

What Afghans Want

By Andrew Garfield

November 2009

[Andrew Garfield](#) is a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and Washington Director of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (London). He is also the founder of Glevum Associates, which conducts extensive face-to-face social science research in Afghanistan and Iraq on behalf of the Department of Defense and other clients. This essay draws on research performed in connection with a joint FPRI-RUSI study on Reforming the Afghan National Police, as well as other attitudinal research undertaken in Afghanistan by Glevum Associates over the last six months. The views expressed are the author's and do not represent the policy or judgments of any organization of the United States Government. The monograph and archived webcast of a September 17 briefing on the subject are posted at <http://www.fpri.org/research/nationalsecurity/afghanpolice/>.

Bleak Prospects

Since President Barack Obama's election in November 2008, countless official reviews, academic studies and popular articles have been published about the war in Afghanistan, and how it should be fought. Journalists, generals and academics have all visited Afghanistan, met with Afghan officials, interviewed a few ordinary Afghans, and written lengthy reports on the problems there. They have suggested various strategies that the US-led Coalition should adopt to support the Afghan Government and defeat a resurgent Taliban. Yet, despite this tidal wave of well-intentioned advice, changes of command, and a recent limited surge of troops, Taliban influence has continued to spread, popular support for both the Coalition and the Afghan Government has diminished, and Coalition casualties have mounted.

The conflict's ever-extending duration, seeming intractability, and apparent lack of success have led many to question the efficacy of continuing the war. This is the case especially in Europe. Yet even in the United Kingdom, which has been a staunch U.S. ally, support for the war is beginning to wane at a time when British casualties in Afghanistan have recently surpassed those suffered in the Iraq war. Certainly an emboldened Taliban believes that, at the very least, the European Coalition partners will soon grow weary of what increasingly seems like an unending and perhaps unwinnable war. Even in the United States, some critics have suggested that Afghanistan could become Obama's Vietnam. What then is the right approach to winning this war? Indeed, can this war be won at all? To answer these questions, I recommend looking at an obvious, source—the Afghan people themselves.

Hearing but not Listening – Seeing but not Recognizing

The United States military, as well as its Coalition partners' militaries, know that, at its core, counterinsurgency is a struggle for the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people. In this multifaceted struggle, the Afghan Government and its Coalition partners also understand that an integrated synergistic campaign is needed that includes an equal focus on development, governance and security.

Coalition militaries increasingly understand that killing and arresting Anti Government Elements (AGEs) is a largely futile exercise, if popular support is lost in the process, and AGE losses are easily replaced by an increasingly supportive or at least compliant population.

In addition, both the Afghan Government and the Coalition know that our adversaries realize they are battling for the very soul of the Afghan people and that they will use every opportunity to enhance their image, promote their ideology and divide Afghans from each other, their Government and the Coalition. We also understand that the AGEs effectively use resentment and anger, ethnic, tribal and familial ties, common narratives, violent and intimidating actions and propaganda to promote their cause.

Why then, if we know what it takes to win this fight and we are acutely aware that our adversary knows, are we struggling to prevail in Afghanistan? Perhaps even losing, at least at the strategic level, where the insurgent wins simply by not losing.

The answer, I believe, is that we have singularly failed to listen to what both eminent and ordinary Afghans have to say. They continue to tell us what issues matter most to them, what strategy and actions they want us to adopt, and which words and deeds they want us to eschew. Unfortunately, all too often, they speak but we do not listen. We see but do not recognize. We act but we do not consult.

Even after seven years, we still make sweeping generalizations about Afghanistan and its people based on superficial learning. Meanwhile our planners and officials remain isolated on our bases and embassies, rarely if ever engaging directly with the local population. Instead they rely on cultural advisors who themselves hardly ever go outside “the wire”. And we change policy based on reviews conducted in a matter of a few weeks, often by experts parachuted into Afghanistan for the duration of the study. These experts subsequently produce reports that at best can only provide a snap shot of Afghan society and the numerous points of friction in it.

Cultural Understanding = Front Line Success

We have had the greatest success in Afghanistan ironically, on the front line. U.S. and Coalition brigades and battalions who live in the heart of Afghan communities have, for the most part, developed an intimate understanding of the communities they support. This has been achieved through their direct engagement with the local population. U.S. forces, in particular, have engaged in formal cultural education with the support of social scientists in the often maligned but essential Human Terrain Teams. Armed with this crucial cultural knowledge, the grunts have cemented many successful relationships with local leaders and ordinary Afghans alike. With their Afghan Army colleagues, they have used this knowledge to pacify successfully those few areas where they have a sustained presence. However, this localized tactical success is not matched sufficiently by carefully targeted regional and national programs designed to address the numerous problems facing Afghans today. These programs must consolidate the hard won tactical success of the brigades and battalions, supporting Provisional Reconstruction Teams, and a few stalwart NGOs.

Human Terrain Research

If the key to success in Afghanistan is listening to and understanding the local population, how is this achieved, particularly at the operational and strategic levels? It is certainly not achieved through relying on a few cultural advisors with limited connections to the communities with whom we are engaging. It is also not achieved through the random use of opinion surveys developed by planners and staff officers permanently stationed in larger bases and embassies.

“All generalizations are dangerous, even this one” *Alexandre Dumas*

Without understanding the human terrain, one can only make sweeping generalizations about Afghanistan based on superficial learning, which can have deadly consequences at the tactical level and undermine national objectives at the strategic level. Critical socio-cultural factors that need to be fully understood include ethnicity, tribal structures, social status, education, gender, affluence, age, religion, politics, sources of power and authority, belief systems, personal preferences, affiliations, inter and intra-community relationships, macro and micro economics, industry and business, and of course security and the insurgency.

The key to determining all Afghans’ identities and to finding out what ordinary Afghans think, is to undertake a coordinated program designed to elicit the views of all segments of Afghan society, both the elites and ordinary citizens. Such a program must utilize a carefully coordinated combination of polls, focus groups, depth interviews, field research, observations, and the insights of Afghan Subject Matter Experts combined with unit insights secured through direct engagement in order to build up a sophisticated picture of what we need to do to prevail in Afghanistan.

To provide these critical cultural insights, the US Army’s Human Terrain System has developed the Social Science Research and Analysis (SSRA) program, in conjunction with a contractor. The SSRA program utilizes a combination of social science-based qualitative and quantitative research and analysis techniques, to include the extensive use of polls, focus groups and interviews. This research is combined with insights provided by a talented pool of Afghan Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to provide a comprehensive overview of Afghan society and Afghan needs and wants. This research is then fused with the insights provided by the deployed Human Terrain Teams and Regional Reach Back Centers to provide a comprehensive picture of the Afghan population.

Although funding for this program is limited it has provided the type of critical insights that should inform all Afghan Government and Coalition plans and actions. The irony of this research is that it identifies several simple, mundane, and understandable problems that are undermining everything that the Afghan Government and Coalition is trying to achieve in Afghanistan. However, these problems require costly solutions to overcome them.

What Afghans Want

The key issues for both Afghan elites and ordinary citizens, which have been determined through a carefully coordinated HTS funded research program, are outlined here. In my opinion, the Afghan Government and Coalition must address these issues if we are to prevail against the Taliban—a victory that this research also indicates most Afghans actually want.

Corruption – Root of all Evil

“Corruption came to Afghanistan and dramatically developed after the end of 2001. It has been practiced and applied just like a well-recognized law in the country.” – A senior Afghan Police Officer

Corruption touches nearly every aspect of an Afghan’s life, requiring payment to obtain essential services; acquire passports, permits, licenses, and other official documents; secure jobs; and obtain medical attention, to list just a few examples. Many Afghans seem resigned to this situation, even while describing such corruption as un-Islamic and a plague on Afghan society.

Most respondents lack confidence in the Afghan legal establishment’s ability or willingness to end the corruption, given that most police officers, lawyers, and judges reportedly profit from corrupt practices. They are also pessimistic that the Presidential elections, once this sorry saga is finally concluded, will make any tangible difference, because Government corruption has become institutionalized. As one Afghan SME put it:

“No official can get a high position in the government without giving a bribe to the recruiters. The appointees have already given bribes and now they have to take bribes from others.”

Almost all Afghans interviewed for this research effort view every branch of the central government as corrupt. Indeed, many older Afghans consider the current government as the most corrupt in their memory. Bribery of government officials, extortion and embezzlement by government officials, and nepotism in hiring for all government posts are reported to be the three most pervasive types of corruption.

Taking money to support poor salaries is not viewed negatively by many Afghans, who reason that the low salaries of junior ranking government officials are a root cause of corruption. However, it is also noted that the most corrupt are often the most senior and well-paid officials.

Most respondents consider Kabul to be the most corrupt city in the country and many suggest that it is the need to bribe government officials that forces many Afghans to go to Kabul in order to obtain services and resolve disputes.

“Unless the present corruption is curbed, local people will not have trust and they will not coordinate with the central government.” – An Afghan SME

According to many of the Afghans interviewed, the government’s legitimacy is being actively undermined by the majority of public officials who exploit positions of authority for their own gain. When asked to estimate the percentage of corrupt government officials, most respondents estimated that between 80 and 90 percent of those currently serving in government posts are using their positions to enrich their own personal wealth.

The Afghan National Police (ANP) is often the face of corruption most frequently encountered by the Afghan people. Corrupt police officers’ actions further erode public confidence in the government overall. However, most Afghans do not consider ANP corruption as the most corrosive form of corruption in the country. Rather, it is embezzlement by high-ranking government officials—governors, parliamentarians and ministers—that worries Afghans the most. These men are considered guardians of

the country and their illegal activity is seen as having a significantly larger effect on Afghanistan's development than that of many mid and low-level officials who are simply trying to make ends meet and supplement their meager income.

“One of the reasons that local people refer to Taliban verdicts is that local people do not trust government courts and government officials. Local people know that the government is corrupt.” – Wardak Tribal Leader and SME

Many Pashtun Afghans view Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) as far less corrupt than government officials and offices. This resonates with many Pashtu respondents who often note that there was far less corruption when the Taliban was running the country. It is, therefore, not surprising that those Afghans who refer to previous governments, are quick to note that the current government in Kabul is the most corrupt in memory.

This culture of endemic—and epidemic—corruption is rapidly destabilizing the country and seriously undermining Coalition efforts to introduce both effective governance and sustainable development. Such high levels of perceived corruption seriously undermine the legitimacy of the Afghan National Government, and to a lesser extent that of provincial, and district government. Such corruption is also a propaganda coup to the Taliban. Unless the Coalition recognizes that this level of corruption must be substantially reduced, public support for the Afghan Government can only diminish and support for the Taliban, at least in Pashtu communities, is likely to increase. This Afghan problem cannot be avoided. No matter how difficult a task, the Afghan Government must be compelled to deal with it or there is little hope that public resentment and growing support for the Taliban can be reversed.

Rule of Law — Resolving Disputes

Afghanistan is a society with many points of friction. The feudal, tribal and ultra-conservative nature of its society and the impact of over 30 years of occupation and civil war have created numerous points of conflict/dispute in a country that has always lacked a reliable, centrally administered and timely source of organized justice. This is compounded by the lack of a national land registry and disputes resulting from the recent civil war. The result is frequent local disputes, often over land and other property, that need to be resolved quickly before they escalate. All too often they are resolved violently, perpetuating community conflicts that can be traced back centuries and can last for decades. However, most Afghans agree that Rule of Law is failing in many areas of Afghanistan and that it is almost impossible to obtain timely and impartial dispute resolution and fairly administered justice.

The majority of Pashtun Afghans interviewed complain that the Kabul administered legal system is systemically corrupt, and that most judges, the police and lawyers are corrupt, as well. Most surveyed, complain that too often favorable verdicts can be secured and punishments reduced or avoided through the paying of bribes or through connections. Afghans also complain that at the village level, it is almost impossible to gain timely access to the judicial process. Buying into a popular myth perpetuated by the Taliban, many Pashtun also complain that the current legal system is too secular and insufficiently pious/Islamic. This is despite that fact that recent depth interviews conducted for the HTS program with senior Afghan judges indicates that as many as 89 percent of Afghanistan judges have been educated at an Islamic legal school.

The Taliban have been quick to fill this perceived Rule of Law vacuum. Their travelling “kangaroo courts” administer a form of justice quickly, and from many Pashtuns perspective fairly, and then ensure that usually draconian punishment is handed out quickly. To ordinary Afghans who desire timely, impartial and pious justice, the Taliban courts have a certain appeal and they are willing to look past the severe punishments often handed out. The Taliban are able to pass these courts off as Islamic, even through few if any of the “judges” have any formal Islamic legal training, which most Afghan judges do. The provision of justice by the Taliban is one of the most tangible examples of their shadow government strategy in Afghanistan, which severely undermines the legitimacy of the Afghan Government and the Coalition’s effectiveness.

In order to undermine popular support for the Taliban and introduce stability in Afghanistan, it is therefore essential that the International Community support and if necessary compel the Afghan Government to significantly reduce corruption in the legal system and extend the rule of law down to the village level. This could be achieved in a number of ways including better oversight and a robust internal affairs organization and through the deployment of well-protected circuit judges, not unlike those who used to administer justice in America’s “Wild West.” We must also speed up the registration of land and seek to promote the Islamic underpinnings of the existing legal system, in order to bolster community support for it, and to discredit the Taliban’s rule of law arguments. Such a program Afghans believe, would significantly improve the image of the Afghan Government; resolve most disputes quickly; and delegitimize a key facet of the Taliban’s shadow government strategy.

Quality of Life

Afghanistan is without doubt one of the poorest countries on earth. One only has to spend a few days in Kabul—let alone in the remote districts of the border provinces—to encounter abject poverty and despair. For most Afghans surveyed, life is a daily struggle to survive. In survey after survey, Afghans report that securing jobs and/or an income is critically important to them and almost impossible to achieve. Yet, efforts to develop Afghanistan’s economy are woefully inadequate. Most Afghan respondents understand the direct link between their inability to find work and/or an income, and the increase in criminality and support for AGEs. Indeed, in one recent survey a majority of Afghans identified the lack of jobs as the second most likely cause of instability and the unemployed as the second most likely to cause a security problem. Ironically, in this survey the Government and the police were viewed as having created the most insecurity in the country.

The Taliban has sought to establish shadow government in many districts and to provide welfare programs and incomes for unemployed young men. Bored, disaffected, and angry unemployed young men offer ripe pickings for the AGE recruiters, who offer hope, honor and income to those without any. When this is combined with a coercive element and peer and community pressure, it is easy to see why the ranks of the Taliban are growing. Yet, many Afghans indicate that they would resist the AGE recruiters if they had alternatives—if they had jobs; if they could secure funds to expand farms and start businesses; if the Government would invest in roads and irrigation to help them prosper.

The inability of the Afghan government to provide for all its people (despite some successes with key development programs such as the National Solidarity Program) also encourages them to seek alternative often-criminal sources of income. The cultivation of drugs is the most obvious example. It also encourages others to exploit the country’s few natural resources leading to a potential

environmental disaster in some areas. For example, in some districts respondents report that the only “export” is wood for fires. As there is no program of sustainable development, this leads to deforestation and erosion, new problems that Afghanistan can ill afford.

Whether the international community likes it or not, unless there is a coordinated, long term and well-funded program to develop the Afghan economy, providing jobs for a majority and at least a livable income for most, support for the Taliban will most likely grow. The insurgent enemy only has to promise that it will make things better for the majority and make only a marginal improvement in the quality of life for its supporters in order to prosper. The government has to make a real difference and improve the quality of life for a majority of its citizens or it will fail.

Clearly, there are many obstacles to developing a viable economy in Afghanistan, not the least of which is rampant corruption, particularly in government. To secure improvement in all areas is impossible. However, until we start hearing what the Afghans are saying—that they need jobs and a minimum level of income—and we try to do something serious about it, we will remain at a huge disadvantage to the Taliban and other AGEs.

Dealing With Illiteracy — Education, Education, Education

Most Afghans interviewed agree—illiteracy undermines almost every facet of public and private life in Afghanistan. They say it denies opportunities to those who cannot read or write. It diminishes the effectiveness of key institutions, such as the police and army, which are forced to recruit illiterate candidates. It seriously undermines government efficiency. It significantly reduces the intellectual capacity of the country, which is utterly inadequate already to support the development of a viable economy and modern society. It perpetuates the endemic corruption that plagues Afghan society and it fosters ignorance, intolerance, and superstition. Even some traditional and ultra-conservative tribal elders lament the high levels of female illiteracy, on one level, because it limits the availability of female doctors, midwives and nurses to reduce the appalling levels of female and child mortality. Perhaps most importantly of all, Afghans say, it reduces the availability of teachers who can break the country’s cycle of illiteracy.

What research shows most Afghans agree is desperately needed, to use an oft-quoted political mantra, is Education, Education, Education. When Afghans talk about education however, they do not mean schools. The Coalition loves to build schools. It is easy to do and there is a tangible result allowing them to “tick the box.” However, it is not schools that provide education Afghans say, it is teachers and a functioning education system. Most Afghans interviewed consistently lament the inadequacy of the education system, not the lack of school buildings.

Afghans rail at the paucity of well-qualified teachers. They complain about the low wages of teachers or the fact that they are not paid at all. They report that many teachers are not qualified to fill their posts and have obtained their positions through corruption and nepotism. As a result, they demand fairly administered entrance exams and well funded teacher-training programs. They are indignant at the corruption in the education system, which Afghan SMEs estimates has led to as many as 14,000 phantom teachers on the books, drawing wages but not teaching. They discuss the lack of school supplies and books and occasionally they talk about the poor quality of maintenance and upkeep of school buildings— including the ones built by the Coalition. Interestingly, many Afghans, including

conservative Pashtun, complain bitterly about the Taliban destruction of schools and even girls 'schools. This is one tactic that most Afghans reject unreservedly.

What does this mean for the Afghan government and the international community? The answer is simple. We need to support with funds, expertise, oversight, and protection, a systematic and well-funded education program that quickly “grows” thousands of qualified teachers, who are given proper assignments and decent pay and who are supported by a reasonably honest and efficient education system that provides books, supplies and maintains buildings. And yes, we do need to build more schools. Unless we support such a long-term education program, Afghanistan will never escape this cycle of illiteracy, which as the Afghans themselves say, undermines everything else they do. We will also embolden the AGEs and allow them to continue to exploit resentment, and the ignorance and intolerance that can be ameliorated by education.

Democracy — More Not Less

The Afghans want representative governance. They want to choose their own government and they want that government to represent their interests. Afghans have for centuries enjoyed a form of representative government provided by the Jirga system, which is a body of the “great and good” assembled to address a specific issue. A Jirga is normally assembled from community leaders who are perceived by most in the community as their legitimate representatives. Afghans also trust community elders and religious clerics to resolve disputes and administer justice. They therefore know what representative governance looks like. Yet many say they do not see it below the national level.

This is because Afghanistan lacks a truly representative form of government below the national level. Provincial Governors are appointed by the President and so on down to the district level. This is a source of great resentment for many Afghans, especially the Pashtu, who also see significant ethnic bias and nepotism in the president's and governor's appointments. This, in turn, undermines support for the government at all levels. The recent empowerment by the national government of local leaders and Jirga, as a perceived legitimate alternative to central government administration, further undermines the importance of and trust in government institutions.

Some Afghans—in particular the Pashtun elites—are concerned that the type of national democracy introduced after 2001 also makes representative governance more difficult and prevents the emergence of a viable opposition. This is because the current system is based on the election of individuals rather than political parties. Without a party system, some fear that it may be nearly impossible to organize a viable opposition that can defeat a powerful president.

What these Afghans believe, is that Afghanistan urgently needs more democracy not less. The Afghan government must, therefore, be encouraged, perhaps compelled, to introduce regional and district elections at the earliest opportunity. Hopefully, this will encourage more Afghans to feel part of the electoral process and develop greater trust in their government. It would certainly deny the Taliban one of their chief recruiting tools. The success of the recent regional elections in Iraq bodes well for Afghanistan. It is also necessary for the international community to foster the development and emergence of political parties in Afghanistan, that become in time, a viable opposition, which is one of the cornerstones of a successful democracy.

Infrastructure – Roads, Water and Electricity

Older Afghan SMEs say that Afghanistan had better infrastructure during the Soviet occupation than it does today after seven years of Western intervention. This is hard to argue against when you drive around Kabul and see the suburbs of communist era housing, drive on roads built by the Soviet army or fly over a city of four million inhabitants that is remarkable for the lack of illumination. Afghanistan's infrastructure is woefully inadequate and it undermines good governance, sustainable development and effective security. It also dislocates the expectations of many Afghans who expected better after seven years of Western support.

Afghanistan urgently needs an effective road-building program. This is essential for a viable economy and in order to bring governance and services to remote areas. It is also essential to allow the Afghan Army and police to disperse their limited resources to protect as much of the population as possible. Even the Romans understood the importance of roads for security. Such roads need to be built by Afghans and they need to be properly maintained. Afghans also say that they desperately need improved sanitation in the cities and major irrigation projects in the rural areas to help develop the agricultural industry on which so many Afghans rely for their income and food. And all Afghans need access to electricity at least for part of each day.

These are basic services that underpin any emerging society. It is, therefore, essential that the international community support the Afghan Government with a systematic well-funded and long-term program to build and restore services and infrastructure that primarily was built well before the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Such a program will significantly enhance security and reduce the effectiveness of the Taliban.

Security – Collateral Damage – Avoiding the “come-on”

The one issue pertaining to the Coalition that consistently creates the most consternation among Afghans is collateral damage. Numerous surveys and interviews strongly indicate that most Afghans perceive that the Coalition in general and the U.S. military in particular as having little regard for the safety of Afghans. This attitude has a serious effect on the legitimacy of the Afghan government, which is seen as powerless to stop the deaths of Afghan civilians. Certain tactics used by the Coalition, including nighttime searches of people and property are also viewed with considerable disdain by a majority and equated with the tactics used by the Taliban.

The recent collateral damage incident in Farah Province is illustrative of how these incidents are perceived. Beyond the general outrage of most Afghans, the views of several SMEs was very informative. They argued that the most insulting and damaging aspect of this sorry episode was the U.S. government's focus on the varying reported totals of civilian deaths rather than on the tragic loss of life. It was almost as if the U.S. military felt that they were the aggrieved party because of the exaggerated losses reported by some sources including the media. Even if the U.S. figures of 20 to 40 civilians killed were accurate, this was still considered to be far too many avoidable deaths. It was this fact, they believe, that the United States should have focused on. Other SMEs expressed frustration that the Coalition was still falling into the Taliban's trap and allowing themselves to become embroiled in firefights in villages using airpower that almost always result in civilian deaths. As one SME put it “why not just walk away, watch from afar and kill them when they leave or on another day”

The negative impact of civilian deaths on Coalition support cannot be underestimated. Every time it occurs, the Coalition makes more enemies and hands another propaganda coup to the Taliban. The focus of the Coalition must, therefore, be on protecting the population not on killing and arresting AGEs. The current campaign in Helmand is necessary to drive an entrenched Taliban out of this province but combat operations involving mass sweep and search operations will not lead to the defeat of the Taliban. Permanent presence and intelligence-led operations using information willingly provided by an increasingly supportive population, and requiring minimal deadly force, is the only way to defeat the Taliban's physical threat. Until such time as the Coalition is seen by Afghans to value their lives as much as their own, more Afghans will question the value of continued support.

Security — Afghan National Police

Many Afghans complain that nepotism, corruption and ethnic divisions are rife in the Afghan police force, problems that are not easily remedied even with international community intervention and support. They also complain that the police are ineffective, slow to respond to incidents and unwilling to thoroughly investigate crimes. However, many of these problems are endemic in Afghan civil society—particularly within the Afghan government at all levels—and cannot be addressed simply through reforming the police. The reform of the entire system of governance in Afghanistan is needed to correct these systemic problems.

When asked, senior Afghan police officers also complain about problems that are entirely correctable with international community support. For example, they complain about high levels of illiteracy, which negatively impacts the effectiveness of the police, as well as the lack of reliable and effective equipment, and the skills and supplies needed to maintain this equipment. They also complain about the training offered by the international community which they say involves too many countries applying different policing models. These models they consider either confusing or inappropriate to the Afghan situation. They also complain about a lack of funds for pay and the use of the Afghan police in roles for which they are ill suited, such as confronting Anti Government Forces. These challenges and shortcomings could be addressed by a better resourced and coordinated international police assistance program. Dealing with societal challenges such as endemic corruption and illiteracy requires a much more fundamental and generational challenge.

They Want Us to Win

Some in the West ask, are the Afghans worth it? Do they really care? Do they actually want peace? The resounding answer to all of these questions is “yes.” The vast majority of Afghans including the Pashtun and many Talibs want peace and stability in Afghanistan. And they will reject the Taliban if they have a viable alternative that offers protection and quality of life. While they see little or no hope, while they perceive the Afghan Government to be corrupt and the Coalition to have a disregard for their safety, and while the Taliban remains menacingly in their midst, they will continue to sit on the fence or cooperate with the men with guns. It is up to us, and the Afghan Government, to offer them hope and the prospect of a better future. They will then come off the fence and support our collective efforts.

Summary — Back to the Future

The United States was instrumental in rebuilding a strong, prosperous, democratic and— most importantly— peaceful post-war Europe and it did so without losing the support of most Europeans. U.S. leaders at that time clearly understood what was needed to avoid the reemergence of dictators and extremism. America, therefore, made the commitment to assist the European nations and especially the defeated Axis powers. They committed to develop strong democratic institutions, robust successful economies, rebuild their shattered industry and infrastructure, and maintain the capacity to defend themselves against internal and external threats without posing a threat to others. This meant America needed to make an almost 50-year commitment to Europe and to expend vast amounts of national treasure to achieve a goal that brought the most benefit to the citizens of countries that were not always entirely grateful. As a result, Europe today is more integrated, prosperous and peaceful than at any time in its history, testimony to an American approach built on the pillars of democracy, development and security.

If we are to succeed in Afghanistan, both the United States and its European allies must heed the advice of the Afghans themselves and make a similar long-term commitment to rebuilding this failing State. We must deal with endemic corruption, which is a plague on Afghan society. We must encourage the Afghan Government to extend democracy down to the lowest levels and support the development of a viable party system. Impartial, timely and pious justice must be available to all Afghan to resolve disputes and reduce the many points of friction that exist in Afghan society.

We must improve the quality of life of most Afghans by helping to develop and grow an economy that can provide legitimate sources of income for the majority of Afghans and fund essential improvements in basic infrastructure including more roads, irrigation, better sanitation, and access to electricity. It is essential that we invest in the future of Afghanistan by supporting a functioning and effective education system and we need to ensure that Afghans have access to at least rudimentary medical care. Furthermore, we must improve the capabilities of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police and continue to assist them to protect the Afghan population from the Taliban. We must do so without being suckered into collateral damage situations, thereby alienating the population we are supposed to protect.

In a country like Afghanistan, this is a tall order indeed. If we are willing to make the commitment in terms of treasure, blood, sweat, tears and patience we can prevail. Most Afghans want us to prevail. If we are not prepared to make a similar commitment to Afghanistan that America made to Europe in 1945, we might as well throw in the towel now, and deal with the consequences. Anything less than a total and long-term commitment is likely to lead to failure anyway.

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