in the Parcham-Soviet regime's bureaucracy. However, most Afghans had not received an education, and only a "narrow sliver of educated Kabuli urbanites" welcomed the call for socialism, meaning that the Parcham-Soviet alliance still had a severely limited political base located mostly in urban centers.[21] Without a strong political backing, Parcham had a hard time recruiting ardent supporters who would help establish a strong bureaucracy. Without a strong state bureaucracy, the Parcham-Soviet regime could not control governmental affairs outside Kabul and other select urban centers, and thus relied on the historic practice of co-opting rural khans and strongmen for power, until they could produce an effective state apparatus.[22] Soviet rulers had once again come to realize that they must deal with the periphery in such a way that did not allow for absolute rule from the center. Yet as khans and rural strongmen retained their power, Parcham began to increase its activity in civil society.

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[21] Hess, 177.
[22] Rubin, *Afghanistan*. 124.

The Soviet military and KhAD, the KGB-trained secret police, were the main tools used by the Parcham state to strengthen political institutions in Afghanistan. Preoccupied with threats from the periphery against Kabul, the Afghan and Soviet militaries "established a defensive zone made of multiple rings of posts extending into rural areas."[23] The military did not have the luxury of being able to extend itself firmly into the rural provinces and thus had to take a defensive stance to protect the seat of government in Kabul. Within and isolated mostly to Kabul, the KhAD secured the city and had the responsibility of eradicating opposition networks. The KhAD arrested an estimated 150,000 people within eight years. The organization used torture to extract information from the population in order to rule the cities. From 1980-1988, the KhAD executed 8,006 people. By the end of 1984, "north Afghanistan and Kabul—became, in effect, a Soviet republic." [24] The significant fact of this is that the Soviet Union, despite being a dominant world power, could only achieve genuine authority in a fraction of the country.

The prevalence of rural loyalty networks that rivaled the power of the central government re-emphasized the deep culture of patrimonialism in Afghanistan. Further, during the early years of the Soviet occupation much of what the Old Order had achieved in terms of reform over the last century was erased. The expansion of government under the Old Order, while limited, represented Afghan politics and sovereign progress. Conversely, the expansion

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[23] 137.
[24] 137-138.

of government under the Soviet Union represented an alien philosophy and military-based control within Afghan borders. This "injection" of mostly foreign doctrine and military power left the Parcham government to rule a country without either popularity or legitimacy. Thus, the government expansion under Parcham did not represent what the Old Order had tried to achieve. Quite the contrary, in the rural provinces, numerous strongmen and warlords began to gather recruits to overthrow the Soviet regime and reestablish Afghanistan's sovereignty.

Civil War, 1989-1996

Throughout the Soviet period, numerous groups fought against foreign rule and presence. As indicated earlier, Afghanistan historically had been a country that is best described as a fragmented, diverse group of peoples and tribes that rely on kinship networks rather than a single hegemonic or even identifiable political system. The groups that fought against the Soviets, collectively referred to as Mujahedeen, epitomize the continued fragmentation of Afghan government in that authority continued to shift from the center to the periphery. Before continuing, we should note that the Mujahedeen are not a single group, nor did each individual group have the same exact goals. Perhaps the only shared goal amongst the several groups was ousting foreign influence.

Ironically, the Mujahedeen received most of their funding and support from foreign actors. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan constituted

the most prominent financiers of the Mujahedeen, and each of these financiers had separate goals for what it wished to achieve in Afghanistan. Pakistan acted as the US's and the Saudi's intermediary funding partner. Organized by the American Central Intelligence Agency, Saudi and American money was sent to the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence group (ISI) that, at its own discretion, could fund Mujahedeen groups.[25] Pakistan, under the military dictatorship of Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, adopted an increasingly Islamized political discourse and legal code,[26] and subsequently supported Islamic groups. Two groups emerged as the most successful and well organized of the Mujahedeen: Hizb-i-Islami and Jamiat-i-Islami. The former was led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and the latter by Burhanuddun Rabbani, and each envisioned himself as the eventual ruler of Afghanistan. The ISI gave overwhelming support to Hikmatyar and his radical Islamist Hizb faction. One reason that Hizb received the most aid was that Hikmatyar was a very successful general, and the ISI sought to support winners, not losers. Another is that Hizb operated mostly in the south and southeast of Afghanistan and was a close neighbor to Pakistan and thus more accessible in logistics terms. Perhaps the most important feature is that Hizb had the most ethnic Pashtun members among all Mujahedeen parties, a significant factor for any group that intended to rule Afghanistan.[27] On the other hand, the nationalist Jamiat-i Islami and Rabbani became a more varied group that

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[25] Rubin, *Afghanistan*. 189.
[26] The term Islamic should not be confused with fundamentalist. Islamic in this usage means Islamic government with sharia law and not a secular state.
[27] Ibid., 197.

represented northern Afghanistan and its diverse ethnic makeup. Such commanders of Jamiat as Ahmed Shah Massoud and Ismail Khan would later become important leaders in Afghanistan. Ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks dominated Jamiat, which made them unpopular with Pashtun groups, Pashtun Mujahedeen, and most importantly, the Pakistani ISI.

Both groups, while operating in their own spheres of influence, expanded their authority and command of local affairs by providing their qawms with protection and services. In fact, "commanders and their qawms usually had dyadic patron-client relationships."[28] The Mujahedeen commanders were able to capture food, money and clothes that they could then redistribute to their kinship or broader social networks, in return for zakat or Islamic taxes, customs duties on transported goods, and usually manpower to fight battles. The Mujahedeen fought to oust the Soviet military and government from Afghanistan, though resistance often remained local and commanders would try to remain autonomous and out of the reach of the central government. By gaining the trust of local qawms and international aid donors, Mujahedeen groups increased their own power and control throughout their territory. Authority also transferred to commanders because the traditional locus of authority in the periphery, elder khans, no longer controlled agricultural resources that were used for redistribution to the public, commanders did. Thus, authority in qawms shifted from khans to commanders.

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[28] Ibid., 188.

By early 1989, the USSR had withdrawn its military from Afghanistan because of the violent resistance from Mujahedeen commanders and Soviet inability to control any districts outside of Kabul. However, while the Mujahedeen enjoyed a momentary victory over the Soviet military, "the fragmentation of the political and military structures of the resistance prevented the Mujahedeen from turning local victories into a national one."[29] A national victory became unattainable because certain leaders focused on asserting their own authority in what they perceived to be their sphere of influence, while others attempted to capture Kabul and finally defeat the Soviet-backed government. One such leader, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, who had unmatched support from the ISI, led his Hizb party to conquer Kabul, where it faced vehement opposition from Rabbani and his Jamiat allies. The fight for Kabul, where Rabbani was president of a very weak government, reinforced the ethnic divisions between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns because Rabbani was a Tajik, and he opposed the rule of Hikmatyar, who led the majority Pashtun Hizb party. From May through August of 1991, Hikmatyar bombarded Kabul, killing at least 1800 civilians and injuring several thousand more; over 500,000 civilians fled the city. By the end of the year, over 5,000 people were killed and perhaps a million had fled the city.[30]

Hikmatyar was never able to conquer Kabul, and his forces and supporters diminished slowly. Nevertheless, the damage in Afghanistan had

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[29] Ibid., 247.
[30] Ibid., 273.

been done. Commanders found themselves at war with one another; the government was at its weakest point in hundreds of years; foreign supporters quickly vanished because the Soviets had withdrawn, and that fact consequently meant no support for state building; violence, discrimination and corruption ravaged the country for years on end. Yet, the consequences were even deeper. Afghanistan's government in Kabul now had absolutely no authority outside the city. In fact, numerous commanders, who came to be known as strongmen, could exert authority only within their own influence group and were not responsible or held accountable to the Afghan people as a whole; rather they were only accountable to their local alliances. The destruction of the Old Order at this point had become complete. Government no longer existed in the sense that institutions, bureaucracy and laws administered the land. Each strongmen now ruled his territory through taxation, military force and local allies.

Hikmatyar's failure to capture Kabul made his patron, the Pakistani ISI, lose interest in his mission and confidence in his competence as a leader. Instead, as the country plummeted into a vicious civil war, the ISI looked to another surrogate to lead the country and rescue it from war. In the south, a group of Pashtun scholars grew disgusted with "commanders [who] abused the population at will, kidnapping young girls and boys for their sexual pleasure, robbing merchants in the bazaars and fighting and brawling in the streets." They began to resist such impious acts and their goals were simple: restore peace,

disarm the population, enforce Sharia law and defend the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan.[31] The group called themselves the Taliban.

Taliban, 1992-2001

A short period after the Mujahedeen commanders battled for Kabul, the Taliban began "cleaning the streets." In 1994 in Kandahar province, a commander kidnapped two teenage girls, shaved their heads, and took them back to the military camp where his men repeatedly raped the girls. The girls' neighbors told Mullah Omar, the religious and political leader of the Taliban, what had happened and he sprung to action. Rallying some thirty Talibs who had sixteen rifles between them, the group attacked the base, freeing the girls and hanging the commander. Omar later said, "We were fighting against Muslims who had gone wrong. How could we remain quiet when we could see crimes being committed against women and the poor?"[32] Exemplary reports like this, which reporter Ahmed Rashid insists were numerous, some true and some false, allowed the Taliban to rise as a group committed to justice that would return order to communities. One single event truly separated the Taliban from the rest of the commanders. In 1994, the Taliban attacked a fuel depot that Hikmatyar's bandits consistently harassed in an effort to make travelling on the streets safe. The fuel depot was at a crucial location where Pakistani goods were smuggled into Afghanistan, and it was particularly important for Pakistan to be

[31] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 22. Hereafter cited as Rashid, *Taliban*.
[32] Ibid., 25.

able to supply commanders. As the Taliban took control of the depot, the ISI again realized that Hikmatyar was no longer the winner they had once supported. Instead they threw their backing behind the new winners, the Taliban. The new alliance between the ISI and the Taliban annoyed other Kandahar warlords, but instead of uniting to defeat the new threat, they continued to fight amongst one another.[33]

The Taliban' continued to thrive under the tutelage of the ISI, and in late 1994 the group attacked and conquered Kandahar city, the second largest city in the country. In the next three months, the Taliban took control of twelve of Afghanistan's thirty-one provinces, opening the roads and disarming the population. As they advanced toward Kabul, which the group conquered in 1996, strongmen either fled or surrendered to the armies of the Taliban.[34] The rise of the Taliban offered a new and refreshing rule to Afghans, as they initially saw the Talibs as liberators who sought justice, stability and unity in a central government.

The Taliban conquest of the nation's capital was highly significant. Earlier commanders and strongmen had not been able to hold onto the city for more than a few years and even so had very little authority outside the city. Even Hikmatyar, with the full support of the ISI, was not able to conquer Kabul. Thus it is clear that it was not only ISI support that allowed the Taliban to be successful.

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[33] Ibid., 28.
[34] Ibid., 30.

Abdulkader Sinno gives an astute look into how the Taliban expanded their vast power base by examining their Pashtun roots. The Kandahar victory gave the group immense credibility throughout the country because of its large Pashtun population and the message the Taliban sent to those they conquered. Essentially the Talibs promised a safe and just society that was built on Pashtun traditionalism. Additionally the Taliban offered Afghans the opportunity to join the momentum of the Taliban movement that strove to implement for the first time the goals of the 1979 Mujahedeen: the establishment of an Islamic state.[35] This was a very clever and useful strategy for the Taliban because it allowed them to collect recruits and economic support via donations. Perhaps more important to the Taliban's success, however, was the effect their conquests had on the regional strongmen.

Strongmen at the time of the Taliban exhibited an understandable unease. The military force and unprecedented popular support of the Taliban threatened every strongman's authority and ability to maintain legitimacy. While strongmen do not fit a unitary description, their options were limited in the face of Taliban armies based on their own organization's power, their size, and Islamic credentials.[36] Sinno proposes that each Pashtun strongman who faced the Taliban ranked outcomes in the following order, from greatest to least:

1. Maintaining local autonomy and control over local resources by successfully resisting the Taliban.

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[35] Abdulkader Sinno, "Explaining the Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns," in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 78.
[36] Ibid., 79.

2. Joining the Taliban as a client with a degree of autonomy while maintaining his organization's integrity.
3. Being rewarded for surrendering local autonomy-money or joining the Taliban as an individual.
4. Disbanding or disappearing from public view.
5. Being defeated in battle.
6. Being defeated by losing the support of his own troops and clients.[37]

Sinno's list seems quite reasonable and illuminates a number of important motivations strongmen had in the period. First, it is clear that strongmen desired to keep control of their resources and that of their clients. Also important is that being defeated by one's clients, which were often qawms, was viewed as worse than losing to the Taliban. This suggests two things. One is that kinship ties were still prevalent and important to Afghan leaders in terms of their honor and ability to govern. Second is that the strongmen knew there was a high risk of being defeated. One of six outcomes involves victory, with the remaining five including some sort of surrender or even complete loss of power. Indeed, the Taliban incursions were swift and formidable, but for strongmen who had fought since the Soviet invasion in 1980, some fifteen years, their decision was remarkable. This prompts a closer examination of Taliban strategy when conquering regions.

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[37] Ibid.

Often when the Taliban loomed on the horizon of a village or town, commanders began to evaluate their options. According to Sinno, the Taliban used their knowledge of Pashtun politics in order to dictate the commanders' decisions. Knowing what the strongmen wanted, the Taliban convinced leaders that successful resistance was impossible and they should either disband or join them. In either case sacrificing autonomy was unavoidable.[38] The Taliban used this tactic against the most vulnerable commanders, and it had several important consequences. First, vulnerable strongmen often had ongoing battles with other more dominant strongmen and by joining the Taliban, the weaker strongman would gain the upper hand. Second, the tactic weakened the region's ability to unite and rally against the Taliban while it undermined the power of dominant strongmen. That is, vulnerable strongmen who yielded to the Taliban often gave key information and a strategic foothold to the Taliban. This put the dominant strongman at a disadvantage, and made his chances of successfully resisting takeover even more dismal.[39] By pursuing these tactics, the Taliban took over more of the country than had ever been controlled by a single governing body, and replaced the diffuse governing bodies of the Mujahedeen strongmen with an autocratic regime headed by a single figure. However, while the Taliban ruled almost 90% of the country, they were not without enemies. Since Rabbani forfeited Kabul and the presidency in 1996, he and his cohorts fled to the north

[38] Ibid., 80.
[39] Ibid., 81.

where they formed the Northern Alliance, the main opposition group to the Taliban.

As tens of thousands fled Kabul, the Northern Alliance provided a safe haven for the Kabuli refugees in the north. The alliance, consisting of a handful of the country's most experienced and well-connected strongmen with the largest followings, struggled to defeat the Taliban and constantly found themselves with their backs against the wall. The leaders were the deposed Tajik President Rabbani, the Panjashiri Ahmed Shah Masud, and Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek. A problem that would forever undermine the Alliance's chances at ruling the country is that they did not have any Pashtun leaders or a Pashtun majority in the populations they represented. However, they were still able to receive support from neighboring governments, and such support perpetuated the ongoing civil war. Iran, India and Russia all supported the Northern Alliance, while Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban. The United States believed that the Taliban would not last, and in 1996, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel expressed the opinion that "We do not see ourselves inserting in the middle of Afghan affairs, but we consider ourselves a friend of Afghanistan . . .."[40] Ironically, the US ignored the threat of the Taliban, and failed to address an issue that would later consume the country's foreign affairs.

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[40] Qtd. In Rashid, *Taliban*. 45.

The emergence of the Northern Alliance (NA) as a direct competitor with the Taliban further changed the location of authority in Afghanistan. The two main power centers in Afghanistan in the late 1990s were the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Both of these two groups exercised power within their own zones of control in order to reach their own goals. This meant that Mullah Omar, who controlled the Taliban, had control of most of the country. For the areas he did not control, authority rested in the hands of several allied strongmen. In both cases, authority still belonged to individuals and not to a governing body or document. This would pose crucial problems for the United States and the Karzai regime, which together would attempt to centralize and institutionalize government in Afghanistan. Any authority that did exist was limited to Taliban leadership and the individual powers of several strongmen. To reconcile this, the Karzai regime would not only have to defeat the Taliban, but also have to somehow minimize the power of the strongmen whose enemy they had just defeated.

Chapter II

Afghanistan in the American Century

Fighting Al Qaeda: War and Diplomacy in Afghanistan.

At 8:46am on Tuesday September 11, the North tower of the World Trade Center was intentionally hit by a Boeing 767. The United States came under attack from a stateless adversary named Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The United States Government under President George W. Bush vowed revenge by declaring war on Al Qaeda and similar terrorist groups worldwide. Early on, President Bush's cabinet had difficulty defining the war they would pursue. Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that "the goal is terrorism in its broadest sense." Vice President Cheney expanded on Powell's words and expanded the scope of the "war on terror" by stating, "to the extent we define our task broadly . . . including those who support terrorism, then we get at states. And it's easier to get at them than it is to find [terrorists]." Bush insisted that the US begin by pursuing Osama bin Laden, the head of Al Qaeda organization.[41] The logic quickly fell into place. The US began its broadly conceived war on terror against Al Qaeda, which first led it to Afghanistan. However, this presented at least two immediate problems to the government. First, the US military could not attack

[41] Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York , NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2002), 43. Hereafter cited as Woodward.

Afghanistan easily or swiftly because of its remote location. Second, the US had no strong political allies in the region that could help facilitate an invasion. The administration had no immediate move to make. It was unprepared for the attacks on 9/11 and perhaps even less prepared to respond quickly to the attackers in Afghanistan. This meant that the cabinet would be hard pressed to reconcile these problems and see successes immediately.

The day after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush asked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld what impact the military could have on Afghanistan immediately. Rumsfeld responded, "Very little, effectively,"[42] noting that commander in chief Tommy Franks of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), which had responsibility for the Middle East region, had few military plans even drawn up for Afghanistan. Franks mentioned that it could be months before the US could deploy major combat operations in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld, unimpressed, replied, "try again," wanting Franks to get the ball moving in weeks or days, not months.[43] Bush agreed and felt that the Pentagon needed to be pressed to act swiftly.

The President also needed to push his diplomats in the State Department to act quickly to befriend nations near Afghanistan. With more allies in the region, the US military might be able to move more effectively and quickly. Without delay, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage invited General Mahmoud Ahmad, the head of the Pakistani ISI who was visiting Washington, to

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 43-44.

the State Department on September 12 to discuss an alliance between the two countries. The conversation began with a forceful message. Armitage told Ahmad that while the US did not yet know what it would ask of Pakistan, it would surely require "deep introspection. Pakistan faces a stark choice, either it is with us or it is not. This is a black and white choice with no gray."[44] Ahmad noted that the US had not been a friend to Pakistan in the past, but Armitage interrupted and repeated his previous statement. Feeling the pressure from the chief executive and the push to act swiftly, the State Department got tough with their South Asian counterparts to get things moving.

At a cabinet meeting a week later, Powell described the diplomatic mission. Powell saw the 9/11 attacks as an opportunity to reshape relationships throughout the world and emphasized multilateralism in building strong, open and beneficial alliances across the globe.[45] As Powell saw it, the attacks were not only against America, but also against civilization and democracy. He stated that the war would be long, and the US would need partners. By that morning he had made thirty-five calls to world leaders, with twelve more scheduled that day. He joked with the cabinet, "I have been so multilateral the last few days, I'm getting seasick."[46] Under Powell, the State Department began to flex its strength and corral a coalition to fight the war on terror. Yet the immense pressure to act quickly created confusion within the cabinet, as it became unclear whose mission would lead the American response to the terrorist attacks.

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[44] Ibid., 47.
[45] 65.
[46] 66.

With both Secretaries in overdrive, each focused inwardly on his own Department. The separate focuses between the two Departments allowed them to drift apart from one another rather than uniting under a common goal. In an afternoon national security meeting that included representatives from Defense, State, Treasury, the CIA, and White House advisors, among others, the group discussed the scope of the war again. Rumsfeld began by asking if the US would be going after terrorism more broadly than just Al Qaeda, and if the US would want a broad range of support. He said that a coalition would be hard to maintain and would limit the US's ability to work towards its own goals, and suggested that Iraq should be a potential target. The Pentagon, even before the 9/11 attacks, considered Saddam Hussein dangerous and committed to acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Rumsfeld and his cohorts in Defense insisted that Iraq should be a primary target in the war on terror. This all came as a surprise to Powell and the State Department representatives.

Powell immediately disagreed with either limiting a coalition or a war against Iraq, favoring a multi-lateral mission focused on Al Qaeda. It was clear that Powell and Rumsfeld had different goals, some of which impinged with the State Department's role in the war. That is, without a coalition, Powell and the State Department would have a limited role in forming the nature and reality of the war on terror because of the reduced need for diplomacy. While diplomacy was still necessary without a coalition, it would play second fiddle to military matters. Further, Powell flatly rejected the desirability of making Iraq a target in

the war on terror. When Rumsfeld again raised the question of Iraq as a target, Powell rolled his eyes and asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "What the hell, what are these guys thinking about?"[47] A mission in Iraq did not fit into the scheme of Powell's multilateral mission to defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and he became frustrated that time was being wasted on even the prospect of a war in Iraq.

These two brief examples of conflict between the State Department and Defense Department exemplify the early divisions and disagreements the Bush administration found in itself. Yet, the far larger looming problem was still the need for action against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. President Bush repeatedly demanded action from his subordinates, particularly hounding the Defense Department and relevant national security agencies like the CIA to make the war a reality.

A Creative Strategy

President Bush felt that the country needed healing after the 9/11 attacks. Healing, he thought, could come from immediate military action against Al Qaeda. However, this did not mean that the US would invade Afghanistan. In addition to CENTCOM's lack of plans for conventional warfare in Afghanistan, the US administration was aware of the massive failures of the British and Soviet armies in Afghanistan during the previous two centuries and had no desire to

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[47] Ibid., 61.

send its army off to the same fate.[48] Without a military plan or the desire to use a land army, the US defaulted to the idea of attacking terrorist training camps, perhaps with missiles from offshore naval craft. The problem was that the training camps were empty. "I don't want to put a million-dollar missile on a five-dollar tent," Bush complained. He wanted to inflict real damage and not just a symbolic demonstration of power and revenge. He continued to press the Defense Department for new options, insisting that "everything is on the table . . . Time is of the essence." [49] Rumsfeld reiterated Bush's words to his subordinates, asking for "creative ideas, something between launching cruise missiles and an all-out military operation."[50] Such heavy pressure from the top leadership to get military action underway forced leaders to think "outside the box." The CIA spoke up with an interesting idea.

CIA Chief George Tenet presented the plan directly to the President in the White House Situation Room. The CIA's proposal was elaborate, inexpensive and intriguing. It would combine intelligence, CIA paramilitary teams, aerial support, US Special Forces teams and Afghan opposition forces. The plan allowed the US to strike immediately in Afghanistan with deadly accuracy, and with a remarkably smaller risk than a major land invasion, both in terms of life and in terms of money. Most of the fighting would be done by certain Northern Alliance generals and their fighters while the US held back and provided

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[48] Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (New York, NY : Penguin Publishing Group, 2008), 61. Hereafter cited as Rashid, *Descent*.
[49] Woodward, 63.
[50] Ibid., 44.

funding, supplies and organized air support. The success of the scheme relied on the Afghan opposition groups, the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance seemed to provide the perfect solution to US officials. To them, it served as the primary military force to fight Al Qaeda and their Taliban allies. This meant that the US could finally attack the enemy, without taking the risk of a massive territorial invasion.

Tenet noted that the Alliance had "roughly 20,000 fighters split into five different factions, but in reality probably twenty-five factions." [51] The Northern Alliance at this time was very fragile due to the assassination of Ahmad Shah Masud on September 9th 2001. Masud was the nominal leader of the Alliance and had lots of influence over his subordinates. US officials had no idea of what consequences might await them in Afghanistan by employing the NA as their surrogate army. Nevertheless, with no other options on the table, the idea was accepted and funded with one billion dollars.[52] The CIA's plan solved the President's need for quick action. It also started the war officially. Until this point, the only action the US had taken against terrorism was to pass legislation that allowed the US Treasury to track and disrupt terrorist financing networks. The transition to ground operations, although these did not put many Americans in Afghanistan, was a significant step for the administration to take.

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[51] Ibid., 51.
[52] Rashid, *Descent*. 62.

Bush, voicing approval, commented later that "it became clear to me that we were going to be able to fight a different war than the Russians fought."[53] Rumsfeld also delighted in the plan because it allowed him time to organize a military strike on Afghanistan without putting large numbers of American troops on the ground. However, the plan had drawbacks. One was that Powell felt alienated because the CIA would shoulder most of the responsibility for diplomatic relations in Afghanistan by funding and interacting with the several Northern Alliance generals. As the CIA ran the war in Afghanistan, the military side of the US government gained much more influence with President Bush than the diplomatic side. In fact, the administration viewed diplomacy at this point as nothing more than a means to facilitate future military action, which consequently meant diplomacy came second to military matters. The transfer of influence to the CIA and the military side of the government led to further divisions in the US government which would later adversely affect policy decisions. The other large drawback of the CIA plan was that it relied wholly on the Northern Alliance to fight and defeat the Taliban.

Jawbreaker

The first team CIA team that crossed into Afghanistan on September 19 consisted of only eleven men. Headed by Gary Schroen, a fifty-nine year old CIA retiree, the team, codenamed "Jawbreaker," was given an explicit order at CIA

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[53] Woodward, 53.

headquarters in the States. "You have one mission, go find the Al Qaeda and kill them. We're going to eliminate them. Get bin Laden, find him. I want his head in a box."[54] The order was dramatic, the team's responsibility was actually to get in close contact with individual generals of the Northern Alliance, but the point was made—be surgical. In his first encounter with the Afghan resistance, Schroen gave Muhammad Arif Sawari, the NA's Intelligence and Security Chief, $500,000 with a simple order: "What we want you to do is use [the money], buy food, weapons, whatever you need to build your forces up."[55] The CIA had dispatched Schroen to Afghanistan with a budget of ten million dollars, which he could use at his discretion. This meant that the entire operation the United States pursued was contingent upon one man's decisions. While that fact is troublesome in itself, it also had consequences in Afghanistan. Each US dollar spent on one general meant that another became disgruntled and disadvantaged. In an already fragile alliance, this was dangerous.

Jawbreaker continued to move across Afghanistan contacting generals. On September 27, Schroen met with General Mohammed Fahim, commander of the Northern Alliance. Fahim took over the Alliance just weeks earlier when the Taliban murdered his predecessor, Ahmed Shah Masud. Although Fahim had support as commander of the Alliance, it was a fragile support. Fahim did not have the charisma or leadership qualities that Masud possessed, and the prominent generals in the Alliance knew it. Still, Fahim claimed to have ten

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[54] Ibid., 141.
[55] Ibid., 142.

thousand fighters under his direct command and was the closest thing to a leader that the US could identify. Schroen gave Fahim $1,000,000 in cash and told him to use it as he saw fit. The CIA's plan began to gain steam as multiple generals came onto the payroll, including strongmen like Rashid Dostum and Burhanuddin Rabbani. The plan was for the Alliance to provide the ground force in Northern Afghanistan and remove the Taliban as it marched south towards Kabul. The US would provide all the air support they could ask for, as Schroen said to Fahim, "You're going to be impressed. You have never seen anything like what we're going to deliver onto the enemy."[56]

The war progressed beautifully. As weeks went on the Northern Alliance, with the help of US Special Forces, air power, and CIA paramilitary teams, quickly cleared much of Northern Afghanistan of the Taliban. On October 30, CENTCOM commander Tommy Franks met with General Fahim and gave him $5,000,000 more to continue the good job and finish taking the North. This is where the US found it had not developed a practical political plan for Afghanistan. It did not want the Northern Alliance to enter Kabul, but it did not have the military force on the ground to prohibit the ambitious commanders from doing so. It suddenly became clear that the US could not completely control the Northern Alliance.

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[56] Ibid., 155.

Why Karzai?

As the military pressed on in Afghanistan, the State Department did not simply sit idle on the sideline. Although the Department aimed most of its work toward establishing alliances with certain Central Asian countries, although this was background noise to the real deal: swift military operations. In spite of this, State's mission's importance grew rapidly as the US realized it could not allow the Northern Alliance to take political control of Afghanistan. An alternative to the NA would have to be found quickly.

The State Department dispatched James Dobbins to Bonn, Germany to attend the UN-sponsored Bonn Conference, which aimed to set up an interim Afghan government. Dobbins was a career diplomat and had previously held positions as assistant secretary of state for Europe, special assistant to the president for the Western Hemisphere, special adviser to the president and the secretary of state for the Balkans, and ambassador to the European Community. He also had extensive experience in conflict resolution and peace building with assignments in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo.[57] By sending an experienced officer like Dobbins to Bonn, the State Department made it clear that it was serious about its mission and that it did not take the issues at hand lightly. The challenges Dobbins faced in Bonn were monumental. His mission was to represent the United States in the search to find a new leader for Afghanistan.

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[57] James F. Dobbins, *After the Taliban* (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2008). Hereafter cited as Dobbins.

On the ground in Afghanistan, numerous individuals aspired to be president of the country. Yet, in addition to local aspirations of power, Afghanistan had become more susceptible to the influence of its neighbors over the past several decades. Dobbins thus had to deal with two different tasks: understanding what being a good leader for Afghanistan entailed, and why Afghanistan's neighbors would support a certain individual. His task was not to select a leader; in fact, Dobbins recalled that "For almost all of the issues discussed in Bonn, I had no written instructions and a good deal of leeway. My job was to get an agreement and almost any agreement would do . . .."[58] That is, Dobbins did not have any direct instructions that reflected US preferences for the Afghan Interim Administration. This signals that Dobbins went to Bonn to broker an agreement amongst Afghans and their neighbors. While this may seem like a trivial position to be in, it was anything but. Dobbins's mission was to secure international support for any Afghan government that resulted from the conference—no menial task. However, the lack of direction also reflected the US government's disinterest in Afghanistan's future, to subject to be later discussed below. Dobbins's main objective was finding an administration that would enjoy enduring international support. This meant finding leadership that would satisfy the opposing interests of Afghanistan's neighbors and the Afghan people. The main players he had to deal with were Iran, Pakistan and representatives of the Northern Alliance.

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[58] Ibid., 85.

Dobbins received a message from the Iranian delegation at Bonn asking him to meet at their hotel. He was with Zal Khalilzad, a representative of Condoleezza Rice, and Bill Luti, a representative of the Department of Defense, at the time. Dobbins believed Luti to be strongly opposed to any dialogue with the Iranian government. The Iranian delegation insisted that the next government should not be headed by Zahir Shah, who they viewed as too old and indecisive, and rather favored another candidate. "They told [Dobbins] Karzai was known favorably in Tehran and would be acceptable to them."[59] When Dobbins briefed his subordinates on the meeting with the Iranians, representatives of the Defense Department became agitated and "rejected the possibility that even a tactical convergence of interest between Tehran and Washington might exist."[60]

Later in the conference, the head of the Iranian delegation, Javad Zarif, suggested that the Bonn Agreement include a mandate that the future Afghan government require democratic elections. Dobbins was not instructed to make such a requirement of the agreement and knew what the Iranian delegate was doing. "Zarif was having some fun at my expense, co-opting themes more usually connected with American than Iranian policy; however, he was also making a point. While Washington was fond of characterizing the Iranian regime as a fundamentalist theocracy, the truth was more complex."[61] Iran for the past several years had funded the Northern Alliance to fight against the

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[59] Ibid., 75.
[60] Ibid..
[61] 83-84.

Taliban, which they viewed as dangerous and offensive. Dobbins clearly took a liking to the Iranian delegate because he agreed with the suggestions he made, and in particular, how he made them. Throughout the conference, Dobbins had constructive dialogues with the Iranian delegates, and the American and Iranian positions were largely aligned.[62] In fact, when discussing future actions in Afghanistan, the Iranians offered to " . . . participate in an American-led program of support to the new Afghan army . . . specifically, Iran is prepared to build barracks for and train up to twenty thousand troops in a larger effort under your leadership."[63] This offer was unprecedented considering the tensions between Washington and Tehran, but it also signaled the mutual interest of these countries in reviving Afghanistan as a stable, peaceful country. The president of Iran at that time was Muhammad Khatami, who was interested in building ties to the outside world as well as relaxing the cultural climate within Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei controlled foreign, military, and security affairs, and, along with hard-liners, did what he could to check Khatami's initiatives. Still, it was a window of daylight before the election of Ahmedinejad, in which Iran took an even more outwardly hostile approach to the United States.

However, a decision of that magnitude was out of Dobbins's hands. Military planning was the responsibility of the Defense Department. Dobbins went through the appropriate channels with the surprising information, and when he presented the proposal to Don Rumsfeld at a National Security Council

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[62] 92.
[63] 143.

(NSC) meeting, Rumsfeld did not even look up from the papers he was perusing. At the end of Dobbins's statement, Rumsfeld made no comment and asked no questions. Nor did anyone else. The proposal fell upon deaf ears and the Iranians never received a response.[64] This again highlights a pair of themes that had developed. One is the US government's remarkable lack of interest in the future of Afghanistan. It is quite unusual for a government to purposefully neglect an offer such as the Iranian's, even if they had political differences. This further underlines the American administration's turn toward unilateral decision making. The second theme is that of miscommunication and disagreement among US policy makers. By rejecting or outright ignoring the Iranian offer, Rumsfeld not only alienated a potential ally, but also undermined hard and important work by the State Department. Rumsfeld decidedly and purposely offended two allies with one single action simply by not raising his head from his reading.

The next delegation that Dobbins spent a considerable amount of time with was the Pakistani group. The Pakistani delegation's position in Bonn was very difficult because every group at the conference wanted to oust the group Islamabad had supported for the previous five years. Nonetheless, Pakistan had a stake in Afghanistan's future government. Their support for a new government was contingent on it being a stable, Pashtun government. This is because the bulk of Pakistan's western region is populated by Pashtuns. As

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[64] 144.

Dobbins began his research, he had dinner with the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid. At dinner, Rashid "warned [Dobbins] that disentangling this fundamentalist Afghan movement [the Taliban] from its Pakistani followers would be difficult."[65] The Pakistanis bitterly resisted the idea of an Afghan government that was run by the Northern Alliance because they had fought, by means of the Taliban, against them for the past several years and knew the Alliance would become their political ally. Further, the Pakistanis warned Dobbins that NA soldiers might clash with Pashtun tribes, who would view the NA as an illegitimate ruler, causing large scale destruction and loss of life.[66] They also suggested briefly that Hamid Karzai would be an acceptable leader of Afghanistan, due to his moderate politics and Pashtun heritage. Nevertheless, the main issue they stressed during their meetings with Dobbins was that control of Kabul by the NA would be catastrophic.[67] Thus, the meetings ended with another endorsement of Hamid Karzai to rule the country and a stern warning to not trust the NA. Ironically, the next group Dobbins was to meet with was the NA leadership.

The Northern Alliance had a unique position at the Bonn Conference. On the one hand, they were outnumbered three to one by other Afghan political factions, all of which were Pashtun. The Alliance knew that it would have a difficult time garnering the international support it would need to be selected as the leadership of a new Afghan government. On the other hand, the Alliance

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[65] Ibid., 58.
[66] 56.
[67] 58.

had done the heavy lifting for the US's entire Afghan operation. Because they possessed the largest military force on the ground in Afghanistan, they could take orders from others with a certain ease. Nevertheless, the Alliance had to represent itself in Bonn and fought for as much support as it could accrue. The Alliance sent Younis Qanooni, the Interior Minister of the NA, to negotiate at Bonn. Ambassador Dobbins presented a scheme for the next government to Qanooni that forced the NA to yield the presidency to Hamid Karzai. The aptly named Bonn Process that followed the meetings took shape:

> The parties agreed that for the next six months an Interim Administration whose members would be selected at the Petersberg [in Bonn], should govern Afghanistan. At the end of the six-month period, a loya jirga [traditional grand council] would meet and name the Interim Administration's replacement, forming a transitional government that would carry on for another eighteen months. The transitional government would draft a new constitution and organize national elections.[68]

Qanooni and the Alliance opposed losing the presidency, but after hours of convincing and negotiating, accepted the agreement. NA leaders would head the three most important ministries in the government: defense, foreign affairs, and interior. This gave the Northern Alliance an extremely powerful position in the new government that was disproportionate to the number of people the government would represent. However, because the Alliance did the fighting, it

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[68] 84.

was inevitable that "each tribe and warlord [would] have a seat at the table in Kabul in a future government."[69]

Karzai was selected as the chairman of the Interim Administration. He was selected for reasons such as having been the Foreign Affairs Minister in the Mujahedeen government in 1992, which he quickly resigned from, citing dissatisfaction with the direction of the movement.[70] His father was a prominent Pashtun chief and his family enjoyed great popularity throughout some Pashtun regions. A fervent nationalist, Karzai sneaked back into Afghanistan and gathered supporters to fight the Taliban and liberate his people at the time of the Bonn Conference. His mission as chairman of the Interim Administration and as Interim President was to unite Afghanistan and create a central government that could exercise legal authority.[71] The international community accepted Karzai as the leader of the Afghan administration because of these specific traits and thus the United States did as well. The US was happy to allow others to choose Karzai and did not oppose his selection in any way. Dobbins was directed only to form a broad-based representative regime and he had just done that. The US's goal in Afghanistan was to rid the country of terror and the Taliban, and then move on to other potential War on Terror targets. Post-conflict peace building operations were not on the US agenda. From the US point of view, the Bonn Conference was completely successful. But the Afghans wanted more from

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[69] Woodward, 226.
[70] Mills, 88.
[71] Karzai was elected Interim President in early 2002 by a loya jirga. This position lasted two years until he was re-elected as President of Afghanistan in 2004 and again in 2009.

the Americans than infusions of cash. Each of the Afghan factions, except the NA, at the Bonn Conference requested that the international community dispatch a multinational force to secure Kabul and the countryside.

Nation Building

The US administration explicitly rejected nation building. Despite the facts on the ground in Afghanistan and the request for some sort of peacekeeping force, the US took a hands-off approach to post-conflict reconstruction. Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, said that the American military "is not a police force. It is not a political referee, and it is certainly not designed to build a civilian society" during the 2000 presidential campaign.[72] Hence, it is clear that the US envisioned its military as an entity that should not and could not rebuild Afghanistan. Further, the military strategy that the US had adopted—i.e., co-opting the Northern Alliance as its military surrogates—did not allow for many US ground troops and this fact limited the US's ability to keep the peace, build the country, or even influence events on the ground. Donald Rumsfeld praised this strategy as a positive because it did not "risk American lives in combat."[73] This left Afghanistan and its population in an awkward situation in which the country lost its only source of stability, the Taliban, and was led by an interim administration without any army. This reinforces the idea that the US did not expect to commit major resources to securing Afghanistan

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[72] Dobbins, 13.

[73] Michael O'Hanlon, "A Flawed Masterpiece," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, prod. JSTOR (Council of Foreign Relations, May-June 2002). Hereafter cited as O'Hanlon.

and that their presence would be brief and leave only a "light footprint."[74] Indeed it was this phrase, "light footprint," that cabinet members would use when referring to the US impact on Afghanistan. Then again, Powell and the State Department wanted "Karzai [to have] . . . a strong central government, as to avoid a power game in which all interested parties would try to carve out territory or spheres of influence."[75] Yet again, opposing interests arose inside the Bush cabinet.

In a war cabinet meeting discussing a possible military attack against the Taliban, military leaders became flustered as to which department was in charge and coordinating the attack. Rumsfeld pointed out that the Department of Defense was only executing strategies that the CIA had developed. The CIA representatives insisted that the commander-in-chief (CINC) of the Afghan operation, a designate of the Department of Defense, was in charge. Rumsfeld retorted, "No, you guys are in charge. You guys have the contacts. We're just following you in."[76] The dispute signaled to others at the meeting that the military arms of the Afghanistan operation had fractured and lacked clear coordination. Until this moment, Richard Armitage of the State Department had been silent. "I don't know who's in charge here," he said. The President immediately responded, "I'm in charge." Armitage quickly realized his mistake and corrected himself: "that wasn't about you. I know who's in charge in here,

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[74] Sultan Barakat, "Setting the Scene for Afghanistan's Reconstruction: The Challenges and the Critical Dilemmas," *Third World Quarterly* (Taylor & Francis) 23, no. 5 (October 2002), 8.
[75] Woodward, 321.
[76] Ibid., 244.

no question about that . . . I want to know who's in charge out there. It's about who's taking responsibility on the ground over there."[77] The State Department wanted to know what was going to happen in Afghanistan and whether they would have any say in the decision-making process. The issue of nation building, which was both a diplomatic and military undertaking, haunted the future of Afghanistan. The prospect that there would be no nation building posed critical problems for the future of the country.

With the Taliban gone and removed, the country lacked the one and only stabilizing force it had had in the past twenty years. Similarly, the Northern Alliance lacked the ability to govern the country based on popular legitimacy. If the US would not provide a significant military force to secure the country, who would? The answer is simple, the same people who always had: the regional strongmen, many of whom now occupied high governmental positions. Ambassador Dobbins, along with other diplomats, pressed the US administration to pursue the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond Kabul. ISAF was the international coalition of nations who had pledged troops to help in Afghanistan's recovery, consisting predominantly of American soldiers.[78] By expanding ISAF outside Kabul, the international community would be not only to secure and stabilize many regions throughout the country, but would also extend the rule of law of Hamid Karzai's government to those regions as well. Thus, an expansion of ISAF would help the

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Dobbins, 131.

Afghan population become comfortable with its new government. That is, government opposition groups or strongmen who planned to retain regional power would be less likely to harass people because of ISAF forces. Hamid Karzai's constitutional government could then exercise effective authority. A commitment to expand ISAF was costly, yet the results that it could have produced would have been monumental.

When the US denied Afghanistan an expanded security force in late 2001, Northern Alliance commanders took control. Ismael Khan took Herat and each strongman took control of what he had conquered.[79] Yet, the lack of Pashtun support prevented the NA from expanding into certain areas, particularly the area between Kabul and Kandahar, which became a "vast, chaotic no-man's-land ruled by commanders, criminals and former Taliban."[80] At the same time, Burnuhaddin Rabbani, the former president during the 1992 Mujahedeen administration, occupied Kabul and expected to become president once more. While Don Rumsfeld and the Defense Department made it clear to Rabbani that he would not be allowed to become president, his force still occupied Kabul. According to the US government, this was not all bad. The CIA continued to pay numerous Northern Alliance commanders millions of dollars to maintain stability in the country.[81] It should be noted that the NA at this point was still a loose alliance of generals who often fought skirmishes against one another in competition for power. This CIA payment strategy seemed to benefit both

[79] Rashid, *Descent*, 82-83.
[80] Ibid., 87.
[81] 128-130.

parties: the US would not have to provide a "boots on the ground" strategy, and the Northern Alliance would be freed of its Taliban enemy. While these facts are certainly true, they had deep and critical consequences for the Karzai government.[82]

By funding strongmen, the US once again instituted a system of patrimonialism in Afghanistan. The strongmen did not necessarily have the support of the people as they had during the Mujahedin era—indeed, many people fled from certain commanders' rule—but they did have the monetary and military support to sustain their command.[83] In effect, the strongmen again carved out their areas of influence in which they bolstered their own power. Ironically, the CIA simultaneously supported Hamid Karzai and his quest to fight the Taliban in the southern Pashtun areas. In fact, he was the only Pashtun fighting the Taliban in those areas. However, the CIA's support for Karzai came in the form of a small group of US Special Forces, food, and small weapons supplies, not large cash donations or military supplies.[84] Thus, the US was funding and supporting two separate groups that controlled Afghanistan. On the one hand, economic and military support went to a handful of powerful Northern Alliance commanders to keep the peace. On the other, political and operational support went to Hamid Karzai and his followers. Clearly, this

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[82] In an interview with the author in 2011, Ambassador Dobbins opined that the Karzai government would have failed without the military support of Northern Alliance commanders.
[83] In February 2002, fifty thousand Pashtun farmers fled the north, where Rashid Dostum was in control, because of pillaging and looting directed at the small Pashtun population of the region. (Rashid, *Descent*, 128).
[84] Rashid, *Descent*. 85.

presented a huge problem for presidential governing capacity. By supporting two separate, non-aligned groups, the US created a situation in which the political authority, Hamid Karzai, had to compete with the military authority, the Northern Alliance.

A Fragile Political Structure

The Karzai government had flaws in its structure that limited Karzai's authority as president. The NA had control of the Defense, Intelligence, Interior and Foreign Ministries that controlled all of the country's defenses. General Fahim, the leader of the NA and Defense Minister, became the most powerful strongman in Afghanistan. Ahmed Rashid argues that Fahim had little interest in creating an Afghan National Army to protect the country from future adversaries. Instead, he favored keeping the "[strongmen] militias on the government payroll because that made them dependent on his support."[85] This is a very important point, because it once again established patron-client relationships as a defining characteristic of Afghanistan's government. Further, it exemplifies the strength of the opposition that Hamid Karzai faced as chairman of the Interim Administration. The US exacerbated this problem by institutionalizing the divisions in the government.

The heavy support of the strongmen contrasted with the poverty of the Karzai government. The strongmen received cash payments from the US to help

[85] Ibid., 129.

fund their armies. Conversely, the government had no state income "and, for the first four months [after the conclusion of the war], no cash from donors to pay the salaries of civil servants and police officers."[86] The government had little funding and the strongmen received millions of dollars. The irony was clear. Strongmen who manipulated the situation in hopes of regaining power bases across the country collected mounds of cash while the government, which was actually supposed to represent the people, sat and watched powerlessly. Referring to the imbalance in governing capacity, former Afghan Interior Minister Ali Jalali said that, "the [Bonn] process achieved a constitutional defragmentation of the country under a central authority while the military power continued to be fragmented."[87]

The US government, particularly the US Agency for International Development, focused on strengthening institutions in the hope it would solidify the government's authority.[88] Yet, forming institutions is not easy. It is very difficult to create functional institutions in a society that had never had strong institutions and had been at war for the previous twenty years. On the one hand, the population would likely not recognize or understand formal institutions as legitimate centers of law. It is much more likely that the population would

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[86] Ibid., 129.
[87] Ali A. Jalali, "Legacy of War and Challenge of Peace Building," in *Building a New Afghanistan*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, D.C.), 30.
[88] Sarah Chayes, *The Punisment of Virtue* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 168. Hereafter cited as Chayes.

recognize direct rule by some sort of strongman-type figure.[89] On the other, Afghanistan's population had been ravaged from the previous years of war. Life expectancy was only forty-four years, and the average age was below eighteen. With few sources of education, the pool of talent that the government could pull from was very small.[90] As a result, the Afghan government had a very difficult time finding loyal, qualified employees to work in the public sector. Moreover, because it could not find enough employees to staff governmental institutions, the central government lacked sufficient power to enforce policies.

The lack of a strong set of central institutions also helped strongmen to advance their own goals. One such individual, Gul Agha Shirzai, made himself Governor of Kandahar with the help of US Special Forces. Karzai had appointed Mullah Naqib to that post, but US officials favored Shirzai, thus forcing Karzai to acquiesce in his appointment.[91] Clearly, Karzai lacked the capacity to enforce his nominal authority, but the more significant fact is that he was forced to allow political enemies in his government. US officials figured Shirzai's appointment would be acceptable because he had strong alliances throughout the country that would help strengthen the national government. However, they did not understand that in Afghanistan, having alliances does not mean having a strong or reliable government. A common joke in White House situation room

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[89] This is not to say that Afghan character prohibits recognition of formal institutions. Rather, it is likely that Afghans would reject central government authority because of the recent history of war, lack of education, and governance models.

[90] Hekmat Karzai, "Security: Coping with the Taliban," in *Building a New Afghanistan*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 69.

[91] Chayes, 169-178.

meetings was, "You can't buy an Afghan, but you can rent one."[92] Sarah Chayes reported, "[Shirzai] applied all of the well-meaning Western aid–lavished on him in his role as a representative of the Afghan government–to the purpose of building up a *personal* power base. And this was a project that could only conflict with truly nationwide governing institutions . . . ."[93] With US support, Shirzai was hard at work to establish a broad base for his own power. This not only harmed the people of Kandahar, who longed for government accountability,[94] but also damaged Karzai in his effort to unite the country under the rule of law. With some truth to the statement, many people jokingly referred to Karzai as "the Mayor of Kabul." Across the country, many other strongmen made similar claims to land. It was clear that patron-client systems had once again popped up across Afghanistan.

Karzai was angered by the development of the extralegal patron systems. Referring to discussions he had with strongmen who were members of his cabinet and thus involved in central government policy-making, Karzai remembered, "We often discussed the differences among us . . . We moderates argued for a *loya jirga* [grand council to appoint new leadership] . . . but the non-moderates argued against our proposals and, unfortunately, they had the money to back up their arguments."[95] He clearly resented the fact that those who did not have legitimacy in government were controlling it. He claimed that billions

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[92] Woodward, 253.
[93] Chayes, 169.
[94] Ibid., 170.
[95] Hamid Karzai qtd. in Mills, 65.

of dollars were sent to groups that wanted to "de-Afghanize" the country by allowing for domination from foreign influence and trying to sweep away centuries of Afghan tradition.[96] Karzai deeply believed that a strong, independent Afghanistan was on the horizon, and he understood Afghan politics and loyalty networks. However, this would work against him because in Afghanistan, especially among Pashtuns, one is obliged to extend hospitality to all under his roof, even an enemy. According to Nick Mills, the political mentality in Afghanistan requires that "[you] do not attempt to use or display your authority unless you're sure you can pull it off, or risk losing what authority you possess." This "informs and influences the entire process of Afghan governance, and would influence Karzai himself."[97] Traditions of Afghan culture added to the awkward position in which Karzai found himself as president. He was challenged by the US government's military support to strongmen, while being constrained in his own actions because he could not break traditional Afghan customs and still maintain legitimacy.

This awkward position required Karzai to act outside the constitutional means of government--i.e., through institutions. He had great popular support as president, but no institutional strength. That is, he was forced to work within his client networks or those he trusted and could depend on to enforce policy. If Karzai wanted to maintain any sort of power, he needed to mix with "the people, leading from their ranks, he could work miracles. But cut off from them, he was

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[96] Mills, 65.
[97] Ibid., 31.

just another scrabbling jockey in the Kabul power struggle."[98] Indeed, Karzai realized early on that he had no military authority, which meant he could only use moral authority, which essentially amounts to name recognition and respect for his base of power. Karzai's supporters often consulted him for advice or help because they viewed him as a post-Taliban authority who would rescue the country.[99] However, this sort of popular support did not matter to the strongmen who opposed him. With their own armies or militias, strongmen had no problem disregarding orders from the president, which subsequently forced Karzai to employ other means of coercion.

In 2002 President Karzai offered Ismail Khan, the self proclaimed governor of Herat, a position in the central administration in Kabul, in an attempt to lessen Khan's power in Herat. Khan rejected the offer, and Karzai went to work. Karzai "[bought] off several middle level [strongmen] and [turned] them against their old patron."[100] By playing strongmen against another, Karzai weakened Khan's power base, and in 2004, Khan relinquished his hold on Herat and took the position Karzai offered him, Minister of Energy and Water.

This was an effective ploy for Karzai. It helped strengthen the central government by weakening one of its great opponents. However, it is important to note that violent clashes between the strongmen killed many people, and Karzai was still forced to offer Khan a legitimate place in the central government.

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[98] Chayes, 220.
[99] Mills, 174.
[100] Antonio Giustozzi qtd in Hess, 183.

This story is significant for two reasons. First, Khan, according to the Afghan constitution, should have disbanded his military outright when asked by Karzai, but it took more pressure and even a bribe to force any sort of change. Second, Khan had lost much of his support base, and by taking the post as Minister of Energy and Water, became a client of Karzai. Patrimonialism returned to Afghanistan, and politics once again were determined by the interplay between patrons and clients.

Karzai tried a similar strategy to lessen Rashid Dostum's power in 2002 by offering him a position in the central government. Dostum, the powerful strongman who had opposed the Soviets and Taliban, declined the offer immediately, favoring his own client network. Later, when offered the position of Chief of Staff of the Head of the Armed Forces, Dostum accepted. But, relocating Dostum did not have the effect Karzai desired because Dostum retained his powerful militia and followers. Years later Dostum was accused of attacking a political opponent and Karzai refused to have him arrested, fearing the backlash from Dostum's following. He further offered to drop the charge against him if Dostum agreed to leave the country, a deal he accepted.[101] Because of Dostum's strong military and political backing, Karzai had to treat Dostum with kid gloves.

Had any ordinary person been accused of the same crime, he would have suffered severe punishment under the rule of law. However, because Karzai had

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[101] Ibid.

weak support within his own government, he had to work around the law to resolve the situation. Steve Hess suggests that moving strongmen around was meant "to build a body of personal patronage in support of his rule" (i.e., Khan, Dostum, etc.).[102][103] While this seemed to slowly solve the problem of competing with the strongmen's power and centralizing state power, it was not without its problems. Certainly, by bringing numerous strongmen into the central government, Karzai established himself as the premier patron of the country, with the others quasi-reliant on his support. In this sense, he mitigated the strongmen's support and could expect some sort of compliance when orders were given out. It also meant that the constitutional government had been replaced by a high-power patron-client system in which a small group of men controlled much of the government's actions.

A government that is supposed to be based on a constitution but actually represents a patron-client system is not a sustainable one. That is, the power of the leader (at this time Hamid Karzai) is not supported or curtailed by a legal document, but instead by his power base. This has two very important consequences. The first to be discussed will be the "goodwill" of the leader. Goodwill in this case means the leader's willingness and ability to rule Afghanistan according to public demands and aspirations. In a patron-client system, a leader with strong "goodwill" can succeed; however, this leader has no

[102] Between 2003 and 2005 several other strongmen were reassigned in similar fashion as Khan and Dostum. Gul Agha Shirzai of Kandahar in 2004, Hajji Din Mohammad of Nangarhar in 2005, Gul Ahmed of Badghis in 2003, Mohammad Ibrahim of Ghor in 2004, Sher Mohammad Akondzudu of Helmand in 2005, and Syed Amin of Badakhshan in 2003.
[103] Ibid.

requirement to act in such a benevolent manner and can wildly change policies as long as he retains his support base in the government, rendering the constitution completely irrelevant. The second consequence is that the leader is at the mercy of his support base. That is to say, while Hamid Karzai did win a popular election in 2004, his main constituents are not the people of Afghanistan, but those he must appease within his own government. Once he loses the support of his clients, the strongmen will likely return to their regions of influence, thus weakening the central government. This could happen for an assortment of reasons. One could simply be a political disagreement that angers a certain faction. Another could be the departure of foreign militaries, which had previously put pressure on the strongmen to leave their power bases and join the central government. The possibilities are varied and reflect the fragile composition of the government. This is not to say that the government is doomed. Rather the point is that the success of the government is inextricably tied to the leadership.

Possible Policies

The United States and international community should not support a single leader or group of people in the future of Afghanistan. Afghan alliances and loyalties are highly fluid because they spring from the Afghan political landscape. While Hamid Karzai (in the author's opinion) has exuded "good will" as a leader, his inclinations can certainly change in the future. Instead, the

US should support the Afghan constitution, which most Afghans at a *loya jirga* in 2003 supported,[104] in order to sustain the current Afghan governing system. Also, by supporting an independent central military, the US can diminish the power of regional militias that threaten the central government's rule, and that would (with lots of hope) support the will of the Afghan people.

Another policy that could be successful is to try to stabilize the country by providing security and military training. The success of Afghanistan does not rely on its constitution. Hamid Karzai has even said that "if stability improves, proper political parties emerge, and we judge that a parliamentary system can function better, then a Loya Jirga can . . . be convened to adopt a different system of government."[105] If the US continues to play an active role in building the Afghan army, it can help the country realize its aspirations. The US should recognize that its relationship with Afghanistan is for the benefit of that country, and only then will the result benefit the US.

Concluding Remarks

The tragic events of 9/11 changed Afghanistan in a myriad of ways. The United States, in its effort to confront the threat of global terrorism, played a major role in the development of Afghanistan's political future. However, the United States acted mainly in disregard of Afghanistan's recent and distant past

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[104] Mills, 191-196.
[105] Hamid Karzai qtd. in Rashid, *Descent*. 217.

and rather in its own interests, which negatively affected the shaping of Afghanistan's current government.

Afghanistan's government has always been weak and fragmented. Traditionally, local village leaders had far more authority than the central government. In the twentieth century, periods of invasion, civil war and autocracy destroyed the country's traditional governing systems and allowed individuals with militias to rule the country. After 9/11, the United States struggled to find an acceptable strategy to destroy Al Qaeda while avoiding a full-scale nation-building project in Afghanistan. By co-opting the Northern Alliance to do the fighting, the US allowed strongmen in the NA to gain potent political followings and militias that were often used to oppose the goals of the national central government. Thus, the US focused on establishing a political order that achieved its own priorities rather than the critical interests of the newly emerging Afghan political structure.

The result was that Karzai had to compete with regional strongmen. The Karzai government was forced to sacrifice some of its own authority in order to mitigate the power of its political rivals by incorporating those very rivals into the government. This created a government driven by patron-client relationships and not by the Afghan constitution. Such a system does not bode well for the future of Afghanistan as it is not a stable system and relies wholly on the character and choices of the leadership.

The current situation in Afghanistan reflects the choices that the US government and Afghan government made in the first several years of the conflict. With the recent upsurge in Taliban attacks the United States can clearly see the error in the "small footprint" strategy it once envisioned for Afghanistan. The United States had a rare opportunity to rebuild Afghanistan into a peaceful and successful state, which it tragically did not realize at the time. If the United States wants to see peace and stability in Afghanistan, it will require enduring support, and in all likelihood, lots of frustration. However, if the international community fails to support Afghanistan, its future will be uncertain and the country could once again fall into a brutal civil war and a breeding ground for terrorism. In the words of the scholar Nick Mills, "If we do not pay the price for Afghanistan's success, we shall surely pay for its failure."[106]

[106] Mills, 20.

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