# "Afghanistan as an Empty Space: the Perfect Neo-Colonial State of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (with 44 photographs)

by

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revised and updated April 2006



source: http://www.overlandstory.com/go/albums/userpics/baluchistan/normal\_baluchistan004.jpg

For the invisible many in the "new" Afghanistan who are cold, hungry, jobless, sick – people like Mohammad Kabir, 35, Nasir Salam, 8, Sahib Jamal, 60, and Cho Cha, a street child – because they "do not exist"

Argument: Four years after the U.S.-led attack upon Afghanistan, the true meaning of the U.S occupation is revealing itself. Afghanistan represents merely a space that is to be kept empty. Western powers have no interest in either buying from or selling to the blighted nation. The country possesses no exports of interest. The impoverished Afghan civilian population is as irrelevant as is the nation's economic development. But the space represented by Afghanistan in a volatile region of geo-political import, is to be kept vacant from all hostile forces. The country is situated at the center of a resurgent Islamic world, close to a rising China (and India) and the restive ex-Soviet Asian republics, and adjacent to oil-rich states.

The only populated centers of any real concern are a few islands of grotesque capitalist *imaginary reality* – foremost Kabul – needed to *project the image of an existing central government*, an image further promoted by Karzai's frequent international junkets. The twin chimeras of an effective central government and a process of nation-building need to be maintained. In a few islands of affluence amidst a sea of poverty, a sufficient density of foreign ex-pats, a bloated NGO-community, carpetbaggers and hangers-on of all stripes, money disbursers, neo-colonial administrators, opportunists, bribed local power brokers, facilitators, beauticians (of the city planner or aesthetician types), members of the development establishment, do-gooders, enforcers, etc. warrants the presence of western businesses like foreign bank branches, luxury hotels (Serena Kabul, Hyatt Regency of Kabul), shopping malls (the Roshan Plaza, the Kabul City Centre mall),

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> John Chuckman, "The Nonsense of Nation-Building in Afghanistan: the Parable of the Hatchet or the Nonsense of Nation-Building in Afghanistan," Scoop.co.nz (March 10, 2006) at http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0603/S00155.htm

import houses (Toyota selling its popular Land Cruiser), image makers (J. Walter Thompson), and the ubiquitous Coca-Cola.<sup>2</sup>

The "other," the real economy – that in which the Afghan masses live and toil – comprises the multitudes creatively eking out a daily existence in the hustle-and-bustle of the vast informal economy. They are utterly irrelevant to the *neo-colonial master interested in running an empty space at the least cost.* The self-financing opium economy reduces such cost and thrives upon invisibility. The invisible multitudes represent a nuisance – much like Kabul's traffic - upon maintaining the empty space. Only the minimal amount of resources – whether of the carrot or stick type - will be devoted to preserving their invisibility. Many of those who returned after the overthrow of the Taliban are now seeking to emigrate abroad, thereby contributing to an emptying space. A

The means to maintain and police such an empty space are a particular spatial distribution of military projection by U.S. and increasingly NATO forces: twenty-four hour high-level aerial surveillance; a three-level aerial presence (low, medium, high altitude); pre-positioned fast-reaction, heavily-armed ground forces based at heavily fortified key nodal points; and the employ of local satraps' expendable forces. The aim of running the empty space at least cost is foundering upon a resurgent Taliban, who have developed their own least cost insurgency weapons (e.g., improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings) and putting them to good use. In a propaganda coup, any armed opposition to a standing government is now labeled terrorism. By such criterion, of course, the American revolutionaries of the 1770's and the Vietnamese National Liberation Front soldiers were terrorists.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> naturally in the midst of this, a few organizations (and individuals) genuinely try and do succeed in making life better for the common people - for example, the hospital run by the Italian N.G.O., Emergency in Kabul comes to mind, the wonderful work on de-mining carried out by a number of NGO's, the vaccination campaigns administered by the United Nations, the projects of Oxfam, BRAC, DACCAR, and RAWA, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For an interesting, balanced, first-hand description see Pankaj Mishra, "The Real Afghanistan," <u>The New York Review of Books</u> 52, 4 (March 10, 2005) at <a href="http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17787">http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17787</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> admirably put recently in Dan McDougall, "'The new Afghanistan is a myth. It's time to go get a job abroad'," The Observer (February 5, 2006) at http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,,1702513,00.html



U.S. troops patrolling the empty space of Afghanistan (source: <a href="http://usmilitary.bravehost.com/patrols.html">http://usmilitary.bravehost.com/patrols.html</a>)

Unlike in the colonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where effort was made to develop economic activities – from plantations to mines, factories to infrastructure – in order to have a self-financing colony, in the neo-colony of Afghanistan no such efforts are warranted. Indeed, such efforts contravene the aim of running an empty space – a neo-colony - at least cost. In effect, Afghanistan today has reincarnated itself in its historic role as a buffer state (in twenty-first century clothing).

The ferocity and barbarity of modernity's obsession to control is experienced daily by common Afghans, whereas here in the United States the U.S. invasion and war is consumed as spectacle, a conflation of image and reality, that is, as the Baudrillardian hyper-reality where image no longer represents reality. Here, the war is consumed as an electronic, pre-programmed one, fought on the television screen. News media information is pre-meditated deception,

...to train everyone in the unconditional reception of broadcast simulacra. Abolish any intelligence of the event. The result is a suffocating atmosphere of deception and stupidity. And if people are vaguely aware of being caught up in this appearement and this delusion by images, they swallow the deception and remain fascinated by the evidence of the montage of...war with which we are inoculated everywhere: through the eyes, the senses and in discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Viewers consumed the highly edited, constructed images of the Gulf War as the real. Baudrillard also argued that the totally lopsided casualties revealed the U.S being engaged in a high-tech virtual war – causing widespread destruction and pain - while the Iraqis in 1991 tried to fight a 'traditional' one with its attendant risks. The two efforts never connected. I have argued elsewhere that the U.S. bombing, invasion, and occupation of Afghanistan represents a repeat media spectacle. Such disconnect between real and image also characterizes how Afghanistan's reconstruction is represented – my concern herein - when in fact the place's primary function is as an empty space.

I realize that my argument will be deeply offensive to many – from the U.S military's Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to the United Nations development establishment (UNAMA), cheerleaders, to the community of NGOs, sundry do-gooders and to the 'Cruise Missile Left' (the humanitarian interventionists are well-represented in Kabul<sup>8</sup>). The beauty of the argument is that it explains so much - presenting a coherent

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<sup>8</sup> after the failed hunt to capture bin Laden "dead or alive," the United States fell back upon justifying the bombing and intervention in Afghanistan upon "humanitarian grounds," namely deposing the repressive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Jean Baudrillard, <u>The Gulf War Did Not Take Place</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). See also his "Jean Baudrillard. The Spirit of Terrorism," <u>Le Monde</u> (November 2, 2001) at <a href="http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-the-spirit-of-terrorism.html">http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-the-spirit-of-terrorism.html</a> and Binoy Kampmark, "Wars that Never Take Place: Non-events, 9/11 and Wars on Terrorism," <u>Australian Humanities Review</u> (May 2003) at <a href="http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-May-2003/kampmark.html">http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-May-2003/kampmark.html</a>
<sup>6</sup> Baudrillard (1995), op. cit.: 69

in numerous essays upon Afghanistan, collected in " Archivistan" at <a href="http://www.cursor.org/stories/archivistan.htm">http://www.cursor.org/stories/archivistan.htm</a>. See also Pepe Escobar, "Power, Counter-Power, Part 2: The Fractal War," <a href="Asia Times">Asia Times</a> (February 7, 2002) at <a href="http://www.atimes.com/global-econ/DB07Dj01.html">http://www.atimes.com/global-econ/DB07Dj01.html</a> and my "War as an 'Edsel': The Marketing and Consumption of Modern American Wars" (Durham: keynote address at conference 'Teaching Peace,' April 1, 2005) at <a href="http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold">http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold</a> after the failed hunt to capture bin Laden "dead or alive" the United States fell back upon justifying the

whole - of what we have seen and continue to observe in Afghanistan. Laments and mea culpas about "nation-building on the cheap" miss the entire point entirely – *empty space* on the cheap. My argument is constructed and based upon revealed outcomes – or circumstantial evidence – as nowhere would any of the powerful or their lackeys publicly admit that Afghanistan is an empty space.

This essay is comprised of five inter-related sections. First, I document how the United States and its client state in Afghanistan, has no interest in real socio-economic development in Afghanistan. Secondly, I delve into the largely invisible economy where most Afghans carry out a daily struggle to survive. The third section exposes the grotesque forms of pseudo-development in Karzai's Kabul. The next two sections delve into how an illusionary image of progress and governance - *Brand Karzai* - is constructed and marketed. I close with an analysis of the U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan which is geared to protect at least cost an "empty space," a modern reincarnation of the buffer state.

Taliban. Many NGOs – including liberal organizations quickly came to support the U.S. intervention (see Walden Bello, "Humanitarian Intervention: Evolution of a Dangerous Doctrine," <u>Focus on the Global South</u> (January 19, 2006) at <a href="http://www.focusweb.org/content/view/818/26/">http://www.focusweb.org/content/view/818/26/</a>). On the Cruise Missile Left, see Edward S. Herman, "The Cruise Missile Left. Aligning with Power," <u>Z Magazine</u> (November 2002) at <a href="http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Nov2002/Herman1102.htm">http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Nov2002/Herman1102.htm</a>

#### 1. Real Socio-economic Improvements in Afghanistan are an After-Thought

In 1989/90 when Afghanistan had served its 'external' purpose – defeating Soviet forces and weakening the Soviet Union – U.S. interest faded and the country became an "empty space" though with dire medium-run consequences (in the guise of Osama bin Laden disembarking in Jalalabad in 1996, at the invitation not of the Taliban but by their enemies, mujahideen warlords whom the U.S. had funded and armed<sup>9</sup>). Similarly, during the period 1950-79, Afghanistan was of no interest to U.S. policymakers so long as the country's leaders maintained its neutrality during the Cold War, something carefully pursued by in those decades.

The country is of no economic interest either in terms of what it exports legally (dried fruit and carpets) or as a market for imports and foreign investment. One can only look on with some bemusement to see the western development establishment searching feverishly for legitimate "new" exports both as substitutes for opium but also to contribute to righting a huge trade deficit. High-vale products like cut flowers, saffron, rosewater, lavender, and perfumes have been suggested as substitute crops. But even the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization dismisses the saffron idea, noting that while it might grow in the Maiwand district of Kandahar, "...but fits into a different agricultural niche than poppy and is simply not a viable alternative." For her part, Sarah Chayes, another feminist in tow of humanitarian intervention (imperialism), is trying to convince poppy farmers around Kandahar to shed the habit and become soap merchants!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Kathy Gannon, "I is for Infidel," <u>GL Weekly</u> (Australia) (December 4, 2005) at <a href="http://www.afghanan.net/forums/index.php?showtopic=898">http://www.afghanan.net/forums/index.php?showtopic=898</a> . For a detailed timeline on Osama Bin Laden's activities, see Center for Cooperative Research at <a href="http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:ZczD3hGZgxYJ:www.cooperativeresearch.net/entity.jsp%3Fid%3D1521846767-2671+bi+laden+dubai+jalalabad+1996&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1">http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:ZczD3hGZgxYJ:www.cooperativeresearch.net/entity.jsp%3Fid%3D1521846767-2671+bi+laden+dubai+jalalabad+1996&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1">http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:ZczD3hGZgxYJ:www.cooperativeresearch.net/entity.jsp%3Fid%3D1521846767-2671+bi+laden+dubai+jalalabad+1996&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> see for instance Barnett R. Rubin, "Flowers for Afghanistan" (Kabul, September 12, 2003) at www.cic.nyu.edu/pdf/Flowers%20for%20Afghanistan

FAO Representation in Afghanistan," Profiles: Southwestern Afghanistan. Main Crops and Cropping Systems," FAO Website at <a href="http://www.fao.org/world/Afghanistan/prof\_sw\_crops\_en.htm">http://www.fao.org/world/Afghanistan/prof\_sw\_crops\_en.htm</a>

Declan Walsh, "A Kandahar Soap Story," <u>The Guardian</u> (March 27, 2006) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1740356,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1740356,00.html</a>

Such efforts and views conveniently forget that the country's economy has historically been based upon self-sufficiency and subsistence agriculture, centered upon the clan at the village level. 13

The exponential rise in land devoted to opium poppy production since 2001 is a very clear indicator of peoples' revealed options or preferences in terms of survival opportunities. By year end 2005, estimates indicated over 2 million Afghans or about 9% of the Afghan population grew opium illegally. Focus upon land under cultivation, however, can be misleading if per acre yields vary as they did during 2003-4 when bad weather significantly and crop infestation reduced yields. In 1999, under the Taliban, 4'600 tons of opium resin were produced compared to 4,200 tons in 2004. In 2003, total output was about 3,600 tons with a hectare yield of 45 kilos of opium which brought in a farm gate price \$283 a kilo (but only \$92 in 2004, though as The Economist noted, "...still not bad, when GDP per head is around \$200). <sup>14</sup> The average kilo farm-gate price of opium in 2005 was \$102 (but a kilo of heroin sold for \$60,000 on the streets of Moscow. 15 Yields have since risen – 32 kgs per hectare in 2004 to 39 kgs in 2005 – an increase in acreage yield of 22% attributed greater moisture and no crop infestation. While the western press points to the "success" of efforts in combating poppy production by highlighting a decrease in acreage between 2004-5 from 131,000 to 104,000 hectares. overall opium output in 2005 remained at 4,100 tons. <sup>16</sup> The prospects are for a continuing flourishing poppy trade.<sup>17</sup>

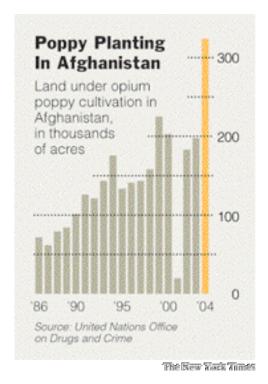
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> a point elaborated upon in detail in Marc W. Herold, 'Modernizing' Afghanistan: How 80 Years of Intervention Impoverished a Frugal Society (Durham: book manuscript-in-progress, Department of Economics, University of New Hampshire, 2006) and in Scott Baldauf, "Key to Governing Afghans: the Clans," Christian Science Monitor (June 24, 2004) at http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0624/p01s04wosc.html
14 "After the Taliban,"

The Economist (November 18, 2004) at http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displayStory.cfm?story\_id=3407727

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Chouvy, op. cit., and Guy Falconbridge, "Russia Illegal Drug Trade Worth \$15 Billion a Year," Reuters (February 17, 2006) at <a href="http://www.e-">http://www.e-</a>

ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/994B68ADA8903BF88725711800460D2B?OpenDocument <sup>16</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Afghanistan's Opium Economy," Asian Development Bank Review (December 2005) at http://www.adb.org/Documents/Periodicals/ADB Review/2005/vol37-6/opiumeconomy.asp

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Afghanistan's Openly Flourishing Poppy Trade," New York Times (February 17, 2006) at http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/02/17/news/poppy.php

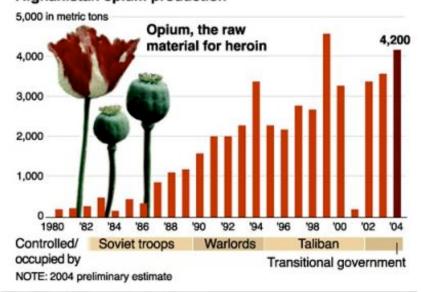


source: "A New Opium War," at <a href="http://montages.blogspot.com/2004/12/new-opium-war.html">http://montages.blogspot.com/2004/12/new-opium-war.html</a>

### U.N. urges control of opium production

A United Nations report released Thursday states that Afghanistan is becoming a "narco-state" and the U.S. and NATO-led forces in the country should get more involved in fighting the drug trade.

#### Afghanistan opium production



Again, all the official hand-wringing in the West about Afghanistan's opium economy and the heralding of alternative crops fails to understand that the opium crop unlike any other is at the center of a complex web of village social relationships. It forms the glue in a complex network of relationships of reciprocity. Peasant farmers do not engage in poppy growing merely because of higher returns per hectare.

Poppy growing and opium production have a long history in Afghanistan. In the 1930's, a quasi-state enterprise held a monopoly of opium export (as recounted elsewhere herein). In much contemporary writing, a flawed, crude, reductionist argument is made: profit-maximizing Afghan farmers will opt to grow poppies. Such a simplistic analysis is untenable.

David Mansfield has presented an incisive, nuanced analysis of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan based upon field research from June 1997 - December 1999. Mansfield begins by noting that the extent of poppy cultivation differs widely across districts in Afghanistan, being greater in areas where landholdings are small, access to both irrigation water and markets more difficult. Poppy mono-cropping is basically non-existent.

In effect, poppy growing is determined by specific local conditions and that it is not necessarily a profitable crop in all circumstances. In particular, poppy growing emerges as a bargain amongst unequal parties, that is, "it has become a medium of exchange between the resource rich and the resource poor, creating a symbiotic relationship." He elaborates,

For the resource rich, their control over resources allows them to determine the rules of exchange by which they acquire opium. Consequently, traditional land tenure arrangements and informal credit

see his "The Economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production: Myth and Reality. Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan" (Feldafing/Munich: paper presented at the conference, "The Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation, August 2001), at: http://www.alternative-development.net/downloads/documents/mansfield david.doc

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systems have been modified in order to favor the cultivation of opium poppy. Within this new framework, opium has come to represent a commodity to be exchanged, not only for the purchase of food but as the means for achieving food security, providing the resource poor with access to land for agricultural production and credit during times of food scarcity.

Hence, opium production is driven less by expected profitability (and crop substitution calculations) and much more by the livelihood strategies of the poor, as it provides access to land, credit, and a vital source of off-farm income necessary for household survival. On the other hand, for those with land, opium cultivation generates attractive risk-adjusted return with minimal personal effort. As Mansfield so aptly concludes, one need

recognize that the socio-economic and political structures that create and maintain poverty in Afghanistan also encouraged the cultivation of opium poppy.

A similar conclusion was reached by a leading researcher at France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique who emphasized that opium production proceeds from poverty and food insecurity, from Afghanistan to Myanmar....it is a coping mechanism and livelihood strategy,

...of part of the Afghan rural population, providing peasants not only with a source of income, but also with access to land and credit. More than opium production as such, it is therefore poverty and the shortcomings of the Afghan agrarian system that should be tackled.<sup>19</sup>

Much ado is made in the West about opium being in the hands of the Pashtun Taliban. Again, such a perspective conveniently forgets the contrary evidence presented by the

South Asia (February 1, 2006) at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, "Afghan Opium: License to Kill," http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South Asia/HB01Df02.html

province of Badakshan where the Taliban never had any presence. The western-sponsored poppy eradication programs have primarily served to alienate large swathes of the desperately poor Afghan rural population who depend upon poppy for daily survival.<sup>20</sup> The U.S.-organized effort in 2004 was a resounding failure. The U.S. contracted with DynCorp (a favorite of Team Bush) for \$ 50 mn to train an Afghan eradication team. The 400 members received two weeks' training – long enough, according to one diplomat then, "to learn how to drive a tractor and point a gun." The team set out for Wardak Province. The result was chaos. In the words of <u>The Economist</u>,

farmers fired rockets at the team camp, and sowed their poppy fields with land mines. Yet it destroyed 1,000 hectares of poppy in six weeks, and should be expanded next year.<sup>21</sup>

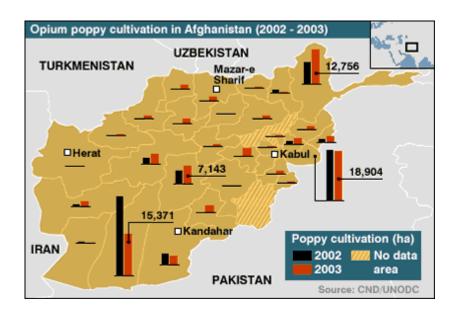
Similar resistance and anger at Western-led efforts to eradicate poppies arose in Nangarhar province. While poppy output was reduced by 80%,

villagers estimated that 60 per cent of Hafi Zan's economy had disappeared. The local mason, butcher and fruit seller have all gone out of business. 'Our village has lost almost all its income,' said one of the elders in another village near the Pakistan border. 'We have no choice. This coming year [2005-6] we will plant opium again and this time the whole tribe is agreed that we will fight. We are ready to die.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> for an excellent empirical account, see Christian Parenti," Afghan Poppies Bloom," <u>The Nation</u> (January 24, 2005) at <a href="http://www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20050124&s=parenti">http://www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20050124&s=parenti</a> and Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Hasty Poppy Eradication in Afghanistan Can Sow More Problems," <u>Christian Science Monitor</u> (March 23, 2006) at <a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0323/p09s01-coop.html">http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0323/p09s01-coop.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "After the Taliban," op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Coghlan, "Afghan Opium Farmers' Anger at West Threatens Crop Controls," Telegraph (August 31, 2005) at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/08/31/wafg31.xml



The income from drugs during 2002-2004 is estimated to have been \$6.820 billion, whereas that from international aid was less than half that, \$3.337 bn,<sup>23</sup> whereas pledges of aid from the international community between January 2002 – April 2006, amounted to \$14.4 bn, only \$9.1 bn were actually committed by February 2005, and of that only \$3.9 billion disbursed (January 2002 – February 2005) and \$3.3bn has been disbursed for ongoing projects. Of the total disbursements, *a mere \$.9 bn worth of projects have been completed*. Such fine-points escape many who point out that Afghanistan "...has been supported by an input of about \$15 billion dollars from the international community since 2001." Ahmed Rashid reported that western donors *committed* on average \$2.5 billion every year during 2002-5 for reconstruction, but less than half that money was *disbursed*. For its part, the U.S. has spent \$1.3 billion on reconstruction in Afghanistan over four years,"... intending to win over Afghans with signs of progress." By way of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> data from Barnett R. Rubin, Humayun Hamidzada and Abby Stoddard, <u>Afghanistan 2005 and Beyond.</u>

<u>Prospects for Improved Stability Reference Document</u> (The Hague: Conflict Research Unit, Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clinendael," April 2005), 79 pp.

as in Sanjay Suri, "Develop the Place, For Everyone's Sake," Inter Press Service (January 245, 2006)
 Ahmed Rashid, "It Takes Two Hands to Help," Yale Center for the Study of Globalization (October 9, 2005)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> David Rohde and Carlotta Gall, "Afghans Allege Reconstruction Funds Wasted,"

New York Times
(November 7, 2005)

contrast, the United States spends \$10 - \$12 bn annually on military operations in Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

The World Bank and members of the development establishment like to point out that such meager results are explained by "bottlenecks in implementation" – long times between commitment to a project and start of actual work. A study sympathetic to the so-called reconstruction effort in Afghanistan was forced to admit in early 2005,

...growth of the legal economy has slowed, little investment is arriving, even Kabul has no reliable electric power or water supply, and bureaucrats paid less than \$50 a month in a capital [city] where the housing market caters to internationals to pay \$10,000 a month for a house, resist reforms that they fear might throw them out on the street...<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, such "development experts" and representatives from some NGO's like CARE, point out that Afghanistan has received significantly less international aid (per capita) than other post-conflict societies (like Kosovo, East Timor, Bosnia, etc).<sup>29</sup> They then go on to blame such a low level of funding as explaining why in the eyes of many Afghans, so little reconstruction has taken place. The refrain is familiar. James Dobbins, a former Bush envoy to Afghanistan, says

Afghanistan is the least resourced, large-scale American reconstruction programme ever. 30

http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/F64904AC-0C00-4AAB-BDE9-B38DC0E206B1.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Back in late 2001, the U.S. was spending about \$2 bn a month on its virtual "war" in Afghanistan, but by February 2002 had only pledged \$296 million over three years for Afghan reconstruction (Escobar (2002), op. cit.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Rubin, et. al., op. cit.: 63

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, Abby Stoddard, Humayun Hamidzada, and Adib Farhadi, <u>Building a New Afghanistan: The Value of Success, the Cost of Failure</u> (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University in cooperation with CARE, March 2004) at <u>www.cic.nyu.edu/pdf/Building.pdf</u>
<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Duncan, "The Nation-Building the U.S. Neglects," Al Jazeera.net (February 29, 2004) at

Whereas certainly a low level of international funding in relative terms has occurred – hardly surprising given Afghanistan as an empty space - more important has been what and how the funds have been spent. As one story headlined, "...computers, satellites and money cannot in themselves transform an impoverished tribal society," especially combined with rampant corruption, inflated project costs, poor carry-through.

During 2002-5, the U.S. spent about \$1.3 billion – or some 38% of the total #3.6 billion pledged by the international donor community after 2001<sup>31</sup> - on Afghan reconstruction (as compared to \$30 billion in Iraq), that is, a little over \$250 million per year, a paltry amount. Moreover, the Bush team has slashed reconstruction aid to Afghanistan from \$1 billion in 2005 to \$ 623 million in 2006. Afghans are widely reported to being increasingly disenchanted with the U.S.-led reconstruction program. Projects languish unfinished. Project quality leaves much to be desired. For example the U.S.A.I.D. in 2004 budgeted to build or renovate 289 schools, but U.S. contractors built only eight and refurbished 77 according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office GAO). Likewise, the U.S.A.I.D. budgeted to build or rehabilitate 253 health clinics in Afghanistan; eight were built and none were rehabilitated. The GAO pointed to poor contractor performance (and security problems, inconsistent financing, staff shortages, lack of oversight). 32 Other reports echo the concern over the poor quality of work undertaken. For example, in a village close to the U.S. occupation forces' main base at Bagram, a mud-brick school built in 2003 compliments of American tax payers is now in utter disrepair – its walls crumbling and its rook pitter by termites chewing into untreated wooden beams.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the project costs of official U.S.-sponsored projects are often much higher than by a private NGO. For example, CARE International built 40 schools in 2004 which, in most cases cost \$10,000 - \$20,000 less than U.S-sponsored projects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> "Security, Drugs, Funding Woes Hinder US Rebuilding in Afghanistan," Agence France Presse (July 29, 2005)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Marcus Stern and Ahmad Shuja, "After Four Years and \$4 Billion," Copley News Service (December 23, 2005) at <a href="http://www.sabawoon.com/news/miniheadlines.asp?dismode=article&artid=27155">http://www.sabawoon.com/news/miniheadlines.asp?dismode=article&artid=27155</a>

Margaret Coker and Anne Usher, "Four Years Later, Much U.S. Aid in Afghanistan Has Had Little Impact, Little is Done to Assure Quality of the Work, U.S. Report Says," <u>Austin-American Statesman</u> (October 16, 2005) at <a href="http://www.myantiwar.org/view/62378.html">http://www.myantiwar.org/view/62378.html</a>

The chief A.I.D. administrator in Kabul, however, proclaims that much progress has been made, citing two national elections, five times as many children in school (including 1.6 million girls), and 500 miles of asphalt roads. Similar rationalizations get regularly repeated: a legal economy which has grown 85 percent since 2001, a quadrupling of school enrollments to 6 million pupils (one-third of whom are girls), falling inflation, a stable currency, booming urban commerce, and paving 1,740 kms of roads. Another purveyor of glad tidings from Afghanistan is predictably The Wall Street Journal.<sup>34</sup>

The use of Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) by international military forces in Afghanistan to engage in civilian reconstruction projects has consistently been criticized by NGOs on three grounds: quality of work executed; high cost of work executed; and concern that blending military and civilian operations will heighten insecurity for all civilian reconstruction work – a claim well borne out as reconstruction workers have become targets since 2002.<sup>35</sup> Alain de Bures, who has worked for decades in Afghanistan for a French NGO seeking to stem deforestation in Kunar Province, blames the American PRT for violence. When the American PRT was set up next door to them, rocket attacks started, U.S. occupation forces arrested one of their employees, etc. Mr. de Bures said of the PRTs, "...in Konar they don't do anything for the people. They are just police for the Americans." He says the PRTs are only there as a military tactic, to win hearts and minds, but they are failing to do even that in the hills of Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, PRTs seem to have come about as a way of trying to achieve security in Afghanistan on the cheap.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Paul Barker, "Why PRTs Aren't the Answer," <u>Institute for War and Peace Reporting</u> (November 3, 2004) at <a href="http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/aid/2004/1103prts.htm">http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/aid/2004/1103prts.htm</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Justin Huggler, "The Trees that Vanished: Crisis in the Hindu Kush," <u>The Independent</u> (September 25, 2005) at http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allArticles/139FF4C0F5A0C4B2872570870044D18D?OpenDocument

<sup>37</sup> see Refugees International, "Security on the Cheap: PRTs in Afghanistan" (July 7, 2003) at <a href="http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/887/?PHPSESSID=5ce00f92779c166324e1d">http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/887/?PHPSESSID=5ce00f92779c166324e1d</a> and also James Ingalls, "Buying Hearts & Minds in Afghanistan. U.S. Efforts to Maintain Imperial Credibility," <a href="http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Dec2003/ingallspr1203.html">Z Magazine Online</a> 16, 12 (December 2003) at <a href="http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Dec2003/ingallspr1203.html">http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Dec2003/ingallspr1203.html</a>

All this does little to alleviate rural hunger, provide jobs, increase access to clean water, etc. In an interview in mid-2005, Afghanistan's Minister for Rural Development, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, admitted that most of rural Afghanistan simply continues to suffer from food insecurity, little access to safe drinking water, access to basic social services such as health and education, etc. 38 Generally, aid bypasses needy villages, whereas in some towns monies sent by relatives from abroad economic activity.<sup>39</sup> Even in Kabul, the island of westernization and the epicenter of imaginary reality, garbage piles up (generating foul odor and undoubtedly contributing to disease) as the city is only able to remove 40% of the daily waste produced. 40 The city's sewage difficulties are even worse. Kabul never had a sewerage-pipe system and the city only has a single truck for picking up sewage! Most property owners simply pay for men with donkey carts to take sewage away. The poor cannot afford that. And so the poor suffer disproportionately from diseases such as leischmaniasis (a sin ailment caused by a parasite transmitted by sand flies), mumps and diarrhea due to garbage and sewage problems. High levels of dust, soot, and fumes choke Kabul, causing health problems.<sup>41</sup>

But the problems run deeper than low funding, "bureaucratic bottlenecks" which paralyze aid donors, and poor project implementation. Spending upon luxury high-visibility constructions in the few urban centers and major highways - a favorite of the international community – has very little direct benefit to most Afghans who live outside of cities and far away from major highways. Over \$3 billion in reconstruction has not brought one single new power plant, new dam, or major water system into service even though electricity is an important input in cities and for agriculture. An estimated 6% of Afghans receive any regular electricity. 42 Road construction has bypassed rural areas where roads are most needed. A doctor in the Guzara district of Herat province told a

http://www.iwpr.net/?apc\_state=hpsiarr2004&l=en&s=f&o=153195

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> "Afghanistan: Interview with Rural Development Minister," Reuters (July 4, 2005) reprinted on Reuters Alternet at http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=47941

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> "Afghan Reconstruction Aid Bypasses Needy Villages," Agence France Presse (January 30, 2006) at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=2&article\_id=21805

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada and Shahabuddin Tarakhil, "Kabul's Underbelly," Institute for War and Peace Reporting (September 30, 2004) at

<sup>41 &</sup>quot;Kabul Choking on Air Pollution," Peopleandplanet.et (June 9, 2004) at http://www.peopleandplanet.net/doc.php?id=2258
Rashid, "Cold Exposes," op. cit.

reporter for the <u>Los Angeles Times</u> that many pregnant women die on their way to hospitals because they lack transportation or the secondary roads are impassable. But the high visibility U.S-funded Kabul to Kandahar \$ 250 mn highway was paved by the Louis Berger Group as chief contractor in record-breaking time, with the aim of helping Karzai in the June 2004 elections and providing for many photo-ops, dutifully printed in the U.S. corporate media. In late 2003, the new U.S. program named "Accelerate Success" was launched in Afghanistan and was "geared towards reshaping the Afghan *public perception* of both the Afghan central government and the United States, its major supporter." The critical element was to create the image – the perception – that U.S.-led efforts are improving peoples' lives.



source: "Karzai Opens Key Afghan Highway," BBC News (December 16, 2003) at <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south-asia/3324789.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south-asia/3324789.stm</a>

Even Jim Myers, head of Louis Berger's Afghan operations said in October 2004, "it's the most political project I've ever done." <sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Neamat Nojumi, "War – What is it good for? Remember Afghanistan?" <u>Los Angeles Times</u> (October 9, 2005)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> a point made in Jim Ingalls, "Buying Hearts & Minds in Afghanistan. U.S. Efforts to Maintain Imperial Credibility," Z Magazine Online 16, 12 (December 2003) at <a href="http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Dec2003/ingallspr1203.html">http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Dec2003/ingallspr1203.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Andrew North, "Afghan Election Notebook 4 – Lonely Road," BBC News (October 5, 2004) at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\_asia/3714332.stm

Another common complaint amongst Afghans is that they are left out of much of their own rebuilding. <sup>46</sup> For example the Chinese-funded project to rebuild the Kabul-Jalalabad highway went to two Chinese firms, relying upon expensive, skilled foreign labor. A similar claim is made about the United States, which favors U.S. firms for its projects:

According to the Washington Post, U.S. construction company, Louis Berger has built or renovated 533 buildings, including clinics and schools at an average cost of 226,000 dollars each. The Afghan government could have done the job for 50,000 dollars a unit, the paper said.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Afghanistan's former finance minister, Ashraf Ghani, claims that the Afghan government could build a school for about \$40,000, one-sixth of the cost racked up when one international aid agency took on the task of delivering 500 schools. The difference is largely accounted for because the aid agency spent 80% of its funds on hiring expensive external technical assistants. Mr. Ghani adds that more than 90% of the more than \$1 bb that was spent on about 400 U.N. projects in Afghanistan in 2002 was a waste of money.

As far as private aid through the 2,300 and some NGO's – 400 being international -active in Afghanistan, which both receive and channel aid, they perform governmental functions that under-sourced Afghans should be doing. Maintaining this maze of NGO's is wasteful. Their logistics, personnel, housing and other internal costs eat up more than 60% of the assistance money, a figure which is probably somewhat exaggerated. Afghans reportedly joke

...that they suffered under the Soviets, then the Taliban and now the  $NGOs.^{49}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ben Arnoldy, "Afghans Left Out of Their Own Rebuilding," <u>Christian Science Monitor</u> (May 24, 2005) at <a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0524/p01s04-wosc.html">http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0524/p01s04-wosc.html</a>

in Agence France Presse, "Afghan Aid 'Wastage' Under the Spotlight at London Conference" (January 29, 2006) at <a href="http://www.theallineed.com/news/0601/29021335.htm">http://www.theallineed.com/news/0601/29021335.htm</a>

<sup>48 &</sup>quot;Millions of Dollars Worth of Aid Money is Being Wasted," BBC (April 5, 2006)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Neamat, op. cit.

The question is where is all the money going in Afghanistan?

Karzai's Planning Minister, Ramazan Bashardost, in 2004 specifically took the NGO. community to task but also the United Nations, accusing them of wasting billions. As planning minister, Bashardost was chief supervisor to the aid organizations operating in Afghanistan. He sought to clarify how the NGO's were actually spending the money allocated to them – how much for the rents and salaries, for their cars and how much they were actually using for their projects. He demanded the organizations open their books. Only 437 out of a total of 2,355 organizations obliged. He found that many relief organizations were there for a simple reason: to turn a profit by the working the gold mine of lucrative aid contracts. The phrase, "the NGO mafia," is commonly used. Many NGO's serve as executors of official U.S. policy, e.g., the Kentucky-based Voice for Humanity funded by USAID distributing 65,800 pre-programmed iPod-like recorders before the 2004 Afghan presidential election where the United States explicitly promoted its man-in-Kabul, Hamid Karzai.<sup>50</sup>

Barshardost resigned when his efforts were overruled by the western kow-towing Karzai, but he then went on to win a seat in the parliamentary elections with one of the highest numbers of votes in Kabul. Barshardost said,

the people are asking themselves 'if these billions of dollars have been donated, which of our pains have they remedied, what ointment has been put on our wounds...there is minimum improvement in the lives of ordinary people.....all ministers and key government officials have lost their legitimacy.<sup>51</sup>

Basherdost's parliamentary campaign called for 1,935 registered NGO's to be expelled from Afghanistan. He says about 20% of all funding to NGOs is spent on "commissions"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Fariba Nawa, "Afghanistan Contracts: Pink 'iPods' for Democracy," CorpWatch.org (March 18, 2006) at http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0318-20.htm
51 "Afghan MP Says Billion in Air, but no Improvement," Reuters (January 31, 2006)

which are bribes to government officials (and the U.N. behaves similarly). He also points out that 420 of the NGOs in Afghanistan have done excellent work.<sup>52</sup>

The aid "wastage" – hefty salaries, luxury cars, large overheads, 'commissions,' overpricing, corruption – was recognized by Jean Mazurelle, World Bank director in Afghanistan, in January 2006,

In Afghanistan the wastage of aid is sky-high; there is real looting going on, mainly by private enterprises. It is a scandal...In 30 years of my career, I have never seen anything like it.<sup>53</sup>

He goes on to say that 35-40 percent of the aid is "badly spent." The plethora of international for protecting the expatriates living in the insurgency hit nation. Then, some of the aid pledged to Afghanistan is used to maintain head offices in faraway capitals. For example, "aid consultants" placed in government and non-government offices – all the American and NATO "advisers" who from behind their walled compounds "weigh in on every aspect of governance, from what kind of uniform the new border police should wear to the legal details of a huge new antinarcotics law"<sup>54</sup> - takes between 15-25 per cent of total aid according to estimates. Another 30 per cent goes to western security firms for protecting expatriates in the insurgency-hit nation. Some of the pledged aid also goes to maintain head offices in faraway capitals. For example, a European official reported

For a contract of 45 million dollars recently given to the F.A.O., four million has to go towards financing its headquarters in Rome.<sup>55</sup>

55 "Afghan Aid 'Wastage'," op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Justin Huggler, "Afghan Candidate Calls for Expulsion of 'Corrupt' NGOs,"

(September 13, 2005) at <a href="http://www.civicus.org/new/content/corruptNGOs.htm">http://www.civicus.org/new/content/corruptNGOs.htm</a>

in Agence France Presse, "Afghan Aid 'Wastage' Under the Spotlight at London Conference," op.cit.
Farah Stockman, "Afghanistan: Few Haves and So Many HaveOctober 9, 2005) at <a href="http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/09/news/afghan.php">http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/09/news/afghan.php</a>

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Bashardost's critique was largely ignored in the United States, but the German weekly, <u>Der Spiegel</u>, devoted a lengthy article in 2005 to the topic of "the aid swindle." Koelbi echoes many points I had made in an essay published in late 2004 for Cursor.org. 57 She writes,

The international community has sought to deliver quick success in rebuilding war-torn Afghanistan. But the country has become an El Dorado for international consultants and professional aid workers who ply the streets in Land Cruisers. Their methods have also fostered an atmosphere of corruption and sloppiness that has left many Afghans feeling disappointed and cheated.

The Karzai regime officeholders seek to have the aid disbursements go through the Afghan government – three-quarters of foreign aid to Afghanistan in 2006 was not going through the government.<sup>58</sup> Of course, given the high levels of official corruption and nepotism within the Karzai clique (a theme I shall later address)<sup>59</sup>, such a "reform" seems to trade-off monies flowing to expensive foreign aid contractors for monies flowing into the pockets of Karzai's clique (via kick-backs on contracts, etc.).

Even the Karzai regime's Minister of Economy, Amin Farhang, who overseas foreign assistance programs reportedly observed in December 2006,

assistance is coming to Afghanistan, but we don't know how it is spent, where it is spent.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> "Susanne Koelbi, "The Aid Swindle," <u>Der Spiegel</u> (May 4, 2005) at http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,348597,00.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Marc W. Herold, "An Island Named Kabul. Trickle-Up Economics and Westernization in Afghanistan," Cursor.org (December 6, 2004) at <a href="http://www.cursor.org/stories/kabul.html">http://www.cursor.org/stories/kabul.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Harry Dunphy, "Report: Most Afghan Aid Bypasses Government," Associated Press (January 23, 2006) at http://www.wibc.com/news/article.aspx?id=799219

at <a href="http://www.wibc.com/news/article.aspx?id=799219">http://www.wibc.com/news/article.aspx?id=799219</a>
Farangis Najibullah, "Eurasia Insight: Afghanistan: Nepotism, Cronyism Widespread in Government," Eurasianet.org (May 11, 2003) at <a href="http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051103.shtml">http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051103.shtml</a>
<sup>60</sup> Rohde and Gall, op. cit.

What better description of Afghanistan as empty space to be kept that way "on the cheap."

The situation for Afghan women and children was deemed an "acute emergency" in mid-2005 by a representative of UNICEF due to sky-high maternal death rates and almost one-half of all children – particularly girls – suffering from malnutrition. An estimated 600 children under the age of five die every day in Afghanistan, mostly due to preventable illnesses, and some 50 women die every day due to obstetric complications. The winter of 2004-5 exposed the country's broken promises when more than 600 people, most of them children died. In some eastern provinces, ravenous wolves attacked equally hungry children.

A virtual fetish has been made of bringing education to Afghan girls and women, a cause taken up in some feminist quarters. Again, the transparently obvious political dimension is clear for all to see.<sup>64</sup> The 2004 UNDP report on Afghanistan notes that it "has the worst education system in the world." Why did western donors before 9/11 express no interest in the plight of Afghan women or girls' education? Why did they not support and report widely upon the lonely, tireless efforts of RAWA?<sup>65</sup> Why do these donors who care so much for Afghan girls, not express similar concern for poor African women? A study made two years after the U.S. invasion concluded,

Yet, more than two years later, the number and manner of dollars spent, and the actual situation on the ground reveals that Afghan women's rights

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> "UNICEF: Afghanistan Child Mortality Soars," Associated Press (August 5, 2005)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> "UNICEF Warns of Continued Threat Facing Women and Children" (March 21, 2006) at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/unicef.htm">http://www.rawa.org/unicef.htm</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ahmed Rashid, "Cold Exposes Afghanistan's Broken Promises," BBC News (March 17, 2005) at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south asia/4310863.stm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> see Katherine Viner, "Feminism as Imperialism. George Bush is Not the First Empire –Builder to Wage War in the Name of Women," The Guardian (September 21, 2002) a <a href="http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0923-07.htm">http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0923-07.htm</a>

beautifully recounted in Anne Brodsky, With All Our Strength; The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

have been clearly negotiated in exchange for political gains, manipulated for public relations success stories, under-funded, or ignored altogether.<sup>66</sup>

Abundant further evidence has been collected by R.A.W.A. which demonstrates that change for Afghan women has been at best marginal since the U.S. invasion.<sup>67</sup> As a member of R.A.W.A. wrote,

Britain and the U.S. said war on Afghanistan would liberate women. We are still waiting...The Karzai government has established a women's ministry just to throw dust in the eyes of the international community. In reality, this ministry has done nothing for women. There are complaints that money given to the women's ministry by foreign NGOs has been taken by powerful warlords in the Karzai cabinet.<sup>68</sup>

In what surely qualifies as a major public relations coup – widely picked up in the western corporate media – a beauty school was set up inside the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kabul. The funding was provided by a group of "comfortable New Yorkers in the high fashion industry," including a *Vogue* Editor. While no doubt the ostensible reason was to train local women in beauty techniques and to give them the business skills to set up their own salons, but the effort was re-interpreted by the West as an example of women's liberation (though the B.B.C. sarcastically headlined a story "Afghan lipstick liberation", when in fact the group benefited represents an infinitesimal fraction of Afghan women.

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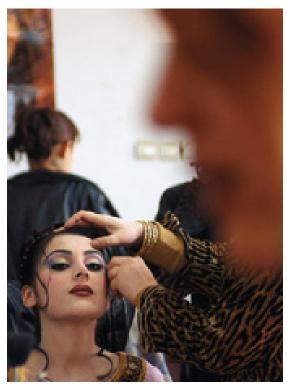
<sup>66</sup> Sonali Kolhatker, "Afghan Women Continue to Fend for Themselves," <u>Foreign Policy in Focus</u> (March 4, 2004) at http://www.sonaliandjim.net/cgi-bin/journal.cgi?folder=writings&next=32

<sup>67</sup> see http://www.rawa.org/women.html

Mariam Rawi, "Rule of the Rapists," <u>The Guardian</u> (February 12, 2004) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,1146134,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,1146134,00.html</a>

<sup>69</sup> Jill Colgan, "Afghanistan – Kabul Beauty School," ABC.net.au (September 30, 2003) at http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/stories/s953439.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> "Afghan Lipstick Liberation," BBC News (October 17, 2002) at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\_asia/2336303.stm





Another last way, to expose the negligible value put on the lives of common Afghans is simply to peruse the detailed evidence I have been gathering during the past four years on the killing and injuring of thousands of Afghan civilians carried out in the name of a 'war on terror.' My compilation, the Afghan Victim Memorial Project, provides up-to-date

details on the killing of over 1,300 Afghans. 71 Another angle to document the low value put on an Afghan's life is to compare the compensation paid by the U.S. military in cases of wrongful death.<sup>72</sup>

I have argued that Afghanistan is simply of no economic interest to the United States (and other developed countries). This is revealed by very low levels of reconstruction aid provided and by the types of donor-funded projects implemented, driven more by donor interests than concern for Afghans' everyday lives. Much of the reconstruction aid has been devoted to high visibility projects of questionable value to average Afghans. The Afghan masses are increasingly clear that terribly little of the \$3 billion in reconstruction aid has trickled-down to them, whereas a significant portion has manifestly and visibly tricked-up to the coterie of elites around Karzai, comfortably ensconced in Kabul.<sup>73</sup> But, should we expect otherwise when the country's function is that of an empty space to be maintained at least cost and presided over by the imaginary reality of a government in Kabul?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> see "The Afghan Victim Memorial Project," at <a href="http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold">http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold</a> see my "The Value of a Dead Afghan Revealed and Relative," Cursor.org (July 21, 2002) at http://www.cursor.org/stories/afghandead.htm

a point dramatically made in my essay, "An Island Named Kabul," op. cit.

## 2. The Invisibility of and Disinterest in the Masses' Real Economy and Daily Life

I shall suggest here that the "new" Afghan economy is a jobless one, dependent upon and driven by imports, one where returned refugees are now seeking to leave once again, and one dominated by the opium trade where the economic gains are very unequally distributed.

Overflowing slums of Kabul, a vast casual labor market, begging, children everywhere trying to earn a few pennies, and visible rampant poverty provide the evidence not available in non-existent official reports. In December 2004, the United Nations' International Labour Organization drew attention to high levels of unemployment in Afghanistan. It singled out illiteracy (estimated to be 70%) as the single greatest cause, but that really misses the point. Widespread unemployment results from a stagnant real economy – the reported annual economic growth rates of 10-20% are statistical constructions having little to do with the real economy of producing legal goods and services. The vast bulk of Afghans find occasional or casual employment in the informal economy in cities or the countryside. Around 50,000 children in Kabul – or 2% of the city's population - work on the streets polishing shoes, selling fruit, working as porters in the markets, washing cars, scavenging in garbage, or simply begging for money.

In March 2006, the highest-ranking member of the United Nations in Afghanistan, Tom Koenigs, in a revealing statement warned Afghan refugees not to return home because security was so dire, unemployment and poverty were so widespread. He stated,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Afghanistan: ILO to Tackle Unemployment," IRINnews.org (December b6, 2004) at <a href="http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=44532&SelectRegion=Central\_Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN">http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=44532&SelectRegion=Central\_Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN</a>

The economic opportunities for someone returning to Afghanistan are exactly zero. Some crisis nations in Africa are extremely well developed by comparison.<sup>75</sup>



Children in Kabul Collecting Garbage for Resale, March 2004

For example, Mohammad Kabir, 35, who was sacked from a government job in a reform process, told IRINnews as he waited at the crowded roundabout at Kot-e-Sangi on the outskirts of Kabul, a huge informal labor market,

This is the capital and you can guess [what it is like in] the provinces. All these people gather here every morning expecting to find daily labour and earn some bread and tea for the family meal.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> David Williams, "Please Don't Come Home, UN Begs Afghan Refugees," (March 21, 2006) at <a href="http://fairuse.100webcustomers.com/fuj/smh6.htm">http://fairuse.100webcustomers.com/fuj/smh6.htm</a>

He waited until midday before finding a half a day's work.

Others find work as servants, chauffeurs and bodyguards in the new service economy of Kabul. The Yet others find temporary jobs in the booming luxury construction taking place in Kabul – building five-star hotels, shopping malls, narco-mansions or "corruptomansions."

Others conclude that "the new Afghanistan is a myth [and] it's time to go and get a job abroad." As Dan McDougall wrote recently,

Outside the iron gates of the Iranian embassy, braced against the winter sleet in woolen caps and ankle-length chupans, hundreds of Afghan men roll out blankets and kneel towards Mecca. At each bow the men's noses merge with the slushy grey mixture of mud, snow and sewage that covers the rutted pavements and roads of Kabul. Their prayers are for a new life elsewhere and food for their starving families - they are queuing in the dawn's half light to leave Afghanistan....'I wish I hadn't come back home from Iran after the Taliban left. I had a better life there; I had occasional work at least, so I am going back.' Zahair Mohammad stands in the line trying, with hundreds of others, to get an Iranian visa. 'I was thinking positively for a long time about rebuilding a life here in Kabul, where I was born, but I was wrong, very wrong. It's time to go. I need to work abroad, like most, as a cheap labourer and send money home. What we're hearing on the radio about a new Afghanistan is nothing but a dream.' He gestures at the kilometre-long queue. 'I was a refugee before and now I'm choosing to become one again. I'm not alone..... The Observer has learnt that such is the demand among ordinary Afghans to leave that this weekend the Interior Ministry has run out of the basic materials to make passports..... According to human rights watchdogs, the huge increase in economic migrants exposes the shortcomings of Western-led

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Mishra, op. cit.

reconstruction, estimated to have cost \$8bn (£4.5bn) so far, failures which are disturbingly apparent in the overflowing slums of the capital, Kabul. Hundreds of thousands may have returned from Pakistan and Iran, swelling the city's population to more than two million, but with local unemployment running at 70 per cent there is simply no future for them.'<sup>77</sup>

Others estimate the unemployment rate in Kabul's population of 2.5 million at 50 - 70%. While the country's gross domestic product has nearly doubled since 2001, about 30 per cent of the country's population remains unemployed – the unemployment rates in the countryside are much lower – and 37% percent need donated food to survive according to statistics compiled from the Brookings Institution.<sup>78</sup>

No aggregate figures are available which describe this reality of a jobless real economy without hope. Certainly a vibrant informal economy exists in which boundless creativity thrives and softens the daily hardship of surviving, but this economy exists outside of and in spite of that created by the technocrats of the development establishment. In this city without industry, with streets abounding with beggars, with hundreds of thousands of impoverished widows and orphans, with chaotic traffic jams (some 30,000 find jobs driving taxis in Kabul), and poverty wages, the option of leaving looks attractive. I can do no better than cite McDougall,

In the bombed remains of Kabul's Ministry of Energy, Nasir Salam, aged eight, skips through the mud, his jacket flapping in the wind, exposing his skinny ribs. He is running towards a vast mound of rubbish where children are playing with kites, one of Afghanistan's most popular pastimes, although the kites are composites of plastic bags and greasy lengths of string. The youngsters are badly malnourished, their hair and flesh a mass of sores, their chests wheezing. On the road that runs parallel to the slum,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> McDougall, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Griff Witte, "In Kabul, a Stark Gulf Between Wealthy Few and the Poor," <u>Washington Post</u> (December

<sup>9, 2005)</sup> at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dvn/content/article/2005/12/08/AR2005120801881 pf.html

their mothers congregate, dressed in filthy burqas and chadris, eyes visible through latticed slits as they bang on car windows begging for money. Others like them had earlier caught a bus to beg in central Kabul, hoping that passing aid workers will spare a dollar. Idle men are everywhere, standing in small groups amid creeks of raw sewage.

Nasir and his parents are among hundreds of families who have taken up residence in this abandoned compound - most were refugees, encouraged to return home from Iran or Pakistan, after the fall of the Taliban but now destitute. The buildings where some are squatting have collapsed ceilings, but they offer some respite from the cold. Few charities come here. The only visitors in the past month have been officials from a government ministry who came to inspect the site and said they would evict the squatters and reclaim the land for the state.

Nasir's father, Allahnazzar, 47, says he would leave, if he could. 'What is there for us here? There are hundreds of thousands like us, perhaps millions. There is no work. We are squatting in the corner of a bombed building for shelter, there is no clean water and children die from disease here every month. Many friends who were with me in Pakistan after the Taliban took power have gone back to find work as labourers. Abroad they can work and send money back to their families to help them survive.' In a far corner of the slum, 20-year-old Enayatullah Khan has invited neighbours to his 'home' for a celebration. He is clutching his Afghan passport, empty save for an Iranian visa. He is due to leave the next day. 'I know I will earn money in Iran, I will get work as a labourer and with spring coming I will work in the fields. I am young, I don't mind leaving Kabul, most of my friends have gone.'

Outside the Ministry of Interior, a cottage industry has sprung up supplying services to those who want to leave the country, from roadside photographers providing passport pictures to local people filling out forms for the illiterate.

Tariq has raised the money to buy an ancient camera and takes at least 200 passport snaps a day. 'The demand is high. Everyone wants to go to Iran and Pakistan to work, young and old, nobody wants to stay here. The queue for the visas is so large that the traffic police marshal it. But what you are seeing here is the people who want to enter within the law, probably because they have been put in jail as illegal immigrants before and don't want that again.

'Hundreds of thousands more will go over the border illegally, what other option do they have,' he adds, pointing across the street where a group of men have monopolized a playground. 'Look at them, they are playing on a children's roundabout, there is nothing else to do.'

A major contributor to the jobless economy is the import-dependency of the new Afghanistan. Aggregate trade data reveals enormous current account deficits amounting to 40-50% of gross domestic product. As a share of the country's gross domestic product, imports amounted to: 67% in 2001/2, 59% in 2002/3, and 74% in 2003/4. The governor of Afghanistan's central bank, Anwar ul-Ahady, singled out consumer goods in 2004 as the most secure area for investment, noting

Most of the things we consume come from the outside. And major cities are the largest consumers. Kabul especially is the largest consumer.<sup>81</sup>

Since so little of that consumed in the westernized enclave economy is produced locally, all needs to be imported. Pankaj Mishra describes a Kabul scene he saw while walking back to his hotel in early 2005,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> the current account deficit was 45.0% of GDP in 2004/5, down from 50.9% in 2003/4, due to a slowdown in imports.

derived from International Monetary Fund, <u>Islamic State of Afghanistan: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix</u> (Washington D.C.: IMF Country Report No. 05/34, February 2005): 32. Unlike other heavy importers like Singapore and Malaysia which also export a lot, Afghanistan imports consumer goods and exports very little.

<sup>81</sup> Tanya Goudsouzian, "Money Talks in Afghanistan's Scramble for Resources. Investors Face Tantalizing Offers from Dubious Characters," <u>The Daily Star</u> (August 28, 2004) at <a href="http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=3&article\_id=7818#">http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=3&article\_id=7818#</a>

Earlier that evening, I had seen two Afghan girls at a pizza parlor. They wore tight blue jeans, their faces were uncovered, and they sipped [imported] Pepsi-Cola as they watched American women playing softball on ESPN. They would have been an unthinkable sight in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan I had visited in early 2001. Almost four years later, Kabul was full of such surprises: new walled-off villas with mock-Palladin facades, well-stocked supermarkets, Internet cafes, beauty parlors, restaurants, and stores selling DVDs of Bollywood as well as pornographic films. Sitting in one of Kabul's great traffic jams caused by the [imported] Land Cruisers, surrounded by the vivacious banter of Afghanistan's new radio stations and the cries of children hawking newspapers, I often felt as if I was in a small Indian city... 82



Kabul: the Import Economy

The spaces and activities of daily living for the masses of poor are being constantly shrunk. In one of the major scandal which came to light in September 2003, dozens of

<sup>82</sup> Mishra, op. cit I have added the [imported].

homes of poor squatters in the Sherpur neighborhood of Kabul were bull-dozed to make place for "narco-mansions" and "corrupto-mansions" of the Karzai clique (including seven cabinet members and Karzai's hand-picked mayor). The Karzai government through its appointed mayor of Kabul, sold 4,300-squatre-ffot lots to officials and commanders for about \$1,000 each. Kothari said some were resold for more than \$80,000 in Kabul's hot real estate market. A

No one in Kabul's new 'land mafia' was ever prosecuted for fraud. The issue was of such enormity that even the flaccid U.S. mainstream press took note,

What happened in Sherpur is a microcosm of what has been happening all over the city and the country," said Miloon Kothari, a U.N. specialist on housing and land rights, who spent several weeks here. His final report accused several senior Afghan officials, including the powerful defense minister, of active collusion in official land grabs, and flatly recommended that they be fired. In his report, Kothari described a "culture of impunity" in which Afghan officials and other powerful individuals can seize homes and refuse to leave them or appropriate valuable public land for their own profit. 85

The huts were bulldozed by Kabul's police and the land parceled out to people with money and connections. Now, dozens of mansions are being built there. These "corruptomansions" differ from typical Afghan homes which have muted colors, simple materials, and shrouded windows. The new houses seem designed to attract attention with vivid tiles, elaborate balconies and ornate columns. A 10-foot-high eagle statue perches on one roof, wings outstretched.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Witte, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> details and photos in RAWA, "Ministers and highest level authorities occupy land and demolish the homes of poor people in Kabul" (September 9, 2003), at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/sherpur.htm">http://www.rawa.org/sherpur.htm</a>

Andrew Maykuth, "Facing Land Grab by Elite, Kabul's Poor Turn to U.N.," The Philadelphia Inquirer (September 20, 2003) at http://www.maykuth.com/afghan/kabul920.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Pamela Constable, "Land Grab in Kabul Embarrasses Government. Mud Homes Razed to Make Room for Top Afghan Officials," <u>Washington Post</u> (September 16, 2003) at <a href="http://www.sfgate.com/cgibin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2003/09/16/MN283860.DTL">http://www.sfgate.com/cgibin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2003/09/16/MN283860.DTL</a>

In Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, government policy led to the closure of some seventy-five brick kilns and the unemployment of 18,600 laborers. The government banned the import of cheap coal from Pakistan and Afghan officials then increased domestic prices (by some 50%). Increased costs significantly reduced demand for mud bricks – a staple in popular housing construction. The kilns had been operated by Afghan refugees who had returned from Pakistan, but are now trying to collect the money to return there. Kabul's small manufacturers of clothing and shoes – often with ten years experience in their trade – began closing-down in early 2005 as Kabul free-trade oriented western policymakers allowed cheap Chinese imports of basic consumer items. Tamin, 22, a newly unemployed tailor who has been making suits in Kabul for ten years, says he cannot find work, adding "If I Don't find work, I will have to go to Iran."

By far the most dynamic sector of the post-Taliban economy has been the narcotics sector. By 2004-5, it was conservatively estimated to account for about 60% of the country's legal GDP excluding opium (compared to about 40 % in 2001-2). Afghanistan has become far more dependent upon narcotics-related income (defined as the sum of farming and trafficking income) than any other country in the world – with narcotics-related income hovering at around 60% of legal GDP, as compared to slightly over 20% for second-placed Myanmar/Burma. Burma. Burma. Burma. Burma. Burma. Burma.

year	Farmers'	Traffickers'	Total income in % and \$ billions	
	income (%)	income (%)		
2000	11%	89%	100%	\$ .9 billion
2001	7%	93%	100%	\$ 1.18 billion

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> "Brick Kiln Closures Put 18,600 Afghans Out of Work," http://www.e-

ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/63e0bdfbc90b9ca987256be00056a108/beeb37f398909418872570e4007aaeca?OpenDocument

Asia Pulse (December 17, 2005) at

Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada, "Imports Threaten Local Industries," <u>Institute for War & Peace Reporting</u> no. 158 (January 2005) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=239146&apc\_state=heniarr2005">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=239146&apc\_state=heniarr2005</a>

<sup>89</sup> Rubin, Hamizada, Stoddard (2005), op.cit.: 24

<sup>90</sup> ibid

2002	51%	49%	100%	\$ 2.35 billions
2003	43%	57%	100%	\$ 2.3 billions
2004	21%	79%	100%	\$ 2.8 billions

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Source: derived from UNODC estimates in Rubin, Hamizada, Stoddard (2005), op.cit.: 24

The opium trade is estimated to employ 2.3 million Afghan farmer family members (compared to 1.7 million in 2003). But, farming families are capturing a declining share of total opium-related domestic income in Afghanistan- - the share falling from 51% in 2002 to 21% in 2004. A case study of the effects of the opium eradication program in Nangarhar during 2004-5 revealed a very grim picture:

This study looks at the impact such a reduction in opium poppy cultivation has had on rural livelihoods strategies and how households have responded. It explores the diversity of coping strategies households have adopted in response to the shock Theban on opium poppy cultivation has imposed on rural livelihoods in the province. It suggests that the majority of households in the areas where opium poppy has been cultivated at its most concentrated have endured significant hardship. The loss of on-farm income, combined with the daily wage labour opportunities from working during the weeding and harvesting season has led to reductions in household income of perhaps as much as US \$3,400, equivalent to as much as 90% of their total cash income. Further indebtment of the farmers is a consequence. This fall in income has been compounded by a shift to wheat for consumption rather than high value vegetable crops fop sales, restrictions in the availability of credit, and deflation in the nonagricultural rural economy that has reduced both the level of employment and the rates of daily wage labor. 91

<sup>91</sup> David Mansfield, <u>Pariah or Poverty? The Opium Ban in the Province of Nangarhar in 2004/05 Growing Season and Its Impact on Rural Livelihood Strategies</u> (Jalalabad: The Project for Alternative Livelihoods in Eastern Afghanistan (PAL), Policy Brief No. 1, September 2005) at <a href="http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/encoping-strategy-policy-brief-9-2005.pdf">http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/encoping-strategy-policy-brief-9-2005.pdf</a>

Another report noted that peasant poppy farmers left without new livelihoods are heeding the call to join the insurgency and reducing their food intake.

In 2004, Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan was estimated to produce approximately one-fifth of Afghanistan's opium. In 2005, its opium cultivation had decreased by as much as 96 percent. While considered an eradication success story, significant economic hardship and major social discontent followed. For many peasants, it meant a 90 percent reduction in their total cash income, by as much as \$3,400. The Cash-for-Work programs designed to provide alternative livelihoods, such as digging wells, offered compensation significantly below income losses. The programs also failed to reach the poorest and most vulnerable. The impoverished peasants have been forced to curb basic food intake and sell long-term productive assets, such as livestock and land. Many have been left feeling betrayed that the promises to help make a new life were unmet, and many are going back to planting poppies this season. The situation in Helmand to the south is analogous. 92

The most pernicious side effect of such poppy eradication programs (in Nangarhar and Helmand) is the inability of poppy farmers to repay their contracted opium debt:

Creditors who lend money to peasants to make it through the winter months and buy seeds for the following season - the only microcredit system available - double or triple the peasants' debts if they are not repaid in the same year. The peasants then have to grow even more poppy than they would have otherwise. If peasants take too long to repay, they face the possibility of being killed by the traffickers and having their houses

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Hasty Poppy Eradication in Afghanistan Can Sow More Problems," <u>Science Monitor</u> (March 23, 2006) at <a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0323/p09s01-coop.html">http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0323/p09s01-coop.html</a>

seized. They are left with two options: Give away their daughters (girls as young as 3) as brides to the creditors or abscond to Pakistan. 93

No matter. The empty space of Afghanistan was perceived to have been violated insofar as the opium trade was believed to be financing a resurgent Taliban.

The three brief cases discussed here – the jobless economy in the new Afghanistan, the displacement of poor families in Sherpur to make way for corrupto-mansions of the Karzai elite, and the destruction of livelihood strategies for impoverished opium farmers – illustrate the U.S. and its client government's disinterest in the masses' real economy and daily life.

93 ibid



## 3. Grotesque Pseudo-Development in Karzai's Kabul

Welcome to the "new" Afghanistan, and please, ladies and gentlemen proceed up these golden stairways.

The forms taken by pseudo-development in Kabul are many and grotesque: construction of luxury hotels (photo above of elevator in the new Kabul City Center), shopping malls

and ostentatious "corrupto-mansions," grinding poverty amidst opulence, pervasive insecurity, lock-down and deserted streets at night, an opium and foreign monies-financed consumption boom, pervasive corruption, alcohol and prostitutes for the foreign clientele, and the long list of "Kabul's finest" - foreign ex-pats , a bloated NGO-community, carpetbaggers and hangers-on of all stripes, money disbursers, neo-colonial administrators, opportunists, imported Chinese and Soviet Republic prostitutes, imported Thai masseuses in the Mustafa Hotel, bribed politicians and local power brokers, facilitators, beauticians (of the city planner or aesthetician types), members of the development establishment, do-gooders, mercenaries, fortune-hunters, enforcers, etc. 96



A corrupto mansion in Heart in April 2006 when a suicide car bomb attacked the Italian PRT base (Reuters photo, Ahmad Fahim)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> for photos, see "Buildings of Afghan Ministers and Warlords in Kabul," Rawa.org (December 2003) at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/build.htm">http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/build.htm</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> let me be very clearly, I am NOT saying all ex-pats. Some live modestly and even in some hardship. For an example, see Raul of the UNDP who describes his life in Kabul at "Raul in Kabul," at <a href="http://spaces.msn.com/raulkabul/">http://spaces.msn.com/raulkabul/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> two years ago, I described this world in my " AfghaniScam: Livin' Large inside Karzai's Reconstruction Bubble," Cursor.org (September 24, 2003) at <a href="http://www.cursor.org/stories/afghaniscam.html">http://www.cursor.org/stories/afghaniscam.html</a>

In this section, I shall address *six inter-related aspects* of Kabul's pseudo-development: (1). opulence amidst destitution; (2). the absence of genuine governance in a culture of impunity; (3). corruption; (4). life in the ex-pat community; (5). evidence of decadence – alcohol and prostitution in Karzai's Kabul; and (6) the climate of generalized insecurity. Naturally, no aggregate data exists on these matters and so I shall rely upon scattered first-hand reports which though form a coherent whole.



A monument to Kabul's "culture of impunity": a new "corrupto-mansion" in Sherpur. For many other examples, see <a href="http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/kab-jan05.htm">http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/kab-jan05/kab-jan05.htm</a> and at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/build.htm">http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/build.htm</a>

On November 8, 2006, destitute Afghanistan opened a five-star, \$36.5 million luxury hotel with rooms starting at \$275 a night – five times the monthly salary of an average Afghan civil servant (the executive suites go for \$400 a night). Karzai who has long had a penchant towards Western luxury hotels – recall that in the 1980s his favorite lair was

in the lobby of the Holiday Inn in Islamabad where he was known by the Western press corps as the "Gucci guerrilla" who distributed C.I.A. monies to the anti-Soviet mujahideen fighters<sup>97</sup> - presided over the grand opening, noting that the hotel could set an example for the development of the rundown capital,

Let's begin developing Kabul keeping the Serena hotel as the center of it.<sup>98</sup>



At the Kabul Serena Hotel, November 8, 2006 (source: Reuters)

Business is booming in the nearby glitzy shopping mall, the Kabul City Centre (see cover photo). Hassan Saidzada, the manager of a watch shop there sells Swiss watches to cabinet ministers, jihadi commanders and newly made Kabuli tycoons. He recently sold a Breitling watch for \$4,000 to the chief executive of a mobile phone company. 99 Faroog

<sup>97</sup> per <a href="http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Hamid\_Karzai">http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Hamid\_Karzai</a>
Agence France Presses, "Destitute Afghanistan Opens its most Luxurious Hotel" (November 9, 2005) at http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20051109-035855-1956r . Four years ago, I laid out the essences of what I thought would be the Karzai approach to development and labeled it "The Intercontinental Model," see "Karzai & Associates' Trickle-Down Reconstruction," Cursor.org (May 12, 2002) at http://www.cursor.org/stories/karzai.htm. The Serena hotel was funded by the Aga Khan Foundation for Economic Development and the World Bank (through its International Finance Corporation).

<sup>99</sup> Declan Walsh, "Kabul: Booming and Broke," The Guardian (December 28, 2005) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1674404,00.html

Shah, salesperson in Suhrab Mobile, sells Apple iPods and giant flat-screen televisions to foreigners and the Kabul nouveau riches. Nearby, Baki Karasu from Turkey, 41, who opened his new Beko store in the fall of 2005, sells imported refrigerators, dishwashers and ovens, but few Afghans can afford such luxuries or have the electricity to run them. 100

Outside, Malik Shah, a 26-year-old day laborer has been standing on the freezing winter pavement since dawn, hoping for a day job that might earn him \$4, but none had come up. Another forty men waited beside him, wrapped in woolen shawls. 101 They are persona non-grata in the Kabul City Center with its escalators, heated stores, Play Stations, fashion boutiques, and cappuccino bar.



Jan.23, 2005 - Kabul: Poverty, joblessness and high prices force many people of Kabul to beggary. One can see beggar men, women and children in every corner of the city (source RAWA at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/kab-jan05">http://www.rawa.org/kab-jan05/kab-jan05</a> 9.htm )

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Griff Witte, "In Kabul, a Stark Gulf Between Wealthy Few and the Poor," Washington Post (December 9, 2005) at  $\frac{\text{http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/08/AR2005120801881\_pf.html}}{\text{Walsh, op. cit.}}$ 

Every morning for the last two months, Abdul Hanan, has waited behind a fence at the entrance to Bagram Air Base, hoping to be selected for a day job. Every evening, the 30-year old father of six walked away empty-handed. He and about 350 other men waited, gazing imploringly at American guards hoping to be one of these admitted each day for the daily wage of about \$4.<sup>102</sup> This is four times the amount Abdul makes hewing handmade wooden snow shovels out of tree trunks in Kabul. Abdul, his wife and six children live on \$1 a day, live in one room without electricity or running water in Kabul. <sup>103</sup>

Thousands of women and girls who weave world famous Afghan carpets are treated as unpaid slaves by their male relatives, according to rights activists, but the government does nothing to regulate the industry.<sup>104</sup> They work in damp, dark home factories. Children carpet weavers are addicted to nicotine and opium given to them in order to be calm. Child labor is rampant in Afghanistan. Impoverished families rely upon the meager earnings children can collect.<sup>105</sup> Amid, 14, Andress, 13, and Rosedeen, 15, below work as mechanics in an auto repair shop in Kabul:

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Anita Powell, "Desperate Afghans Turning to U.S. Army for Work. Amid Staggering Unemployment, Day-Laborer Jobs Prized," <u>Stars and Stripes</u> (February 23, 2006) at <a href="http://stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=35250">http://stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=35250</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> see and listen to video on Abdul at "Kabul's Poor," Copley News Service (no date) at http://www.copleydc.com/marc\_poor.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> "Afghan Carpet Weavers are Unpaid Slaves, Rights Activist," Agence France Presse (December 1, 2005) at http://www.rawa.org/carpet.htm

for a superb visual portrayal, see Chien-Min Chung, "Afghan Child Labor," The Digital Journalist (2002) at <a href="http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0208/cc\_intro.htm">http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0208/cc\_intro.htm</a>



Amid (L), 14, Andress, 13, and Rosedeen, 15 (R), work as mechanics at an auto repair shop in Kabul.

Photo @ Chien-Min Chung

Many Afghan families only see reconstruction money by begging for it directly. <sup>106</sup> Every day, Haroun, a 12-year-old sells chewing gum in the traffic outside the compound in Kabul of the U.S. occupation forces. So do his three brothers and sister, aged 8 to 13. Their mother Gul Shah, 35, tends to a small home in a rundown neighborhood with open sewers and petty crime. The main room is heated by a small stove fed with animal turds. She says

Of course, I don't want them to be in the streets, especially if they miss school. But otherwise we will not have enough to eat...So many changes...but none of them have reached here. 107

the livelihood strategies of the urban poor in Kabul are examined in Pamela A. Hunte, <u>Some Notes on the Livelihoods of the Urban Poor in Kabul, Afghanistan</u> (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Case Studies Series, February 2004) available at <a href="http://www.livelihoods.org/static/phunte\_NN248.htm">http://www.livelihoods.org/static/phunte\_NN248.htm</a>

Since the demise of the Taliban, crime has steadily escalated. In Jalalabad in early 2005, Afghan police found the bodies of 18 people buried under a house who the police believe had been enticed by young women with the promise of sex and then killed for their cars. <sup>108</sup>

Malnutrition is an everyday reality. A U.S. State Department report published in July 2005 noted that Afghanistan has the highest level of malnutrition in the world at 70 percent.

A Kabul native studying in Peshawar described peacetime Kabul with its rich and poor:

In Sherpur, the super-rich are building mansions verging on palaces. Meanwhile, a much larger number of Afghan squatters live in squalor in the shells of former government buildings, including one that once housed the embassy for the old Soviet Union. Abdul Qayoom sits in the sun making wooden snow shovels. A cow moos, a rooster crows and a young child whimpers. Older children laugh as they play.

Abdul, who makes less than a dollar day, and his family share space in one of three abandoned government buildings clustered behind a fence. The Spartan complex is home to some 700 Afghan refugees who returned after the Taliban regime fell four years ago.

They were drawn back to Kabul by promises of homes and jobs, said Abdul. But the government abandoned them as well as the buildings, he said. "We are disappointed," he added. Abdul's house is a small mud-brick shanty without electricity that he shares with his family of eight. The building around the shanties is nothing but a concrete shell.

Abdul's children, wearing tattered clothes, play around him as he tells his story: He fled his native province of Samangan in the north when the civil war broke out in 1992. He migrated to several provinces before ending up

Declan Walsh, "Afghan Police Find Bodies of Drivers Killed for Car Parts," The Guardian (February 4, 2-005) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1405632,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1405632,00.html</a>

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in Kabul after the fall of the Taliban in 2001."We came here in the hopes of a better life," he said. "But you can see how we live." Abdul and other returnees are scattered across Kabul in tents and houses made of tin, wood planks or mud. It has been three years since the government "dumped" them in abandoned buildings, as they say, promising aid and suitable shelter. They received two sacks of flour and a canister of cooking oil six months ago, Abdul said. "The government just makes promises but doesn't fulfill them," he added. 109

As the glittering new palaces of consumption were opening up in Kabul, another story was unfolding. In December 2006, the Kabul police authorities were destroying and removing small shops of poor families in the Pol-e-Bagh Amoni area close by to the Serena Hotel. The authorities wanted to have the area cleared so as to allow safer access by roads, since the Serena is where visiting dignitaries frequently stay. Karzai's police moved in and smashed small shopping stalls, dumping them into the Kabul River.





source: <a href="http://www.pajhwok.com/viewalbum.asp?id=126">http://www.pajhwok.com/viewalbum.asp?id=126</a>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Ahmad Shuja, "Peacetime Kabul Has Its Rich and Poor," Copley News Service ()January 21, 2006) at <a href="http://www.paklinks.com/gs/showthread.php?t=205132">http://www.paklinks.com/gs/showthread.php?t=205132</a>

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The peoples' livelihoods were destroyed without the slightest consideration for their future – much like the destruction of poppy fields. The small shop owners protested and a confrontation with the city police ensued.



BBC Persia photo courtesy of RAWA

Open sewers run through Kabul's streets. One of the movers of the Kabul Beauty School, Rosemary Stark, recounts

I fell into the sewer. Kabul is a huge city without a functioning sewer system. Imagine a gulley between the sidewalk and the street that is 12 inches wide and up to two feet deep. Through it runs raw sewage, street garbage and this time of year, melted snow. Occasionally, there's a chunk of concrete thrown over it, but most of the time you have to leap to avoid it.<sup>110</sup>

Most residents in Kabul unable to afford diesel generators and buy fuel have no more than five hours' power every other night. A one-kilowatt generator costs at least \$80 and diesel fuel goes for about \$4 per gallon. As winter temperatures plunge below zero,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Rosemary Stasek, "Letter From Kabul," <u>Mountain View Voice</u> (February 25, 2005) at <a href="http://www.mv-voice.com/morgue/2005/2005\_02\_25.kabul.shtml">http://www.mv-voice.com/morgue/2005/2005\_02\_25.kabul.shtml</a>

family members huddle around wood stores and fires trying to stay warm. Cold-related illnesses are rampant. The unlucky ones die from the cold. Sahib Jamal, 60, says two already died this winter. At night she warms her calloused, blackened hands and her eight children on a fire. During the day, her eight children scavenge in the streets of Kabul for empty soda cans – 60 cans bring in 40 cents. She said, "that's enough to buy three pieces of bread." A street boy, Cho Cha, instead of going to school washes cars to support his family, observing

Life hasn't changed...I earn more money now than I did under the Taliban, but things are more expensive.<sup>111</sup>

But, the U.S.-backed Karzai routinely trots out new promises of a bright future. On a recent trip to Herat, Karzai was approached by an old man who told him, "only make promises you can fulfill." Wadir Safi, a law professor at Kabul University, says, "People have become fed up with promises and not seeing much improvement practically." Mohammad Reza returned with his family from exile in Iran by bus in late 2001, but now he's trying to go back. He says, "I wish I hadn't come. I had a better life there."

After three years of promises, Karzai finally increased the pay of Afghan civil servants and teachers by 40 percent, but this translated into taking the average salary to just over \$40- \$50 a month, one-half the price of a one-kilowatt diesel generator. The country's 280,000 civil servants earn an average monthly wage of \$50, while about 50,000 Afghans work for "aid organizations" where support staff earns up to \$1,000 a month. The rest is foreordained: the qualified Afghans get hired away. The result is that Kabul in particular is brimming with a very small coterie of expensive foreign contractors, consultants and staff. 113

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Farah Stockman, "Afghanistan: Few Haves and So Many Have-Nots," op. cit

Sayed Salahuddin, "Afghan Prosperity a Dream for Most, Frustration Grows," Reuters (December 1, 2005) at http://www.afghanan.net/forums/index.php?showtopic=887

the above comes from Toby Poston, "The Battle to Rebuild Afghanistan," BBC News (February 26, 2006) at http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4714116.stm



A child living inside the old Kabul National Theater building in August 2004 (from <a href="http://personal.rhul.ac.uk/umys/038/Ethics%20materials/A%20child%20living%20inside%20the%20old%20living%20inside%20the%20old%20National%20Theater%20buildin.jpg">http://personal.rhul.ac.uk/umys/038/Ethics%20materials/A%20child%20living%20inside%20the%20old%20inside%20the%20old%20inside%20the%20old%20inside%20i

As a result of the influx of ex-pats and all the other "fine people" in Kabul, inflation has taken hold and rents have skyrocketed. Rent for a three-room mud home is at least \$200 a month – four times the monthly salary of a civil servant! Just between September 2001 and January 2002, for example, the rent of Save the Children's Kabul office rose from \$500 a month to \$6,000 a month! In the dilapidated district called Daimazang, impoverished families live in 10-foot-square spaces partitioned off with mud brick walls on all sides. Some have strung plastic tarps for protection from snow and rain, others simply face the sky. There is no electricity and little firewood; the price of wood had doubled to about \$1 for twelve pounds. Hazrat Gul, 45, who makes \$4 a day breaking stones for construction in the mountains around Kabul said

We just have a blanket. During the night, we get under the blanket and we try to sleep. 114

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<sup>114</sup> Witte, op. cit

Mohammad Agha, a father of five who works as a bicycle mechanic, said he feared many in Daimazang would not make it through the winter. Agha, his own voice hoarse with pneumonia added, "all of the children are suffering. They are all coughing from pneumonia."

U.S. bombs, the opening of a parliament and fraud-ridden presidential elections have not changed their everyday reality. Karzai's vision of developing Kabul along the lines of the opulent Serena Hotel manifestly has no place for poor people like Mohammad Agha.

The "new" Afghanistan has visibly benefited a few. Farah Stockman provided a nice description of their reality,

The fields of the few landowners who have received irrigation assistance have blossomed into squares of emerald green on a horizon of parched earth, while the Land Rovers of foreigners and Afghans with UN jobs or U.S. defense contracts dominate Kabul's traffic jams. Commercial buildings, some financed by drug barons and others by businessmen returned from exile, feature never-before-seen wonders: Afghanistan's first escalator and modern shopping mall, complete with a metal detector at the door; a café that would not look out of place in Paris; and showrooms full of flat-screen televisions, Beverly Hills Polo Club watches, and Turkish suits that almost no one here can afford. But for most residents, Kabul is still a city of antique rugs, open sewers, and mud houses built into the hillsides... Larger-than-life billboards left over from the recent parliamentary election show female candidates, now free to participate in politics. They gaze down on burka-clad women begging for money below. A short distance outside the capital, the signs of progress fade. The road east winds past a vast no man's land dotted by adobe villages that have seen little change in the past four years. Farther still, past Jalalabad, the road comes to a place of dilapidated Russian tanks on the horizon and a ruined ancient fort. There are no schools here. The

only hint of the central government's influence is anger by local farmers over an effort to eradicate the growing of opium poppies. 115

Islands of opulence amidst a sea of poverty and, let me repeat, "the only sign of the central government's influence is anger by local farmers."

A pillar of the façade of development and progress in Karzai's "new" Afghanistan is the *establishment of governance* to which I now turn. <sup>116</sup> Even liberal analysts routinely trot out the idea that since 2003,

...the Karzai government has been able to extend its authority to most areas of the country and to curtail the overbearing influence of warlords in national politics. The *de facto* veto that prominent warlords seemingly held over national policy from 2001-03 has largely been removed.<sup>117</sup>

This assertion remains questionable. What we *do know* is that those regional warlords are now ensconced in the Kabul government, that the Kabul government is largely a façade for U.S. influence and priorities, and that heightened insecurity pervades even Kabul.

As many have noted, the writ of the Kabul regime still barely extends to the periphery of the city during daytime with occasional forays outward into the provinces by heavily armed contingents of Afghan and U.S. occupation forces. The real governance, however, lies elsewhere as Amy Waldman cogently noted in 2004, dateline Kabul:

KABUL, Afghanistan — "So what are we doing today?" Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, asked the United States ambassador, Zalmay M. Khalilzad, as they sat in Mr. Karzai's office. Mr. Khalilzad patiently

an interesting analysis of governance or the lack thereof in Afghanistan is also presented in Mark Sedra and Peter Middlebrook, "Beyond Bonn. Revisioning the International Compact for Afghanistan," Foreign Policy in Focus (November 2, 2005) at <a href="http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/2912">http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/2912</a>. The report is long on "things to be done" and rather short on "what is and why."

<sup>115</sup> Stockman, op. cit

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Sedra and Middlebrook, op. cit.

explained that they would attend a ceremony to kick off the "greening" of Kabul — the planting and seeding of 850,000 trees — in honor of the Afghan New Year. Mr. Karzai said he would speak off-the-cuff. Mr. Khalilzad, sounding more mentor than diplomat, approved: "It's good you don't have a text," he told Mr. Karzai. "You tend to do better." The genial Mr. Karzai may be Afghanistan's president, but the affable, ambitious Mr. Khalilzad often seems more like its chief executive. With his command of both details and American largesse, the Afghan-born envoy has created an alternate seat of power since his arrival on Thanksgiving. As he shuttles between the American Embassy and the presidential palace, where



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Amy Waldman, "In Afghanistan, U.S. Envoy Sits in Seat of Power," New York Times (April 17, 2004) at <a href="http://www.sunnysidewoodsidepeace.org/index.php?name=pagetool\_news&news\_id=84">http://www.sunnysidewoodsidepeace.org/index.php?name=pagetool\_news&news\_id=84</a>

And so on March 21, 2004, as part of Kabul Greening Week, Karzai trotted outside to plant a tree under the keen eye of Ambassador Khalilzad, a photo op duly recorded by the obedient Western press. The trees were planted and the ambassador and Karzai then met with United Nations personnel about elections, "a process that Khalilzad is ferociously prodding for."

Some two years later in January 2006, Karzai issued a decree in Kabul ordering all concrete security barriers strategically placed in the capital to protect embassies and other such spots to be removed after torrents of complaints from inconvenienced drivers. But foreign organizations and the U.S. Embassy emphatically opposed the removal. The concrete blocs remain in place six weeks after Karzai's ultimatum. As Habibullah, 28, of Kabul observed,

Karzai's decrees don't have any authority even over Afghans – how can we expect them to have an impact over foreigners?<sup>120</sup>

The *spectacle of "governance"* is illustrated by the recent elections in Afghanistan. Once again, a hollow fetish is made of the completion in October 2005 of the three steps outlined in the 2001 Bonn Agreement: the indirect election of a more representative government; the passage of a new constitution; and the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>121</sup>

The western governments, the United Nations, and mainstream press fell over themselves heralding the good news, a new president chosen in the country' "first democratic elections." Such assertions reflect a convenient historical amnesia: in 1986 and 1987, Afghanistan's first true national elections were carried out under Soviet military

<sup>119</sup> Waldman, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Wahidullah Amani, "Barriers Prove Insurmountable for Karzai," <u>IWPR</u> (February 18, 2006) at <a href="http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allArticles/E21F5CF1864CC26487257119007FBE84?OpenDocument">http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allArticles/E21F5CF1864CC26487257119007FBE84?OpenDocument</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> See comments by Barnett Rubin in Panel II: Politics, Democracy, and Institution Building (Washington D.C.: conference "Winning Afghanistan," American Enterprise Institute, Washington D.C. (October 2005)) at <a href="http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all,eventID.1159/summary.asp">http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all,eventID.1159/summary.asp</a>

see UNAMA statement at <a href="http://www.unama-afg.org/news/statement/SRSG/2004/04apr22.htm">http://www.unama-afg.org/news/statement/SRSG/2004/04apr22.htm</a> and "The First Democratic Elections in Afghanistan: A Report by the Bipartisan Observer Team," Foreign Press Center Briefing (October 15, 2004) at <a href="http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/37133.htm">http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/37133.htm</a>

occupation, First, the KGB organized a 'loyal jirga' – national assembly - in 1985 and through bribes and intimidation, got its new Afghan asset, Najibullah, positioned to take the place of the ineffectual Soviet puppet in office. 123 Second, elections in 1986 and 1987 confirmed Moscow's choice. The resemblance with the U.S.-sponsored and manipulated, U.N-funded elections of October 2004 where Washington's choice was ratified, are all too obvious. In the U.S-U.N-run election, dangerous opposition candidates who did not recognize the legitimacy of the Karzai regime were excluded (by, for example, not guaranteeing their safety), warlords were bribed to give at least tacit support to Karzai, and diverse ethnic minority groups were allowed to participate thereby guaranteeing a fractured outcome. Moreover, Karzai was virtually the only candidate with the necessary transportation and security resources to mount a nationwide campaign. As Michael Scheuer cautioned, however, few of those who disagree with Karzai have put away their weapons and decided to wait peaceably for the next election. 124

Predictably, little changed outside Kabul, where the country remains ruled by local warlords, "rented" power brokers, drug kingpins, and the Taliban. The old warlords have not been sent into retirement, but merely shuffled around among top provincial jobs or cabinet posts. Kandahar's infamous Gul Agha Sherzai – once labeled "the U.N.'s warlord of the year" was removed from Kandahar, given a ministerial post, and then sent off to be governor of Nangarhar province. 125 Ismael Khan and Rashid Dostum were brought in from their regional fiefs to take a place in the Karzai cabinet, whereas other local kingmakers and U.S. favorites such as Hazrat Ali (Nangarhar) and Mohammad Atta (Mazar) continue with "business as usual" in their regional empires. Mohammad Yusuf Pashtun was transferred from being Minister of Urban Development to the post of governor of Kandahar, but the real power in Kandahar is Wali Ahmad Karzai, the president's drug-trafficking younger brother.

Foundation) 3, 6 (February 14, 2006) at

<sup>123</sup> the analogy is from Eric Margolis, "Bogus Elections in Kabul," at http://www.bigeve.com/fc121304.htm <sup>124</sup> Michael Scheuer, "History Overtakes Optimism in Afghanistan," <u>Terrorism Focus</u> (The Jamestown

http://www.iamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369902

Robert Fisk, "Ladies and gentlemen, let's have a big hand for Gul Agha - the UN's warlord of the year," The Independent (August 9, 2002) at http://www.islamawareness.net/Asia/Afghanistan/rf warlord.html

Recently, in a cabinet reshuffle, Karzai retired the last of the powerful Northern Alliance personalities, replacing foreign minister Abdullah with an unknown pro-Western academic, Rangeen Daadfar Spanta, who had held a minor university teaching post in Germany, in a move geared to ensure greater compliance with his diktats and those of his American masters. The reshuffle resulted in the dominance of western-trained "professionals" who favor the continued U.S/NATO occupation. Displaying at best wishful thinking and at worst his utter subservience to his western mentors, Karzai has called upon his countrymen to think as a nation instead of attaching loyalties to their clans and tribes. Anyone vaguely familiar with Afghan history knows that most Afghans' loyalty is to family, clan and tribe and that the central government has always been looked upon, with right, as a negative interference.

In 2005, another electoral spectacle was again on display to the world. The U.N.-funded parliamentary elections led to (the intended) weak, fractured body, due partly to U.S insistence that candidates stand as independents, not associated with any party. The International Crisis Group described the unusual election as a 'lottery.' The structure of the political framework was chosen so as to precisely guarantee continued executive power by the U.S-backed Karzai and his coterie of ministers. As expected, former militia bosses, war criminals and the like secured seats in the new parliament. In many parts of the country, old tribal politics still hold sway and old faces still dominate. In many parts of the country, old tribal politics still hold sway and old faces still dominate. In many parts of the country and according to even the New York Times, "whole districts have come under suspicion for ballot box stuffing and proxy voting." The voter turnout was a mere 53%, and in Kabul, the most politicized city, it was only 35%, reflecting disillusionment with the electoral spectacles. Is Declan Walsh put it,

<sup>126</sup> Akram Gizabi, "Western-Trained Professionals Dominate New Afghan Cabinet," <u>The Jamestown</u> Foundation (April 8, 2006)

<sup>&</sup>quot;Sink Loyalties to Clans; Karzai Asks Countrymen," Pajhwok Afghan News April 5, 2006)

<sup>&</sup>quot;Elections Will Create Weak and Divided Parliament, Says Expert," AKI Italy (September 7, 2005) at <a href="http://www.adnki.com/index\_2Level.php?cat=Politics&loid=8.0.204603610&par=0">http://www.adnki.com/index\_2Level.php?cat=Politics&loid=8.0.204603610&par=0</a>

Paul McGeough, "Old Ways Linger Beneath a Veil of Votes," <u>Sydney Morning Herald</u> (September 10m 2005)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Voting Fraud is Found in Afghanistan's Election," New York Times (October 3, 2005) at http://www.afghanwomensmission.org/news/index.php?articleID=44

<sup>131 &</sup>quot;Despite Assurances, Karzai Falls Short on Reforms," The Daily Star (Lebanon) (October 10, 2005) at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=2&article\_id=19163

it seemed bizarre – Afghanistan was hosting a great party for democracy, yet it looked as though nobody had bothered to turn up...officials were pedaling hard to find comforting explanations.<sup>132</sup>

Since convening on December 19, 2006, the parliament has predictably accomplished nothing.<sup>133</sup>

Many who had voted in 2004 did not vote in 2005 as nothing had improved for them as a result of the first election. These poor results elicited a lot of hand ringing in October from the Washington Beltway 'internationals' crowd – the likes of the Afghanistan Working Group, the United States Institute of Peace, Human Rights Watch, Larry Sampler of the Institute for Defense Analysis, etc. <sup>134</sup> Larry Sampler of the Institute for Defense Analysis and formerly at UNAMA in Kabul, floated the specter that the international community could be "losing the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people as warlords appeared to be winning at the polls. <sup>135</sup> They predictably won. In a country with an 80 percent illiteracy rate and the absence of western-style campaigning, voters simply voted along ethnic, tribal, religious, or power-broker lines. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission asserted that more than 80% of the winning candidates in the provinces and 60% in Kabul maintained ties to armed groups. <sup>136</sup> The incoherence of post-election governance is underscored by others, saying the country has

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Declan Walsh, "Democratic Disillusionment," The Guardian (September 23, 2005) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,1576824,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,1576824,00.html</a>

Amanullah Nasrat and Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, "Parliament Makes Little Headway," <u>IWPR</u> (March 20, 2006) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=260416&apc\_state=henh">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=260416&apc\_state=henh</a>

for a description of the views see the summary of a conference held in October 2005 at the neoconservative bastion, the American Enterprise Institute, "Winning Afghanistan," a http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all.eventID.1159/summary.asp

Larry Sampler, "Disappointment Grows in Democracy's Dividends" Washington D.C.,: conference "Afghanistan: Old Problems, New Parliament, New Expectations," United States Institute of Peace, October 2005) at <a href="http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\_briefings/2005/1025\_afghanwomen,html">http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\_briefings/2005/1025\_afghanwomen,html</a>
<sup>136</sup> Sedra and Middlebrook, op. cit.: 9

ended up with three or four governments...and now, the fifth, the parliament....described as a hodgepodge of conflicting ideologies and interests.<sup>137</sup>

But predictably, the U.S. Government and the mainstream U.S. press proclaimed with great fanfare that the parliamentary elections were proof that democracy had taken hold in Afghanistan, one U.S observer hailing a "miracle" had just occurred in Afghanistan. An exchange between that U.S. election observer and R.A.W.A. highlights the radically different interpretations. The representative of R.A.W.A. listed numerous individual cases of intimidation and fraud. Moreover, in March 2006, the Karzai regime withdrew public funding for the security of an outspoken female parliament member, Malalai Joya, thereby greatly increasing the chances of her assassination. 139

After some \$350 million spent – about *one-third the value of all reconstruction projects completed in four years* - by the U.N. on the two elections, little tangible change has occurred for the vast majority of Afghans. Little of the reform agenda has taken root, while warlordism, corruption, drug trafficking, opulence in a sea of mass poverty, and a resolute Taliban insurgency grind on.

All the while, the human rights of ordinary Afghans continue to be abused. The independent Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) set up in December 2001, has documented these. In February 2006, scores of residents of the Sancharak district of the northern Sar-i-Pul province accused a number of former local commanders from the Northern Alliance parties – the Jamiat and Junbish - of running private cells, extortion and torturing people. The AIHRC confirmed the existence of private jails in the province; however the provincial governor denied the claims. In April

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Jim Lobe, "Four Years into Afghan Campaign, Perils Abound," Antiwar.com (October 6, 2005) at <a href="http://www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=7534">http://www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=7534</a>

The Seattle Times (October 4, 2005) and Mehmooda Sheikiba, "The 'Miracle' or a Mockery of Afghanistan?" at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/seattletimes.htm">http://www.rawa.org/seattletimes.htm</a>
"Afghanistan Defunds Security for Uppity Woman MP," Antiwar.com (March 21, 2006) at <a href="http://www.antiwar.com/blog/index.php?id=P2694">http://www.antiwar.com/blog/index.php?id=P2694</a>

Ahmad Naeem Qadiri, "Sar-i-Pul Residents Complain of Torture Cells," Pahjwok Afghan News (February 15, 2006) at <a href="http://www.pajhwak.com/viewstory.asp?id=13373">http://www.pajhwak.com/viewstory.asp?id=13373</a>

2006, people in the northern province of Faryab complained bitterly about warlords extorting illegal "taxes" from them, imprisonment and torture in private jails run by elements of the former Northern Alliance. 141 The grandiosely named Afghan Security Force – former mujahideen hired by the U.S. forces to guard their bases – is accused by local people of lawlessness and extortion. 142

Little doubt remains that a culture of impunity reigns at all levels of governance in Afghanistan.

For average persons in the country's civil service, the Karzai regime doled out a \$7-amonth wage increase in October 2005, which was met with despair and derision. 143

Governance by the Kabul-based Karzai regime is a cruel hoax for most. For many, the biggest change from the Taliban era has been increased insecurity and stifling corruption. 144 But the president continues on his heavy schedule of international junkets - giving speeches, attending international conferences (at the World Economic Summit in Davos), accepting medals and other honors, and even returning to his old lair in Islamabad in February 2006:

<sup>141 &</sup>quot;Afghanistan: People in Farvab Complain of Torture and Illegal Taxes by Warlords," IRIN News/Reuters/Alternet (April 12, 2006) at

http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=52759&SelectRegion=Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN

142 Kim Sengupta, "British Troops Fear Backlash as Afghans Attack Opium Crop," The Independent (February)

<sup>26, 2006)</sup> at <a href="http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article347792.ece">http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article347792.ece</a>
<sup>143</sup> "Despair at Afghanistan's First Civil Service Wage Hike," Agence France Presse (October 16, 2005) at http://www.paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=122661

144 Sedra and Middlebrook, op. cit.: 4



Hamid Karzai in Islamabad in February 2006 (photo by Farooq Naeem, AFP)

Appointments to key decision-making positions throughout the Afghan government have often been based upon nepotism and cronyism (as well as opportunism in the sense of bringing in possible powerful independents). Such nepotism and patronage extends to relatives of ministers part and present like Marshall Mohammad Fahim, Abdullah Abdullah, Yunos Qanooni, etc. In 2003, Minister Farhang admitted that nepotism and cronyism have been increasing in Afghanistan. Favorite positions accorded are ambassadorships. Karzai himself chose two of his uncles, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Ghaffor, as ambassadors to the Czech Republic and Egypt. Reasons cited for such practices include considerations of trust, paying back supporters, and lack of jobs and few other sources of reliable income.

Moreover, at numerous times the Karzai regime has either tolerated blatant fraud (e.g., the bulldozing of homes in Sherpur<sup>146</sup>) or made executive decisions to pardon officials accused of corruption. The UN's special envoy on housing rights specifically named

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Farangis Najibullah, "Afghanistan: Nepotism, Cronyism Widespread in Government," Eurasianet.org (May 11, 2003) at <a href="http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051103.shtml">http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051103.shtml</a>
<sup>146</sup> details and names of close Karzai associates who benefited provided in RAWA reporter, "Crime and Barbarism in Shirpur by Afghan Ministers and High Authorities," Rawa.org (September 16, 2003) at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/land2.htm">http://www.rawa.org/land2.htm</a>

Marshall Fahim and Education Minister Yunus Qanooni as benefiting from the evictions. <sup>147</sup> In 2006, Karzai issued a decree pardoning six officials convicted in the hajj ceremony corruption case. <sup>148</sup> Some months earlier, an Afghan army general helped the kidnapper of the Italian NGO worker, Clementia Cantoni, escape from jail. <sup>149</sup> A senior official of the central bank, Da Afghanistan Bank, went underground after fraudulently withdrawing sums from the bank in July 2005. <sup>150</sup>

Everyone in Kabul knows that to secure business deals requires paying a "commission." Bribery, corruption and extortion exist among the police, judicial system, passport offices, public utilities, and even the national airline. The "new" Afghan police regularly shake down passersby at highway checkpoints, thereby hampering commerce. Merchants and drivers in Kandahar complain loudly. No big business can start in Kabul without a percentage being paid to one or several ministers, generals, governors, and commanders. As Goudsouzian put it, "money talks in Afghanistan's scramble for reconstruction." An Afghan-American political analyst provided additional specifics,

The shadow economy...has given governors and commanders a kind of 'purse power' that once was the monopoly of the central government...a number of illicit income sources, such as opium, lumber, fuel and other smuggling items are in the hands of high government officials and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> "Afghanistan's Poor Losing Homes: UN Report," CBC News (April 11, 2004) at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/land-un.htm">http://www.rawa.org/land-un.htm</a>

<sup>148 &</sup>quot;Karzai Pardons Officials Convicted in Hajj Corruption Case," at <a href="http://www.paktribune.com/news/print.php?id=130887">http://www.paktribune.com/news/print.php?id=130887</a>
149 "Army General Helped Kidnapper to Escape: Afghan Official," Reuters (August 9, 2005) at <a href="http://e-">http://e-</a>

ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/B79B79A641A46BCF872570580065EE6A?OpenDocument

150 Ahmad Nareem Qadri, "Financial Fraud Unearthed at Afghan Central Bank," Pajhwok Afghan News (July 14, 2005) at <a href="http://e-">http://e-</a>

ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/FCF5F6A464FEA4098725703E0015D6D7?OpenDocument

151 for a description see Hafizullah Gardish, "Corruption Rampant at Every Level," Afghan Recovery
Project No. 120 (May 27, 2004) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=153983&apc\_state=heniarr2004">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=153983&apc\_state=heniarr2004</a>,
"Ariana Boss Aims to Give the Afghan Carrier Back Its Wings," Agence France Presse (April 16, 2006),
and "Corruption Runs High in Balkh Passport Department," Pajhwok Afghan News (March 29, 2006)

152 Kandahar's Economy Dives for Cover," The Globe and Mail (April 7, 2006) at <a href="http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/28DF60B6B75E47BF87257149004351AA?OpenDocument">http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/28DF60B6B75E47BF87257149004351AA?OpenDocument</a>

Tanya Goudsouzian, "Money Talks in Afghanistan's Scramble for Reconstruction," The Daily Star (August 24, 2004) at <a href="http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=3&article\_id=7818">http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=3&article\_id=7818</a>

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commanders. In addition, custom revenues, which has always been the main source of national income for the Afghan state, has been largely taken by the governors/warlords and spent at their discretion rather than being controlled by the central treasury.<sup>154</sup>

The remaining cedar forests in the Spin Ghar mountain range (home to Tora Bora) and in Kunar Province are being cut down by timber smugglers who export the wood to Pakistan. Since the Soviets left in 1989, 25 per cent of Konar's forests have been destroyed.

The illegal businesses of provincial strongmen are overlooked in Kabul in return for political and military cooperation – the famed renting of an Afghan. One of the more astonishing cases involves Hamid Karzai's younger brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who blends the tribal, money power, and a role in "new" Afghan politics (as a candidate for parliament in Kandahar). Wali lives in a marble-clad mansion in Kandahar behind security walls that are more elaborate than even the local U.N. bunker. <sup>156</sup> In 2004, reports began surfacing that Wali was involved in the drug trade. <sup>157</sup> A year later, Wali who helped finance Karazai's presidential campaign, was directly implicated by the former interior minister, Taj Mohammad Wardak,

There is no direct proof but everyone knows. If you ask the people in the bazaar, four out of ten will tell you that Karzai's brother is exporting drugs. 158

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Goudsouzian, op. cit

<sup>155</sup> Justin Huggler, "The Trees that Vanished: Crisis in the Hindu Kush," <u>The Independent</u> (September 25, 2005) at <a href="http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allArticles/139FF4C0F5A0C4B2872570870044D18D?OpenDocument">http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allArticles/139FF4C0F5A0C4B2872570870044D18D?OpenDocument</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> McGeough, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> reported in Carlotta Gall, "Afghan Poppy Growing Reaches Record Level, U.N. Says," <u>New York Times</u> (November 19, 2004)

<sup>158</sup> Declan Walsh, "Karzai Victory Plants Seeds of Hope in Fight to Kick Afghan Opium Habit," <u>The Guardian</u> (January 1, 2005)



Ahmed Wali Khan in Kandahar greeting one of Afghanistan's most notorious warlords, former governor of Kandahar, Gul Agha Sherzai, now Karzai's governor of Nangarhar (photo Cassandra Nelson,2004)

In a report published in January 2006 on Afghanistan's drug trade, <u>Newsweek</u> reporters wrote

[Wali] was alleged to be a major figure by nearly every source who described the Afghan network to NEWSWEEK for this story, including past and present government officials several minor drug traffickers. 'He is the unofficial regional governor of southern Afghanistan and leads the whole trafficking structure,' says the veteran Interior Ministry official. Ahmed Wali Karzai vehemently denies the allegation...<sup>159</sup>

In mid-2005, Scott Baldauf wrote in <u>The Christian Science Monitor</u> about "the involvement of local as well as high-level government officials in the opium trade is frustrating efforts to eradicate poppy fields." In February 2006, none other than Habibullah Qaderi, Afghanistan's anti-narcotics minister admitted that some cabinet ministers were deeply implicated in the drug trade. The minister explained that this

Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, "A Harvest of Treachery. Afghanistan's Drug Trade is Threatening the Stability of a Nation America Went to Stabilize. What can be Done?" Newsweek (January 9, 2006) at <a href="http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10663339/site/newsweek/">http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10663339/site/newsweek/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Scott Baldauf and Faye Bowers, "Afghanistan Riddled with Drugs," <u>The Christian Science Monitor</u> (May 25, 2005) at <a href="http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-05-12-csm-afghan-drugs\_x.htm">http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-05-12-csm-afghan-drugs\_x.htm</a>

Toby Harnden, "Drug Trade "Reaches to Afghan Cabinet'," Telegraph (February 5, 2006) at <a href="http://news.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/02/05/wafg05.xml">http://news.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/02/05/wafg05.xml</a>

reality helps understand why trafficking is conducted with apparent immunity. Ali Ahmad Jalili, who resigned as Afghanistan's interior minister in 2005, even said,

sometimes, government officials allow their own cars to be used for a fee. Sometimes they give protection to traffickers. In Afghanistan, corruption is a low-risk enterprise in a high-risk environment. Because of lack of investigative capacity it is very difficult to get evidence. You always end up arresting the foot soldiers. <sup>162</sup>

One observer in the Mazar region noted when five local government officials in the Chamtal district of Balkh were dismissed in late 2005, "it's a case of the sharks arresting the small fish." Major high-level traffickers include favorite U.S. warlord, Hazrat Ali in Nangarhar and General Mohammed Daoud, a former warlord who moved on to become Afghanistan's *deputy interior minister in charge of the anti-drug effort*. In the northern province of Badakshan, which serves as a center of opium processing and transshipment, local police forces in old Russian vehicles are no match for drug kingpins in their BMW and Lexus landcruisers. The province's police chief admits that 40-50 per cent of the local police are involved in the drug trade. When Haji Adam, a major opium smuggler living near Garmser, Helmand Province, got ill in his walled mansion, a helicopter landed to whisk him away for treatment in Germany.

Abdul Karim Brahowie, Afghanistan's minister of tribal and frontier affairs in 2005, said the government had become so full of drug smugglers that cabinet meetings had become a farce. He said, "Sometimes the people who complain the loudest about theft are thieves themselves." A British official added that corruption was also rampant in the new

<sup>166</sup> Baldauf and Bowers, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Harnden, op. cit

see Paul Watson, "Afghanistan: A Harvest of Despair. The Lure of Opium Wealth is a Potent Force in Afghanistan," <u>Los Angeles Times</u> (May 29, 2005) at <a href="http://www.rawa.org/drugs-lat.htm">http://www.rawa.org/drugs-lat.htm</a>

Rachel Morarjee, "An Afghan Province Where Heroin Rules and Police Look the Other Way," Financial Times (April 13, 2006) at <a href="http://news.ft.com/cms/s/d97be45e-ca89-11da-852f-0000779e2340.html">http://news.ft.com/cms/s/d97be45e-ca89-11da-852f-0000779e2340.html</a>

The Guardian (April 7, 2006) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,1748890,00.html

National Assembly. Should one be surprised that Afghans greeted the Karzai government's newly launched anti-corruption drive with skepticism?<sup>167</sup> A senior police commander in Kabul reported in 2005, "whatever number of police cars there are in Kabul, I can tell you that more than 50 percent of them are carrying drugs inside from one place to another."<sup>168</sup>

A German investigative journalist writing for the country's largest weekly, <u>Der Spiegel</u>, concluded based upon experience in the northern province of Badakshan, that once the Taliban deposed, "peace in Afghanistan [was] a boon for drug lords." Victory over the Taliban spelled defeat in the war on drugs.

I have demonstrated that the Afghan economy is fuelled primarily by foreign funds and by the opium economy – it does not matter that this economy is illegal for when money earned is spent it sets in motion the Keynesian multiplier. Let me now turn to the life and style of ex-pat community and other members of "Kabul's finest."

I rely here upon the accounts by the ex-pats themselves. Daily life in the ex-pat community is discussed in the glossy, full-color monthly magazine, <u>Afghan Scene</u>, put out since June 2004 by Domenic Medley, 33, a Britisher and former BBC journalist. <sup>170</sup> A member of the bloated ex-pat community reflected on a blog in June 2005 as follows:

We drive around in 4x4s, white, driven by Afghan drivers. We are served dinner. We live in compounds, cut off from the rest of Afghan life. We have, essentially, servants. Let me repeat that, for it bears emphasis: we have servants. We are paid enough per month to feed the average family for a year. In Kabul for one whole day, boys aged 10 years old pull a barrow around making a profit of 50 afs. We barely notice the odd dollar as we throw down tips in the restaurant, as my Ustad pointed out to me. If

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Afghans Greet Government's Newly Launched Anti-Corruption Drive with Skepticism," <u>Institute for War & Peace Reporting</u> (February 4, 2006) at

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\_id=10&categ\_id=2&article\_id=21944

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Baldauf and Bowers, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Dirk Kurbjuweit, "Peace in Afghanistan is a Boon for Drug Lords," <u>Der Spiegel</u> (August 17, 2005), at <a href="http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,370130,00.html">http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,370130,00.html</a>

and available for perusal at http://www.afghanscene.com

I were an Afghan, I would hate me: in fact I do. OK, so none of this really matters if we are doing good work. Let's pose the question: are we doing good work? Actually, let's not, because I don't like the answer I feel inclined to give. My colleague posed the question, and gave two answers, with two consequences. Either we are hated, in which case we need to get the hell out, right now, OR we are not hated. If the latter, we need to think about security very seriously. Now that Clementina is no longer in the hands of those who kidnapped her, I can speak of this without being accused of bad taste. If we are not actually hated, then living the way we do is simply more likely to institute that sort of hatred. We are insulating ourselves from a community which prizes community and belonging, which cements gawm ("us and them") as a concept, which prizes elaborate greetings, the protocols of civil behaviour. We consistently reject this, driving around in our big cars unsmiling and oblivious. This behaviour is not likely to endear us. Our security regulations demand that we remain in glorious isolation, but are themselves counter-productive in that they make the ordinary Afghan less likely to help us in times of need. We may only be threatened by a minority, but we are systematically alienating the good wishes of the majority. It is difficult to know what to do. Should we relax security and make an effort to exist in the community? Perhaps for longstay people this makes most sense. The problem is that most of the staff here come and go, live in the ex-pat Kabul bubble, never learn the language, and never really interact with Afghans (I do not absolve myself from these accusations). Our ignorance and lack of commitment means we cannot safely live in Afghanistan-proper. Our work suffers fatally as a result.

The writer is obviously a member of the well-heeled non-governmental organizations such as the agencies of the United Nations and countless other "aid" agencies in Kabul. The foreign NGO workers – though not the Afghans – earn on average \$4,000 a month, mostly tax-free, and seldom spend it in local shops. Sure, they frequent the new Sony Centre and the Kabul City Centre, but most other shopkeepers only glimpse them as they drive around in the couple hundred \$60-75,000 Toyota Land Cruisers, a majority owned by the U.N.. <sup>171</sup> A correspondent for the magazine <u>Private Eye</u> provides additional insight into life in the ex-pat community of Kabul:

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> salesman Muhammed Khaled at the Toyota dealership said, "we have enough customers willing to pay US\$50,000 for this car. Customers are either foreigners, important commanders or government officials" ("Capitalism Intensifies Class Divisions in Afghanistan," Associated Press (September 28, 2003) reprinted in <u>Taipei Times</u> (September 28, 2003)

The cruisers ferry them from office to restaurant to guesthouse. Some of them are quite lavish. A French organization has hired a four-star chef and Kabul's 'first boutique hotel' has opened for business...There's the swimming pool at the central U.N. compound and regular parties and barbecues. Memories of a party held by the DHL courier group last November [2003], when an opium pipe was passed around by UN staff, are still fresh. If boredom strikes, aid workers might also sign up for Tai Chi and Argentinean tango lessons. Booze, pork chops, prosciutto, marinated steaks, shrimps, cigars and caviar are regularly flown in the two PXs catering for westerners. Run by westerners themselves, none of their vast profit reaches the local economy. Now the German brewer of Biltburger Pils has a representative in Kabul signing up new customers. And Starbucks is here too 'for office and home delivery.' Again none of this investment is much to us locals. True, a few Afghans are 'lucky' enough to get jobs cleaning, serving tea or gardening... 172

The letter elicited an indignant rebuke where the writer (country director of the population-control N.G.O., PSI International) pointed out that NGO staff travel around in \$33,000 Nissan Patrols and that an annual salary of \$48,000 in Kabul is hardly inflated given the "pretty harsh conditions" of life in Kabul.

And one wonders along with Mr. Bashardost why so little of the reconstruction aid committed actually translates into tangible life-improving things?

A professor of film at Boston University, John Robert Kelly, published an account, "Beer and Loafing in Afghanistan," in a right-wing blog (run by University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds) about his experiences in Afghanistan as an ex-pat. I quote from it extensively here because it luridly captures important facets of some (not all) expat thinking:

It's a lonely and frustrating life for the western NGO and UN grief relief workers in Afghanistan. There are those hefty paychecks, often amounting to thousands of dollars—tax-free-- a week, but no place to spend it. After all, how many carpets and antique swords can one collect? Then there's that pesky problem of the desultory hours surfing the net in air conditioned estates converted to office space, but nowhere else to travel,

<sup>172</sup> Correspondent for Private Eye, "Letter from Kabul," <u>Afghan Scene</u> no. 2 (July/August 2004): 30-31

except back to the villa in new, chauffeured Landcruisers for an evening of the same old faces, same old conversations. Numerous fearful directives and warnings keep these NGO workers from hitting the street and meeting and mingling with the Afghan population. When these warnings are lifted, few wish to wander from their guarded compound. There's a very valid awareness that the NGO permanent party isn't well liked by the Kabulis. An elderly Hazara rug merchant whose business has been halved by the timidity of NGO shoppers, snorts derisively in perfect English, ""Their feet never touch the ground in Kabul."" And he's right. In a typical week, one sees just a few handfuls of westerners, mostly ISAF troops on holiday, even in the safest zones of the tourist traps and souvenir shops on Chicken Street, Kabul's answer to Rodeo Drive. Many of the professional compassion corps are feeling restless and bored; they've already been staff in Kosovo, East Timor and Afghanistan, and nowadays believe they belong in Iraq, that's where the real money is. In the status conscious pecking order of NGO hierarchies, Afghanistan is passe. Only the palpable danger of Iraq keeps down the flurry of resumes from Kabul to Baghdad. It's the rare NGO worker who applies for work before the shooting is over and the maximum salaries are fixed. The money has been spent in Afghanistan, the bank is closed. The UN has larded tens of millions of dollars on an enormous fleet of brand new top-of-the-line Toyota Landcruisers, many times that on inflated salaries, mansions and the luxurious perks of occupying pashas. The needy locals are not amused. The American citizens who've liberally financed this largesse would be appalled at the waste. It's not all monotonous or pointless in Kabul; at one French NGO housed in a stunning antique-laden chalet, I've devoured a seven-course meal prepared by a 4 star chef. Then there's always the sumptuous UN House, where one can take a dip, mingle poolside among scandalous bikinis and dowse dehydration with inspired cocktails fashioned by our languid Euro masters. Unfortunately, since "American UN employee" is an oxymoron, our one attempt to storm the formidable barricades is a spectacular failure. We're rudely turned away, despite flashing \$20 bills to the Afghan UN security. My companion, a fierce Pushtoon-American licensed to pack a very visible Glock 19, glances back at the sunbathers as we're escorted out: "We've paid for all this with our taxes, you bastards!" One of the Pushto guard's shrugs his shoulders sympathetically, muttering an apology that suggests "someday this will all be ours again." For all the heroic American efforts in Afghanistan, truly and deeply appreciated by the indigenous population, we're still treated as unwanted nuisances by the predominantly European NGO residents. For us hoi polloi, there was always the Irish Pub that opened on Saint Paddy's day to such fanfare in the western press—and with far greater gratitude in Kabul——but is now shuttered, a victim of its own success. Sean McQuade's commercial instinct was impeccable: the creation of a stimulating oasis for thirsty westerners in one of the driest and most oppressively conservative cities in the Islamic world. The demand was

high——a bit too high, according to some Afghans. In a city where getting stoned isn't an amusing colloquialism for intoxication but a literal description for the Taliban sport of getting smashed at the soccer stadium, Sean's otherwise laudable enterprise had a few defects in the business model, the most notable was that his public house had a mullah next door. McQuade had hoped for a lower profile for his tavern, but the spirited swarms of tipsy patrons pouring into their NGO SUVs in the late hours scandalized the neighborhood and not even the owner's gracious offer of baksheesh to rebuild local roads and schools could keep the speakeasy alive. All is not lost for parched westerners in search of a public lager with good company, however, since other more discreet taps have opened throughout the city. At the Mustafa Hotel, long the favorite haven of adventuresome tourists and savvy international journalists, where last summer we diluted toxic contraband Tajik vodka (at \$50 a liter) with Fanta, one can not only legally quaff a draught, but also surf the net or file a story at the same time...and not a mullah for a hundred meters. 173

Further entertainment for the well-heeled bored ex-pats and nouveau riche Afghans is provided with the reopening of the Kabul golf course (where a round costs \$50), the city's first 'gastroclub-cocktail bar (the Elbow Room), listening to Saad Mohseni's commercial radio (Arman FM) and television (Tolo TV) stations, or simply perusing the latest <u>Afghan Scene</u> magazine – whose first issue featured a fashion piece entitled "I can't believe I'm buying a tube top in Kabul." The Bloomberg news agency featured an article titled "Whiskey Shots Replace Gunshots in Rebuilding, Revitalized Kabul." It described the scene close to midnight at the Coco Cabana club in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood where whiskey shots were still being noisily exchanged, adding

This is a new Kabul, a rebuilding city full of high-rises put up by the nouveau-riche modeled on gaudy Pakistani buildings they remember from their exile. With their black-and-white marble trim, fussy columns and multicolored glass facades, they stand like arrogant peacocks over their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> from blog <a href="http://instapundit.com/archives/010705.php">http://instapundit.com/archives/010705.php</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Duncan Campbell, "Kabul Tunes into Capital Pursuits," <u>The Guardian</u> (June 17, 2004) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,.1240395,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,.1240395,00.html</a>
The Guardian (June 17, 2004) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,.1240

<sup>173</sup> Michael Luongo, "Whiskey Shots Replace Gunshots in Rebuilding, Revitalized Kabul," Bloomberg.com (September 20, 2005) at http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000085&sid=afxFw9ptaAyI&refer=europe

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humble adobe neighbors. Paid handsomely for working in a war-ravaged country, the burgeoning ex-pat community rebuilding the country flocks to trendy international restaurants like L'Atmosphere, owned by a Frenchman who originally came to Kabul to train Afghan journalists. Here, behind high steel walls, a passageway meant to mimic a Provencal farmhouse gives way to a well-kept garden, complete with a swimming pool. Bikiniclad French women exchange greeting kisses on the cheek as Bridgette Bardot-era music pumps gently from well-hidden speakers. Tables fill up quickly with hungry U.N. workers and diplomatic staff who pore over the menu, looking for the best Beaujolais.

In a report for the <u>Times</u> of London in March 2006, Richard Beeston reported from Kabul,

Today, in spite of regular power cuts, the odd terrorist attack and the haphazard nature of life, the city is booming. A typical evening for foreigners in Kabul begins with a debate about where to meet for drinks and then whether to eat Italian, Thai, Indian, French or Lebanese food. Afterwards there are bars and pool halls run by Russians from Tajikistan and, for some, brothels packed with Chinese prostitutes..... At Escalades, a supposed private members' club in Kabul, a dozen Chinese prostitutes danced with little enthusiasm in front of leering middle-aged American and British contractors with money to spend. Residents said that the clubs were allowed to operate because the owners bribed the police. 176

Any guest staying overnight at the Serena Hotel would fine familiar luxury as

...almost everything that the luxury hotel requires - from European cheeses for its breakfast buffet to chemicals for the laundering of its downy white towels to the Penhaligon lotions and shampoos with which

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<sup>176</sup> Richard Beeston, "Good Times Roll in City Where Fun was Banned," <u>Times</u> (March 15, 2006) at <a href="http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25689-2086117,00.html">http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25689-2086117,00.html</a>

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the bathrooms are lavishly stocked - must be imported. Goods are flown from Dubai into one of Pakistan's international airports, then taken by railroad to the border city of Peshawar, where they begin a 10-hour journey by truck over the Khyber Pass to Kabul.<sup>177</sup>

Ghulam Hazrat Safi returned from Dubai and invested \$35 million building the green glass, 10-storey Kabul City Center shopping mall and the adjoining Safi Landmark Hotel (photo below). The Safi hotel boasts 40 "fully furnished suites", two restaurants, a fully equipped gym, and conference facilities. It offers over 100 shops in house ranging from gold to antiques, electronics to technology, and cosmetics to apparel.



source: http://www.pajhwok.com/viewalbum.asp?id=195

The adjoining Kabul city mall opened in September 2005. Since then

...groups of young Afghan men and women have been enjoying shopping in stores that sell perfume and scented candles, or gossiping over coffee in the basement cafe. Wearing jeans under a long black robe, Marsila, a 25-

<sup>177</sup> Kayherine Zoepf, "Emerging Destination of the Year: Kabul," <u>The New York Times</u> (January 22, 2006) at <a href="http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/01/22/travel/22kabul.html">http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/01/22/travel/22kabul.html</a>

year-old student studying English literature at Kabul University, said she and her classmates have become mall rats.<sup>178</sup>

## Civilization restored.....mall rats in Kabul.



Interior of the Kabul City Center (photos from <a href="http://www.pajhwok.com/viewalbum.asp?id=121">http://www.pajhwok.com/viewalbum.asp?id=121</a>

Amongst "Kabul's finest" figure the freelance soldiers of fortune (e.g., ex-Green Beret Jack Idema), carpet-baggers of all stripes, enforcers (e.g., DynCorps, Bearing Point, etc). They apparently hang-out at Kabul's Mustafa Hotel,

...muscles and automatic weaponry on display, guzzling beer and flirting with the giggling Thai girls flown in to staff the hotel's new massage parlour and beauty salon. The American ex-soldiers who have flocked to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Laura J. Winter, "A Rising Kabul Rules," <u>New York Daily News</u> (November 27, 2005) at http://www.nydailynews.com/news/wn\_report/story/369276p-314217c.html

Afghanistan tend to be men of mystery, their ranks dominated by laconic Southerners. They are to be found in the Irish bar of the Mustafa, a former secret police detention centre hurriedly converted into a hotel after the fall of the Taliban and now run by an Afghan-American car dealer from New Jersey. Over expensive glasses of Jack Daniel's, they swap hair-raising tales, compare weaponry and joke with the massage parlour girls who dress in camouflage waistcoats.<sup>179</sup>

Fortune-hunter, Jack Idema, went a bit beyond even the standards of Kabul's chaotic violence, by operating a private jail where he and his thugs hung prisoners upside down, tortured them, etc. But in reality, the most exciting it gets for most of these macho men is guarding western businesses for several hundred dollars a day.

#### Civilization protected.

As part of the massive influx of foreigners and newly-rich westernized Afghans, alcohol consumption and prostitution have made a strong come-back. The compromise reached regarding alcohol was that only foreigners are officially allowed to consume liquor even though the Afghan constitution bans alcohol. Bars and clubs openly serve alcohol and when closed-down by authorities are quickly re-opened. Along the road between Kabul and Jalalabad, several stalls openly sell Heinecken beer. One stall owner said to Kim Barker as a police officer walked by, "no problem....Foster's, Heinecken, Beck's, whiskey vodka. I have wine for women too."

As usually happens, along with alcohol and private clubs, commercial sex has sprung up. In March 2005, the Disco Restaurant opened. The new club hung a banner along the

Nick Meo, "Kabul's Colonel Kurtz," http://www.sundayherald.com/43285

Sunday Herald (July 11, 2004) at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> Kim Barker, "Compromise on Alcohol Leaves Afghans Shaken, Stirred," <u>Chicago Tribune</u> (April 25, 2005 at <a href="http://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-0504250110apr25,1,4855928.story?coll=chi-site-nav">http://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-0504250110apr25,1,4855928.story?coll=chi-site-nav</a>

sidewalk featuring a half-naked dancing couple. The Disco served no food but did provide four Chinese women willing to dance with foreign men. The owner, Zhaogia Guo says he wanted to make money and give foreign men a place to dance.

In early 2005, articles began appearing providing details on how Chinese restaurants and guest houses in Kabul often served as fronts for popular brothels. Justin Huggler reports that "most are located in the expensive neighborhoods like Wazir Akbar Khan and Share-Nau, amid the expensive restaurants and bars frequented by the plethora of foreign diplomats, UN staff and NGO workers who live in Kabul." The Silk Road Restaurant located just across from a girls' school, is one of the many new brothels opened up in Kabul (photo by Tom Pennington, Forth Worth Star Telegram/KRT, Dec. 30, 2005):



<sup>181</sup> Justin Huggler, "Chinese Prostitutes Arrested in Kabul 'Restaurant' Raids," <u>The Independent</u> (February 10, 2006) at <a href="http://www.swop-usa.org/news/restaurants.html">http://www.swop-usa.org/news/restaurants.html</a>

#### Civilization's underside tasted by some.

Again, some get facilities closed down by authorities but then re-open under another name. In February 2006, Afghan police raided many restaurants, arresting 46 foreign women for selling alcohol to Afghans and engaging in prostitution.<sup>182</sup>

According to a regular brothel patron, prostitutes in Kabul are divided into two categories: Chinese, Thai and those from the former Soviet republics. Even the prostitutes are imported!

A Mr. Sabit who is legal adviser to the Interior Ministry makes the rounds of guest houses, bars and clubs in Kabul. Kim Barker reported

On one recent visit, he gestured at a Chinese woman dressed in a fur jacket, fishnet stockings, white miniskirt and white boots--almost unbelievable in a country where many Afghan women still cover their faces and everything else. "Look at that," he muttered. The only customer was a Western man, sitting at a table by himself. Although Sabit would like all these places to disappear, he will probably end up disappointed.

The large foreign community in Kabul operates economically as an import-dependent bubble economy onto its own with few domestic linkages. At best, some crumbs of the incomes earned trickle-down to poorer segments of society. The organizations visibly function with very large overheads. Along with the arrival and growth of the ex-pat inevitably come certain western social ills.

Widespread agreement exists that in Kabul and larger Afghanistan a climate of fear and instability exists. A resurgent Taliban insurgency threatens vast swathes of the nation and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Justin Huggler, op. cit.

Michaela Cancela-Kieffer, "Business Turns Bad for Chinese Brothels in Afghan Capital," France-Presse (February 4, 2005) at http://www.aegis.com/news/afp/2005/AF050208.html

even affects large cities like Kandahar, Kabul, and Mazar-i-Sharif. The year 2005 has been the bloodiest since 2001. The insurgency in the provinces has successfully disrupted reconstruction work, e.g., in the south some 200 schools are closed due to violence according to local officials. <sup>184</sup> The insurgency's new tactics – suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices - and kidnappings promise to further raise the general sense of insecurity. <sup>185</sup> Kabul's thoroughfares are empty by 9 P.M. and the 'internationals' are advised to stay at home under curfew. A recently arrived employee of the United Nations Development Program writes,

This place is like Europe after WWII, except it is full of Afghans and they are not particularly industrious or organized. I am living in a guest house of UNDP staff and have settled into a routine, exercises at dawn, breakfast, work, lunch, work, a ride home, a drink, dinner, reading and bedtime... with some writing in between. There is no liberty permitted here, we go and come to the office and can't be on the streets at all. Security is tight. WE are picked up by a UN car and dropped off at 6:30 P.M. 186

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> IRIN, "Afghanistan: Education Crisis in the South with 200 Schools Closed," Reuters (February 8, 2006) and Declan Walsh, "Lessons of Life and Death," <u>Boston Globe</u> (March 16, 2006) at <a href="http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/16/lessons">http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/16/lessons</a> on <a href="http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/16/lessons">http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/16/lessons</a> on <a href="http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/16/lessons">life and death/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Kidnappings are primarily undertaken by gangs. In 2004, a gang kidnapped the cousin of the very wealthy Habib Gulzar, owner of Kabul's only official Toyota dealership and a ransom was paid for his release.

<sup>186 &</sup>quot;Raul in Kabul," at http://spaces.msn.com/raulkabul/



Afghan police officer Ghulam Raza, 26, frisks guests before they are allowed to enter a wedding at the Sham-e-Paris restaurant in Kabul, the capital. Such security practices were unknown in Afghanistan until recent months (By Griff Witte -- The Washington Post)

### A report in a Canadian newspaper in early 2006 cautioned,

Kabul – The city smells of dust, diesel, wood smoke, windborne curry, chai tea and a whiff of raw sewage – but also fear. And it is growing....in the past 18 months, and even more so in the past six months,..[the] mood of optimism has shifted to a grinding sense that things are slowly falling apart, expatriates here say. The evidence is everywhere on the streets. Guest houses that once thrived with foreign business are dark and empty, and drivers willing to ferry foreigners are in short supply. The one hotel in Kabul that still does a robust trade, the Gandamak Lodge, is literally ringed by gates and razor wire and guarded by men with automatic weapons...many humanitarian workers from abroad have lefty...foreign embassies fly no flags and carry no displays that would overtly give their presence away...road travel from Kabul to...Kandahar...is now

discouraged for anyone traveling without protection of an armed convoy. 187

The situation is exacerbated by an entrenched, well-financed opium mafia threatening the role of law.

But within the Washington Beltway, officials claim that a measure of peace and security has finally taken root in Afghanistan. But as Wahidullah Amani wrote for the independent newspaper of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting,

...try telling that to Abdul Hadi, a resident of...Kandahar. Hadi had just recently witnessed a suicide bombing that left one dead and three injured, in addition to the bomber himself. Although the bomber may have been aiming to hit a passing convoy of United States-led Coalition troops, his victims were all Afghan civilians. In Kandahar, we are afraid of the trees, of the air, of the ground we walk on,' said Hadi as he gestured helplessly at his surroundings. 'This is no life'. 188

A policeman in Kandahar added, "as a policeman, I go on duty in the morning never knowing whether I will live to go home in the evening."

The Karzai regime argues that its police and army forces are now in control of the country. Based upon what evidence? The absence of large-scale, pitched battles with large Taliban forces – the Karzai spokesman saying, "the opposition is no longer able to fight face to face". What they don't say is that it is the destructive force of B-52Bs, the F-16s, the A-10s, and the Apache helicopters which are the explanation of the Taliban

Michel Den Tandt, "Afghans Fight Rising Fears," <u>The Globe and Mail</u> (January 23, 2006) at <a href="http://www.e-">http://www.e-</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/659f885a92f87f44872570ff00447948?OpenDocument&Click=</u>

188 Wahidullah Amani, "Growing Sense of Insecurity," <u>Institute of War & Peace Reporting</u> (December 23, 2005) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=258840&apc\_state=henh">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=258840&apc\_state=henh</a>

refraining from launching attacks with larger units and instead focusing upon small-scale targeted missions.

The situation in the provinces which were once strongholds of the Taliban is even more precarious for the United States and its Afghan client's forces. Griff Witte recently provided a vivid description of Uruzgan, the homeland of Mohammad Omar,

When the United States sent tons of wheat seed here this winter [2005/6] to be given to farmers as an alternative to growing poppies, local officials sold the seeds and pocketed the money. When the U.S. ambassador came for a visit Jan. 5, a suicide bomber detonated himself several hundred yards away, killing 10 people. And every time U.S. troops have managed to seize a portion of Uruzgan province, this remote, ruggedly beautiful region of south-central Afghanistan, enemy fighters have simply slipped away and found new hiding places among its endless craggy hills and hollows.<sup>189</sup>

The United States, as part of controlling the empty space of Afghanistan at least cost, has been able to "persuade" the Dutch to oversee volatile Uruzgan Province, the Canadians to do the same in Kandahar, and the British to oversee volatile Helmand Province.

In nearby Pakistan, a thoroughly reorganized Taliban movement has even established the Islamic Republic of [North] Waziristan. <sup>190</sup> By taking control of almost all of the North Waziristan tribal area, the Taliban have gained a significant base from which to wage resistance against U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. <sup>191</sup>

Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Terrorism: Taliban Video Claims Mulsim State in [North] Waziristan," Adnkronosinternacionmal (AKI) (February 6, 2006) at http://www.adnki.com/index 2Level.php?cat=Terrorism&loid=8.0.261219324&par=0

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Griff Witte, "Afghan Province's Problems Underline Challenge for U.S. Resilient Insurgency, Corruption Keep Uruzgan a 'Last Frontier'," <u>Washington Post</u> (January 30, 2006) at <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/29/AR2006012901092.html">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/29/AR2006012901092.html</a>

Syed Saleem Shahzad, "The Taliban's Foothold in Pakistan," <u>Asia Times</u> (February 8, 2006) at <a href="http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South">http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South</a> Asia/HB08Df01.html

This section has woven together a tapestry of the grotesque pseudo-development whose related threads include: a culture of impunity and corruption, obscene opulence amidst grinding poverty and unemployment, a façade of governance marketed with a \$300 million price-tag, and an import-driven, high-priced ex-pat economic bubble in Kabul, The whole looks like the chimera expressed by Karzai,

Let's begin developing Kabul keeping the Serena hotel as the center of it. 192

<sup>192</sup> Agence France Presses, "Destitute Afghanistan Opens its most Luxurious Hotel" (November 9, 2005) at <a href="http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20051109-035855-1956r">http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20051109-035855-1956r</a>

# Projecting Progress and Governance: Selling Brand Karzai

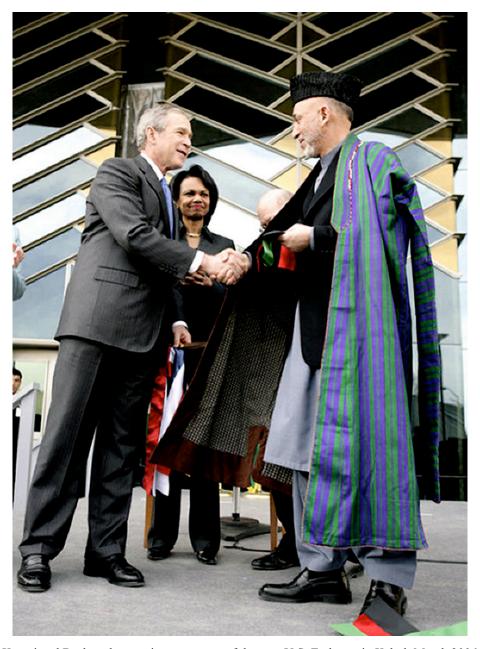


Karzai being ferried around in Afghanistan

The U.S. Government and its Afghan client spare no efforts to craft, project and publicize an image of progress and governance under Karzai. The United States authorities admit that "victory in the long war ultimately depends on strategic communication," that is, upon marketing a particular, constructed image of reality. 193 In other words, reality is far less important than effectively selling an interpretation. I shall briefly focus upon four forms which this vast marketing effort takes in selling "Brand Karzai." The image of a revitalized country under the leadership of a responsible, Western-oriented leader is portrayed by modern buildings sprouting up and new asphalt strips going off into the horizon. A huge media fanfare is raised over the "successful" elections held in 2004 and 2005. Thirdly, the corporate media entertains the public with a bouquet of insignificant spectacles deemed to convince the reader that happiness has returned to Afghanistan: beauty salons are opening up, kids are flying kites, adults converse via cell phones, and

193 see James P. Pinkerton, "American Outwitted on World Stage. Can America Win a Sustained War in This Media Age?" The Cincinnati Post (February 2006) at http://news.cincypost.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060224/EDIT/602240309/1003

the "hideous" burka is on the way out (replaced timidly by miniskirts on sale in a boutique in Herat<sup>194</sup> and western fashions in Kabul). Lastly, the corporate media assists in establishing the credibility of 'Brand Karzai' by reporting on his incessant international travels, seeking to legitimate him as a statesman of international stature.



Karzai and Bush at the opening ceremony of the new U.S. Embassy in Kabul, March 2006

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Fridon Poya, "Mini-skirts, Dating in Afghanistan's Heart After Warlord Leaves," Agence France Presse (November 28, 2005) at <a href="http://www.afghanmania.com/en/news/0,news,4750,00.html">http://www.afghanmania.com/en/news/0,news,4750,00.html</a>

The centrality of image over substance as regards Karzai was revealed in the first weeks after the Taliban were bombed out of power in December 2001. Besides being a known and compliant asset of the West, Hamid Karzai could be marketed to the general public as a man of taste, chic, and aristocratic heritage. Within a month after the Taliban had abandoned Kandahar, the western press was promoting Afghanistan's "Mr. Chic." Karzai was said by the poised B.B.C. to

broken new sartorial ground by marrying classic tailoring with ethnic fashions, in a combination which may breathe new like into the way leaders dress around the world. Mr. Karzai has a knack for combining classic and ethnic. One of his trade-marks is to layer Nehru-collar shirts, waistcoat and jacket. He is also well known for sporting Astrakhan hats...<sup>195</sup>

By late January, the press was reporting that Karzai was pleased with his fame as a fashion icon (though hoped that he could become more than a "fashion plate"). <sup>196</sup> Georgie Anne Geyer added

The <u>Washington Post</u>'s congenitally snippy Style Section went furthest in falling all over itself, when writer Robin Givhan wrote breathlessly of Karzai that "there is a lot of Hollywood" in the man. "Many are captivated by his signature hat and his billowing cloaks in vivid shades of emerald green or exuberant ribbon stripes," she went on. "They like his flowing shirt with its banded collar. Karzai has the natural sex appeal of a Sean Connery rather than the situational sex appeal of, oh, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Karzai is an alpha male with a peacock's flamboyance. Might other men follow? Designers can only dream."

<sup>196</sup> "Aghan's Karzai Aims to be More Than a 'Fashion Plate'," Reuters (January 21, 2002) at http://www.namibian.com.na/2002/January/world/023B141DD2.html

<sup>195</sup> see "Picture Gallery: Afghanistan's 'Mr. Chic',"

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\_asia/1765402.stm

BBC News (January 17, 2002) at

in her "Karzai's Colorful Clothes Show More Than Good Fashion Sense," at <a href="http://www.uexpress.com/georgieannegeyer/index.html?uc\_full\_date=20020201">http://www.uexpress.com/georgieannegeyer/index.html?uc\_full\_date=20020201</a>

By mid-2002, Karzai had toured many Western capitals establishing himself,

as a well-educated, westernized and stylish [leader]...He won further praise from the Gucci fashion house for his trademark green-and-white chapan – traditional Uzbek coat – and his ceremonial karakul hat.<sup>198</sup>

The western press had successfully leveraged Karzai's fashion style into statesmanship. But many Afghans well knew that "Karzai is not the president of Afghanistan, B-52 is president."

Merely being fashionable, was an insufficient sales pitch to market Brand Karzai. The new "statesman" needed to be shown as actually accomplishing something tangible. The choice emerged in the guise of displaying Karzai presiding over the modernization of Kabul (and to a lesser extent Afghanistan – which was more difficult to show as Karzai's influence outside of Kabul was limited). He would be prominently shown inaugurating new constructions and cutting ribbons of finished constructions. The favorite modern icons were highways and luxury hotels.

An early centerpiece of such effort took place on November 10, 2002, when Karzai and U.S. Ambassador Robert Finn officiated a ground-breaking ceremony to mark the first day of construction of Afghanistan's main highway, known as "Highway 1," from Kabul to Kandahar. The international press was present and recorded the solemn moment: CNN even published a photo of Karzai praying at the ceremony. 200

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> "Hamid Karzai: Shrewd Statesman," BBC News (June 14, 2002) at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\_asia/2043606.stm

<sup>199</sup> USAID, "Ground Breaking Ceremony for Kabul- Kandahar-Herat Highway Reconstruction Project" (Washington D.C.: USAID Press Office Release, November 10, 2002) a <a href="http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2002/pr021110\_1.html">http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2002/pr021110\_1.html</a>

Diana Muriel, "Work Begins on Afghanistan's Highway," CNN.com (November 10, 2002) at http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/central/11/10/afghanistan.roads/index.html



A year later on December 16, 2003, Karzai with U.S. Ambassador Khalizad at his side, cut the ribbon to inaugurate the newly repaved highway. U.S. Special Forces swarmed around the area, Apache helicopters whirred overhead, and the photo op was deemed a success. Karzai proclaimed, "we are rebuilding Afghanistan, bringing back to us what we all desired." What didn't make the headlines was that Highway One epitomizes money wasted on reconstruction. A former Afghan Finance Minister said that the government could have repaved the road for \$35 million, but USAID ended up paying \$190 million. He went one further, saying that more than 90 percent of the more than \$1 billion spent on about 400 United Nations projects in Afghanistan in 2002 was wasted. 2022

reported in Stephen Kaufman, "Afghans Celebrate Reconstruction of Kabul- Kandahar Road," USINFO.State.Gov (December 16, 2003). Photos of the occasion may be found in a news release of the Louis Berger Group at

 $<sup>\</sup>underline{http://www.bergerafghanistan.com/public/projdocs/doc100232\_200312\_KK\_Highway\_Inauguration\_Cere\_mony.pdf}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Tony Poston, "The Battle to Rebuild Afghanistan," BBC News (February 26, 2006) at <a href="http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4714116.stm">http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4714116.stm</a>

In April 2004, Karzai donned a hard-hat and with his entourage of armed U.S. DynCorp guards, inaugurated the building of the five-star Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kabul (fittingly located opposite the U.S. Embassy), another media spectacle.<sup>203</sup>





In April 2005, Karzai launched the construction of another major highway, linking Kandahar with Herat. At the inauguration photo op, he said, "we are starting a very important part of the reconstruction of our country, which is the reconstruction of the roads."

Brand Karzai was further promoted at the ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 5, 2005 of a lavish, five-star, reconstructed hotel, the Kabul Serena, financed by the Agha Khan and the World Bank (which has contributed over \$900 million to the country since 2002 (\$456mn in grants and \$436mn in loans). The new hotel is part of "Kabul's extreme

<sup>203</sup> "Karzai Hails New Afghan Hyatt," <u>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</u> (April 17, 2004 with photo of Karzai in hard hat by Emilio Morenatti).

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makeover."<sup>204</sup> The high-visibility festivity and ribbon-cutting was widely reported upon. Numerous photos were shot, displaying an interior worthy of the best in San Francisco.



## As Daniel Cooney wrote,

"with its large swimming pool, health club, pastry shop, two restaurants and neat mustard-colored exterior, the hotel contrasts sharply with its surroundings. Crippled men compete with ragged street children on the pavement outside to beg for change from passing cars. About 300 yards away is the Murad Khani slum, where thousands live in flimsy shacks next to open sewers."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Daniel Cooney, "New Hotel Part of Kabul's Extreme Makeover," Associated Press (November 8, 2005) at <a href="http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2005/11/08/afghanistans\_first\_5\_star\_hotel\_opens/">http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2005/11/08/afghanistans\_first\_5\_star\_hotel\_opens/</a>
Cooney, op. cit

Further inauguration events presided over included beginning construction of Afghanistan's first private university on March 21, 2005, the American University of Afghanistan located off the Dar ul-Aman Road in west Kabul.

The second element in marketing Brand Karzai – already dealt with in previous sections of this essay – was to announce with tremendous fanfare and coverage – everyone remembers the endless stream of photos of Afghan ballots – the successful completion of presidential and parliamentary elections. We were all treated to spectacles of ballot boxes crossing mountains and rivers, a sure sign that democracy was finally on-the-make in Karzai's Afghanistan.<sup>206</sup>





"For the first time in 5000 years..."

Some of press coverage was triumphal. A U.S election observer announced,

On Sunday September 18<sup>th</sup> [2005], Afghans went to the poles for the first time in more than 5000 years to vote for members of their new Parliament. Voters cast votes for the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) and Shoraiy Wolayety (Provincial Councils). The free

<sup>206</sup> for an interesting and beautiful set of photos of the 2004 elections, see <a href="http://richardwainwright.co.uk/gallery/slideshow.php?set\_albumName=Afghanistan">http://richardwainwright.co.uk/gallery/slideshow.php?set\_albumName=Afghanistan</a>

elections were part of the Bonn agreement signed four years ago following the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001. Nearly 6,000 candidates completed for 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga and for the 34 provisional councils. About 25% of the seats were reserved for women. Candidates included medical doctors, teachers, businesspersons as well as former Communists, members of the Taliban and warlords.<sup>207</sup>

Others were satisfied with qualifying the elections as being a "landmark."<sup>208</sup> The more academic commentators expressed dismay and concern over the very low turn-out in the September parliamentary election.<sup>209</sup> Other commentators noted the substantive difference between a procedual versus republican democracy.<sup>210</sup> But never mind such complicated chatter, the media marketed a sustained pitch stressing "success." Viewers were deluged with a sea of ballot boxes. After all, \$350 million had been disbursed by the U.N. – the equivalent of one-third of all completed reconstruction projects between 2001-5 – in these elections.<sup>211</sup>

The third major aspect of selling Brand Karzai is to present images and stories describing how happiness has returned to the blighted nation. Favorite themes portray laughing children flying kites again, a re-opened golf course, fourishing beauty salons, modern city dwellers conversing via cell-phones, the demise of the dreaded burka, the return of western fashions, etc. Such human-interest stories are aimed to reassure a reader that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Diane Tebelius, "For the First Time in 5000 Years...," Diane in Afghanistan (September 20, 2005) at http://www.dianeinafghanistan.blogspot.com/

Daniel Cooney, "Election Results in Afghanistan Finalised," <u>The Scotsman</u> (November 13, 2005) at <a href="http://news.scotsman.com/international.cfm?id=2233982005&format=print">http://news.scotsman.com/international.cfm?id=2233982005&format=print</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> for example, see footnotes # 28 and 29 herein

<sup>210</sup> see Jan Qarabaghi, "Afghanistan: What Kind of an Election, What Kind of a Democracy?"

Observer (2005) at http://afghanobserver.com/Articles/Qarabaghi Elections.html

Jan Qarabaghi (op. cit.) notes, "I would like to draw the readers' attention to the staggering costs of the up-coming elections (these costs are currently paid for by the generosity of the foreign powers occupying Afghanistan): To conduct and supervise the elections, over 150,000 election officials and workers have been employed for a period of over three months. The total personnel and logistical cost of the undertaking has been estimated to be over \$158 million (the cost of last year's presidential election was about \$200 million). Based on these figures, election costs per candidate turn out to be over \$27,000. The cost per elected MP will be \$634,538 (=158,000,000÷249)."

under the statesmanship of Hamid Karzai the country has returned to the fold of the world's civilized countries.

Even while the Taliban were still being driven out Afghanistan's cities, the Western press was publishing articles about boys flying kites again. The implication was that normalcy and happiness were on the way back. For the past four years, countless stories have been devoted to the theme. The day after the 2004 presidential election, an Afghan boy was shown flying a kite above Kabul:



source: <a href="http://richardwainwright.co.uk/gallery/slideshow.php?set">http://richardwainwright.co.uk/gallery/slideshow.php?set</a> albumName=Afghanistan

Another theme prominently written about is the return of sports to Afghanistan, from soocer to cricket, body-building to golf, and buzkashi. Numerous articles describe the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> for example, see "Kite Gambling Returns to Afghanistan," <u>The Holland Sentinel</u> (March 31, 2002) at <a href="http://subvision.net/sky/planetkite/middle-east/afghanistan/index.htm">http://subvision.net/sky/planetkite/middle-east/afghanistan/index.htm</a>

restoration of the Kabul Gold Club in the Bandi Qarha section of Kabul.<sup>213</sup> But, a revealing footnote to the happy scenes of golfers teeing off, is the Afghan National Army tank patrolling the nearby hills.



Steve Kelley of The Seatlle Times takes a swing

A constant endlessly repeated theme has been the possibility of women "becoming beautiful again" in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Countless articles (and even a film)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> for example, see Steve Kelley, "Afghanistan's Kabul Golf Course a Symbol of Survivial," The Seattle Times (April 28, 2005) at <a href="http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/sports/2002255735\_kell28.html">http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/sports/2002255735\_kell28.html</a>

describe the flowering of Kabul's beauty salons. Some time before their arrival, western journalists were already informing us about the high heels and western dress Afghan women were wearing beneath the burqa. Articles with titles such as "Opening Afghan Eyes with Mascara and Beauty Classes" received wide coverage.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, a stream of articles described in every detail the Kabul Beauty Academy, including its first class of graduates (see below).<sup>215</sup> What many seem to misunderstand is that the burka provided and still provides a sense of security and privacy.<sup>216</sup>



Palawasha, one of the first graduates of the Kabul Beauty School (source: <a href="http://www.picturecontact.com/afy\_info\_id\_srchshow\_APPMODE\_S2\_ItemCode\_JDW05740\_site\_Afghanistan\_InCurrentKeywords\_Afghanistan\_SearchResults.151.htm">http://www.picturecontact.com/afy\_info\_id\_srchshow\_APPMODE\_S2\_ItemCode\_JDW05740\_site\_Afghanistan\_InCurrentKeywords\_Afghanistan\_SearchResults.151.htm</a>)

Hamida Ghafour, "Opening Afghan Eyes with Mascara and Beauty Classes," Los Angeles Times (April 5, 2004) at <a href="http://www.afghania.com/print.php?sid=5342">http://www.afghania.com/print.php?sid=5342</a>
 as in Rosemary Stasek, "Letter from Kabul.," Mountain View Voice (February 4, 2005) at

as in Rosemary Stasek, "Letter from Kabul.," <u>Mountain View Voice</u> (February 4, 2005) at <a href="http://www.mv-voice.com/morgue/2005/2005\_02\_25.kabul.shtm">http://www.mv-voice.com/morgue/2005/2005\_02\_25.kabul.shtm</a>| . A photo of Ms. Staek with Karzai and a long list of articles on the Kabul Beauty Academy may be found at <a href="http://www.stasek.com/afghanistan/media.shtml">http://www.stasek.com/afghanistan/media.shtml</a>|

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Salima Ghafari, "The Burqa: Prison or Protection?" <u>IWPR</u> (May 27, 2005) at http://www.peacewomen.org/news/Afghanistan/May05/burqa.html

Moreover, as Humera Khan so eolquently noted, the question is more about power than clothing,

"the issue of the burqa in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the Muslim world, is not about the garment itself. Women wore such clothing even before Islam and will continue to do so as a matter of choice......while the Taliban were imposing their beliefs and reducing freedom on one side, the same can be said of the male-dominated and often misogynistic fashion industry on the other."

The image of a modernizing Afghanistan under Karzai is also promoted by numerous articles on the telecommunications revolution underway. Afghans are portrayed buying cell phones in newly opened shops, engaging in incessant SMS messaging, sending romantic messages, etc.



An Afghan man looks at prices of a GSM phone offered by Roshan, Afghanistan's second mobile network, which went into operation in Kabul, July 27, 2003. Roshan is owned by a consortium grouping the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, Monaco Telecom International, U.S.-based MCT Corp and French telecoms giant Alcatel. Photo credit: Ahmad Masood, Reuters. See also

http://www.talkingproud.us/International081703.html

Humera Khan, "Freedom, Fashion and an Assault on the Burka," <u>The Guardian</u> (November 21, 2001) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,603051,00.html

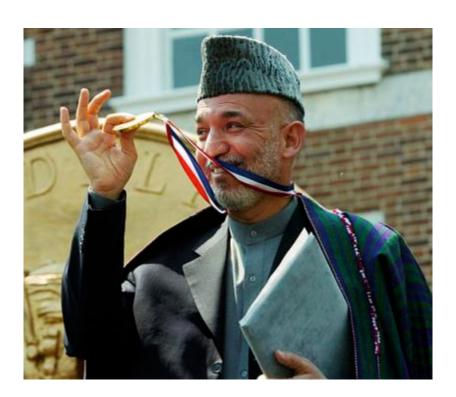
The arrival of Bollywood movies and western fashions receive ample coverage. Some youth sport baseball caps, frayed blue jeans, denim jackets sleeveless shirts, imported thirts in Kabul. In late 2005, Aresh Azizi opened a western-style boutique in Herat featuring a mannequin with a flawless face and marble-smooth arms... [wearing] a miniskirt. Azizi proudly announced, her name is Venus. Articles lament the passing of good times when miniskirts and Western fashion were in style in Afghanistan. Making Inroads. A Good Country Again From Fashion to Hollywood, Outside World in Making Inroads.



as in Abdul Baseer Saeed, "Youth Turn to Western Fashions," AARNo. 168 (April 16, 2005) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=238984&apc\_state=heniarr2005">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=238984&apc\_state=heniarr2005</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Fridon Poya, "Miniskirts, Dating in Afghanistan's Herat after Warlord Leaves," Agence France Presse (November 28, 2005) at <a href="http://www.metimes.com/print.php?StoryID=20051128-055233-3302r">http://www.metimes.com/print.php?StoryID=20051128-055233-3302r</a>
Roya Nassery, "When Miniskirts and Western Fashion Were in Style in Afghanistan," <a href="Cape Cod Times">Cape Cod Times</a>
(November 9, 2001) at <a href="http://www.capecodonline.com/special/terror/terrornews/whenminiskirts9.htm">http://www.capecodonline.com/special/terror/terrornews/whenminiskirts9.htm</a>
<sup>221</sup> Mark Memmott, "Afghanistan 'A Good Country Again,' From Fashion to Hollywood, Outside World is Making Inroads," <a href="USA Today">USA Today</a> (August 22, 2002)

Further "goods news" is written about: Afghans heading for the Kabul City Center shopping mall; Coca-Cola returning to Kabul iopening a new bottling plant; and the New York-based J. Walter Thompson advertising agency set up a joint venture in Kabul. 222 Another major element in marketing Brand Karzai is widely publicizing the U.S. client's international junkets. Hardly an international meeting goes by without the tell-tale green manteled Karzai being on public display. Other junkets include receiving honorary degress and medals of all sorts, again providing for wonderful photo ops. A spectacular photo op was provided when Karzai received the 2004 Liberty Medal at Indepence Hall in Philadelphia:



Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada, "Afghans Head for the Mall," IWPR (December 7, 2005) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=257693&apc\_state=heniarr20051">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=257693&apc\_state=heniarr20051</a>1 with photos; "Coca-Cola Returns to Afghanistan," <a href="mailto:Drinks Business Review">Drinks Business Review</a> (December 8, 2005) at <a href="http://www.drinks-business-review.com/article\_news.asp?guid=0AFA0C6E-6806-4390-A853-242F1852104F">http://www.drinks-business-review.com/article\_news.asp?guid=0AFA0C6E-6806-4390-A853-242F1852104F</a>; and "US Ad Agency Enters Afghanistan," BBC News (January 31, 2006) at <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4665132.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4665132.stm</a>

One puzzles why the international media devotes so much attention to a leader whose existence depends upon 20-30,000 foreign troops. Why not devote similar print and photos to leaders from important international players like Brazil, or Nigeria?

Both the U.S. Government and the mainstream corporatre media spare no efforts in seeking to promote Karzai as a respectable statesman of international stature. Their efforts began with a focus upon fashion, moving on to reporting on high-visibility construction projects in Afghanistan and on Karzai's international voyages, heralding with great fanfare the successful completion of two national elections, and all the while trying to portay the return of normalcy and happiness to Afghanistan by a deluge of human interst stories (about kite-flying, golf, weight-lifting gyms, beauty salons, western fashions, etc.).

# 5. U.S. Military Strategy to Maintain Afghanistan as an 'Empty Space'

After a couple of years of learning following the demise of the Taliban as a visible presence, the United States military has perfected its strategy of *maintaining Afghanistan* as an empty space at least cost. This strategy fits well with what Gabriel Kolko in his newest book, The Age of War: the United States Confronts the World, argues, namely that since 1945 the U.S. has consistently overestimated the value of military power in resolving conflict and correspondingly underestimated the political dimension of conflict.<sup>223</sup> Kolko notes that the U.S. easily won the military campaign (October 7 – December 7, 2001) in the traditional military sense, but failed to understand the politics of the region. By so failing, it has encouraged an insurgency that is growing in strength and which it has shown itself unable to contain.



A U.S. soldier takes a break while searching for Taliban fighters in Afghanistan's empty space. Air Force SSgt Aric Benally of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry (Airborne) in Zaul Province (photograph by Tom Pennington)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Gabriel Kolko, <u>The Age of War: the United States Confronts the World</u> (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006)

The current U.S. strategy is comprised of six inter-related elements:

- 1. relying upon two levels of 24/7 air power;
- 2. concentrating hub activities at two large, *permanent U.S. bases* Bagram and Kandahar while NATO will operate a large new base under-construction in Herat capable of housing 10,000 troops.<sup>224</sup> In 2005, the U.S. Air Force spent \$83 million upgrading its two major bases in Afghanistan;
- 3. maintaining some 30 smaller, forward operating bases with 14 smaller airfields housing highly mobile air and ground forces. US forces stay in their fortified bases and only carry out special search operations, leaving routine patrolling to their local satrap forces;
- 4. reducing its own ground forces commitment in order to cut both financial and political costs (e.g., dead and injured U.S. troops) and having N.A.T.O. forces (especially Canadian, British and Dutch) replace U.S. occupation forces in the most volatile regions Kandahar, Helmand, and Urzugan;
- 5. employing local satrap forces of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to do routine patrolling and ground combat, but with heavy U.S. aerial tactical support (see #1. above). But, success here depends upon training of these army and police forces;
- 6. increasing use of "strategic communication" (or disinformation) by the Bush Administration combined with severely limiting independent access to regions where fighting is occurring. Much of the actual fighting (and casualties) thus goes unreported, e.g., the Norwegian Defense Central Command recently admitted that Norwegian Special Forces had been engaged directly in heavy fighting with Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. <sup>225</sup> In 2006, the Pentagon completed a planning document, The Information Operations Roadmap, in which it detailed its coming new military doctrine of information warfare. <sup>226</sup> The roadmap lays out three new

Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US Digs in Deeper in Afghanistan," <u>Asia Times</u> (February 9, 2005) at <a href="http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\_Asia/GB09Ag01.html">http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\_Asia/GB09Ag01.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> "Report Says Norwegian Special Forces Engage Taliban in Afghanistan," Xinhuanet (March 27, 2006) at <a href="http://feeds.bignewsnetwork.com/redir.php?jid=cbab72a0e9b7281d&cat=f8a5cc818e15aecf">http://feeds.bignewsnetwork.com/redir.php?jid=cbab72a0e9b7281d&cat=f8a5cc818e15aecf</a>

<sup>226</sup> Neil Mackay, "America's War on the Web," Sunday Herald (April 2, 2006) at http://www.sundayherald.com/54975

developments: Pentagon will wage war against the Internet in order to dominate the realm of communications; military psyops using all media – newspapers, books, posters, internet, music, etc – to put out black propaganda to support government and military strategy; and an effort by U.S. war planners to take control of the Earth's electromagnetic spectrum allowing U.S. war planners to monitor global communications. Other examples of information war cited in the report include the creation of 'Truth Squads' to provide public "information" to counter negative publicity (such as the burning of Taliban bodies, Abu Ghraib, torture at Bagram, etc.) to talk up American support for freedom and democracy. In other words, "truth" will be fabricated.

The Pentagon has deployed air power assets so as to effectively maintain a 24/7 presence over Afghanistan. High-flying large bombers – B52Bs and B1-Bs based in Diego Garcia – are constantly in the air high over Afghanistan, ready to provide tactical air support at short notice. Such use of air power in Afghanistan is increasing: the number of air strikes doubled between 2004 to 2005, rising from 86 to 157. In the past couple years, the Pentagon has also relied more upon un-manned aerial vehicles of the Predator type. These drones patrol 24/7 over regions deemed to be in hostile hands (e.g., the northeastern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan especially in the border areas), launching rocket attacks upon targets.

At a lower-level, other tactical aircraft based within Afghanistan (and from U.S. carriers operating in the Arabian Sea – especially the close air-support heavily armed A-10 Warthogs (at Bagram) and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters (at the two large U.S. bases as well as at many of the forward operating bases) – provide more focused and more mobile fire power.

227 "Pentagon Boosts U.S. Air Strikes in Iraq, Afghanistan," http://english.people.com.cn/200603/17/eng20060317 251381.html

The effect of such very mobile, massive aerial firepower has led the insurgents to change tactics away from concentrating their forces, focusing instead upon small-scale, quickly executed, highly pin-pointed attacks (e.g., police posts, government buildings, schools and other reconstruction projects, U.S. Humvee patrols, etc.). Attacks upon Afghan National Army and Police are intended to raise the cost of recruiting such local U.S. satraps. The tactic is hit-and-run, an adjustment to U.S. air power deployment and having nothing to do with the desperate tactics of an almost defeated enemy (as the Pentagon and the U.S. corporate media so loudly trumpet).

The tactic is to cause sufficient U.S. casualties that the issue remains visible politically. And certainly in 2005, the Taliban and their associates did just that. The United States Institute of Peace USIP) reported that Afghanistan in 2005 was more dangerous for American troops per capita than Iraq:

According to USIP, in the spring of 2005 U.S. troop casualties – both injured and killed – reached 1.6 per 1,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, compared with a casualty rate of 0.9 in Iraq. Afghan insurgents, likely Taliban an al-Qaida fighters, are adopting methods proven effective in Iraq. <sup>228</sup>

For the entire year of 2005, the number of U.S. troop fatalities in Iraq per 1,000 U.S. soldiers present in Iraq was six while in Afghanistan it was five; in other words, Afghanistan is just about as deadly a place as is Iraq.

Attacks by Taliban and allies have mushroomed since spring 2005.<sup>229</sup> Scores of articles were published as of March 2005 with headlines like "Taliban Are Back" or "Revival of

<sup>228 &</sup>quot;Afghanistan More Dangerous than Iraq," PakTribune (February 25, 2006) at http://paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=135343

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> see for example, Rachel Morarjee, "Afghanistan on the Brink of Chaos Again," <u>Dawn</u> (July 1, 2005) at <a href="http://www.dawn.com/2005/07/01/int13.htm">http://www.dawn.com/2005/07/01/int13.htm</a>, Hamida Gafour, "Escalating Violence Has Roots Beyond Taliban," <u>Globe and Mail</u> (January 19, 2006) at <a href="http://canadiandimension.com/articles/2006/01/19/315/">http://canadiandimension.com/articles/2006/01/19/315/</a> and Mirwais Afghan, "No End in Sight to Afghan's Years of Violence," Reuters (January 26, 2006) at <a href="http://www.tiscali.co.uk/news/newswire.php/news/reuters/2006/01/26/world/noendinsighttoafghan39syears">http://www.tiscali.co.uk/news/newswire.php/news/reuters/2006/01/26/world/noendinsighttoafghan39syears</a>

the Taliban."<sup>230</sup> In May, Ken Sanders headlined a piece with "Iraq in Miniature." <sup>231</sup> By September, Paul McGeough was writing from Spin Boldak in southern Afghanistan, "Welcome to Taliban Central, Pay at the Gate." In early 2006, the Taliban were producing DVDs showing their training camps in the Waziristan border region.<sup>233</sup> Even more dramatically, the Taliban claimed to have established a Muslim State in North Waziristan, two weeks after Carlotta Gall reported in the New York Times that Pakistani efforts to root out insurgents in that area had faltered.<sup>234</sup> A powerful new militia dubbed "the Pakistani Taliban" has effectively seized control of North and South Waziristan and is rapidly gathering steam.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, the Taliban circulate openly in Ouetta, the capital city of Balochistan. <sup>236</sup> The Afghan Taliban forces are now led by veteran, experienced, senior commanders such as Jalaluddin Haggani, Mullah Dadullah and Saifullah Mansour and work closely with Al-Qaida. Increasingly Afghans, Chechans, Uzbeks and Arabs are fighting side-by-side, employing more sophisticated weapons, communications equipment, showing high levels of coordination, and clearly-defined battle tactics.<sup>237</sup>

ofviolence, html, and Tom Engelhardt, "Drugs, Bases and Jails, The Bush Administration's Afghan Spring," TomDispatch.com (April 5, 2005) at <a href="http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0405-21.htm">http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0405-21.htm</a>

230 Jalal Ghazi, "Arab Media Penorts: Taliban Ara Baak." Alternations (April 2, 2004)

Jalal Ghazi, "Arab Media Reports: Taliban Are Back," Alternet.org ( Masrch 3, 2005) at http://www.alternet.org/story/21401 and Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Revivial of the Taliban," Asia Times (April 9, 2005) at <a href="http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central">http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central</a> Asia/GD09Ag01.html

231 Ken Sanders, "Iraq in Miniature,"

Online Journal (M

Online Journal (May 13, 2005) at

http://www.onlinejournal.org/Special\_Reports/051305Sanders/051305sanders.html
<sup>232</sup> Paul McGeough, "Welcome to Taliban Central, Pay at the Gate," Sydney Mo Sydney Morning Herald (September 12, 2005) at http://fairuse.1accesshost.com/news2/smh69.html

Mark Drummond and Bilal Sarwary, "DVD Role in the Afghan Insurgency," BBC News (February 22,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Terrorism: Taliban Video Claims Muslim State in Waziristan," AKI.news (February 6, 2006) at

http://www.adnki.com/index 2Level.php?cat=Terrorism&loid=8.0.261219324&par=0# and Carlotta Gall and Mohammad Khan, "Pakistan's Push on Border Areas is Said to Falter," New York Times (January 22, 2006) at http://www.truthout.org/docs 2006/printer 012206F.shtml.

Declan Walsh, "Pakistani Taliban Take Control of Unruly Tribal Belt," The Guardian (March 21, 2006) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/pakistan/Story/0, 1735600,00.html and especially Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Revolution in the Pakistani Mountains," Asia Times (March 24, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South Asia/HC23Df05.html

see Abdullah Shahin, "Where the Taleban Train," IWPR (March 7, 2006) at <a href="http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=260014&apc\_state=henh">http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=260014&apc\_state=henh</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> these points are developed in the following articles (beyond the ones already mentioned in footnotes #3-5: Carlotta Gall, "Forgotten Afghan War: Taliban Remains Vibrant," New York Times (June 4, 2005); "In Afghanistan, the Taliban Rises Again for Fighting Season," The Independent (May 14, 2005); Jonathan Landay, "A New Taliban has Re-emerged in Afghanistan," Knight Ridder (August 19, 2005); Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Osama Adds Weight to Afghan Resistance," Asia Times (September 14, 2004); Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "Unholy Allies. The Taliban Haven't Quit, and Some Are Getting Help and Inspiration

The year 2005 was the most violent year of the insurgency since 2001. From January – December 2005, 99 U.S. soldiers were killed in Afghanistan as compared to 55 killed between October 7, 2001 and the end of 2002. During 2002, 43 died, during 2003, another 46 were killed and another 52 during 2004. Even the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency admits that violence in Afghanistan increased by 20 percent during 2005, raising the level of insurgent threat to the highest point since late 2001. What is also surprising is that attackers now include Chechen, Uzbek and Arab fighters not merely along the Pakistan border, but in provinces well inside Afghan territory, in provinces such as Logar and Ghazni. The increased lethality and effectiveness of improvised explosive devices employed in Afghanistan is illustrated by two recent attacks – on February 13, 2006 in Uruzgan Province and on March 12, 2006 in Kunar Province. Both attacks involved remotely-controlled devices directed at armored U.S. Humvees on patrol and each killed four U.S. soldiers.

The insurgency's strategy is to bleed the enemy slowly, force a dispersion of its forces (increasing their vulnerability), and to bring to a halt to any so-called reconstruction projects by raising the general level of insecurity.<sup>241</sup> In May 2005, CARE International

from Iraq," Newsweek (September 26, 2005); Scott Baldauf and Ashraf Khan, "New Guns, New Drive for Taliban," Christian Science Monitor (September 26, 2005); Griff Witte, "Afghans Confront Surge in Violence. Foreign Suppot Seen Behind Attacks That Mimic Those in Iraq," Washington Post (November 28, 2005); Kim Sengupta, "Remember Afghanistan? Insurgents Bring Terror to Country," The Independent (January 17, 2006); Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban Deal Lights a Slow-Burning Fuse," Asia Times (February 11, 2006)

<sup>(</sup>February 11, 2006).

<sup>238</sup> Carlotta Gall, "G.I. Death Toll in Afghanistan Worst Since '01," New York Times (August 22, 2005) at <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/22/international/asia/22afghan.html?ex=1282363200&en=18aafe76a7b2081&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss">http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/22/international/asia/22afghan.html?ex=1282363200&en=18aafe76a7b2081&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss</a>

<sup>239</sup> Katherine Shrade, "Intelligence Official Says Violence Increasing in Afghanistan," Canoe News

<sup>(</sup>February 26, 2006) at <a href="http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/World/WarOnTerrorism/2006/02/28/1466564-ap.html">http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/World/WarOnTerrorism/2006/02/28/1466564-ap.html</a> and Walter Pincus, "Growing Threat Seen in Afghan Insurgency," <a href="Washington Post">Washington Post</a> (March 1, 2006) at <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/28/AR2006022800874\_pf.html">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/28/AR2006022800874\_pf.html</a>

240 Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US Back to the Drawing Board in Afghanistan," <a href="Asia Times">Asia Times</a> (October 5, 2005)

241 a recent article by Sean Naylor in <a href="Armed Forces Journal">Armed Forces Journal</a>, a magazine for U.S. officers, presents a somewhat different interpretation, some of it of course quite self-serving. The author, Sean D. Naylor, while admitting that the Taliban have regrouped, argues that the Taliban have adopted a lie-low-and-wait strategy, so that the U.S. forces would come to believe that the enemy was defeated and start withdrawing its forces. When sufficient U.S. troops had left, the Taliban would launch a large-scale assault to take over state power. He explains the resurgence in fighting since mid-2005 by stating that newly arrived Special Forces units have taken the fight into the remote areas serving as Taliban sanctuaries. The problem with this analysis is that much of the fighting is still and increasingly outside such sanctuaries (for evidence, see

and an Afghan NGO issued a report, "NGO Insecurity in Afghanistan," wherein the fatality rate for NGO employees and the very high levels on insecurity prevailing in rural Afghanistan were documented.<sup>242</sup> Aid workers hardly venture out beyond the confines of Jalalabad and Kandahar.<sup>243</sup>

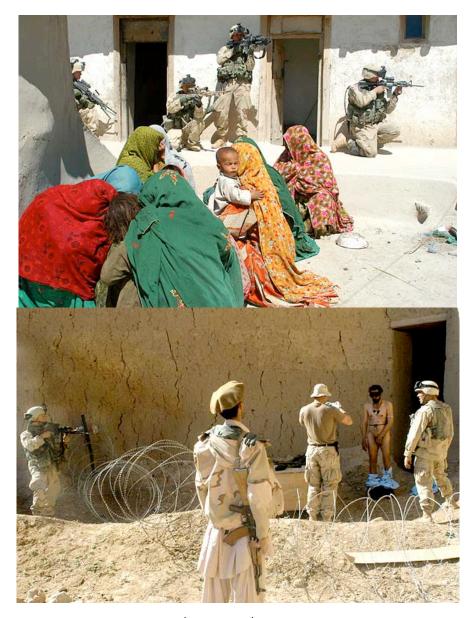
The traditional guerrilla tactic of fading away into the villages and hamlets also raises the political cost for U.S. and Afghan forces as they bomb or attack villages, break into homes, killing and injuring civilians as occurred numerous times recently. At least 150 civilians have been killed by U.S. military action during the past year (see Table 1). When the U.S. kills civilians, it is very hard to wind the hearts and minds of relatives. The night-time raids also turn villagers against U.S. occupation forces. 244 The corrupt and rapacious behavior of central government representatives does the same. For example,

The elders from the Sangin district of Helmand, which American planes bombed recently, said they had joined the small number of Taliban fighters because the government officials preyed on them and robbed them. 'The Taliban are in the villages, among the people,' said Ali Seraj, a descendent of Afghanistan's royal family and a native of Kandahar...With its corrupt and often brutal local officials, the government has pushed Afghans into the hands of the Taliban, said Abdul Qadar Noorzai, head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in Kandahar.<sup>245</sup>

sources cited in footnotes 5-9, especially Ken Sanders, "Iraq in Miniature," Online Journal (May 13, 2005) at http://www.onlinejournal.org/Special Reports/051305Sanders/051305sanders.html). Moreover, the Taliban are not lying low and withholding high-profile, large-scale attacks upon U.S. because of a waiting strategy, but rather from the lesson learned that such attacks cannot be launched with the type of massive air power possessed by U.S. forces (Sean D. Naylor, "The Waiting Game. A Stronger Taliban Lies Low, Hoping the U.S. Will Leave Afghanistan," Armed Forces Journal (February 28, 2006) at http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/story.php?F=1404902\_0206). at

Sanders, op. cit. The cited report can be accessed http://www.careusa.org/newsroom/specialreports/afghanistan/20050505\_ansocare.pdf. Walsh and MacAskill (2006), op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> see Declan Walsh, "Frustrated US Forces Fail to Win Hearts and Minds," The Guardian (September 23, 2004) at <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1310564,00.html">http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1310564,00.html</a>
<sup>245</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Are Still Calling the Shots," <a href="https://example.com/The-Scotsman">The Scotsman</a> (March 5, 2006)



Raids in Paktika Province by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry's 'Wolfhounds' in fall 2004 photographed by war photojournalist Perry Kretz for German's <u>Der Stern</u> magazine

A deputy director Amnesty International heard on his recent visit to Afghanistan,

...numerous accounts of deeply offensive behavior toward women by U.S. forces, such as ransacking women's belongings and verbal abuser during weapons searches. 'We will kill to protect the honor of our women and children,' said one released detainee whose family had allegedly endured

such treatment... We took scores of testimonies from individuals who alleged wanton destruction or theft during raids. We also heard tales of males being humiliated by, among other things, being forced to kneel on the ground with heads bowed while being blindfolded and handcuffed, sometimes hooded, in the presence of their families before being taken away for interrogation.<sup>246</sup>

<u>Table 1. Incidents where U.S. Military Action in the Afghan Theater</u> <u>Killed Civilians, March 2005 – today</u>

Wife and 2-6 children	Б	A -114	M1-22-05	W VI::11	D-14:1	2.7
wife and 2-6 children	F ?	Adult child	March 22, 05	Waza Khwa village	Paktika	3-7
A 1	M	10-14?	March 23, 05	Near Asadabad	Kunar	1
A boy		Adult	April 29, 05			10
Gulbahar Aqa, father 2 brothers	M M	Adults	April 29, 05	Zambori village in Charcheno	Uruzgan	10
		Adults		district		
4 women 3 children	F					
8 civilians incl. women	•	child	M 0/0 07	A1: C1: 1: 4: 4	T 1	8
	F,M	Adult child	May 8/9, 05	Ali Shing district	Laghman	8
and children	3.6		M 16.05	0 1 31	Paktia	1
Shayesta Khan, 75	M	adult	May 16, 05	Sarbano village		1
5 civilian tribesmen	M	adults	May 21/22, 05	Lwara Mandai	North Waziristan, Pakistan	_
					border with Paktika	5
17-25 civilians	M,F	Adults,	June 30, 05	Chechal village	Kunar	17-25
		child				_
5 civilians incl. a	M,F	adults	Aug 2, 05	Ali Shing district	Laghman	5
woman						
Abdul Shahkor, 55, and	M,F	M-2	Aug 8/9, 05	Rauf village in Dai Chopan	Zabul	5
wife, 16-yr-old boy,		F-2		district		
another man and woman		1 child				
2 men, 1 woman	M,F	M-2	Aug 9, 05	Mara (Mareh) village in Deh	Zabul	3
		F-1		Chopan		
Azizullah's wife	F	adult	August	Village in Dai Chopan area	Zabul	1
Noor Aziz, 8	M	child	Dec 1,05	Asoray , North Waiziristan	Pakistan	2
Abdul Wasit, 17						
Bal Khan and his	F,M.	M-4		Dandi Saidgai village, 13 kms	Pakistan	8
mother, brother and two	child	F-2,		north of Miran Shah, North		
sons; Salam Khan and		child-2	Jan 7, 06	Waziristan, 3kms from border		
his mother and brother						
4 women, 8 children, 6	F,M.	F-4		Damadola village in Bajaur		
men	child	M-6	Jan 12/13, 06	Agency, 40 kms from border	Pakistan	18
		Child-6		with Kunar		
Five civilians	?	adults	Feb 2/3, 06	Sarvan Kala village	Helmand	5
One civilian	M	adult	Feb 4, 06	Shoraw village	Helmand	1
Two nomad women	F	adult	Feb 11, 06	Bangi Dar village	North Waziristan, Pakistan	2
A woman	F	adult	March 8/9,06	Kandi Bagh village	Nangarhar	1
Nasrat Ali Hassan, 45		adult	March 14, 06	Kandahar city	Kandahar	1
	M	aduit	Maich 14, 00			
	M	adult	March 24/25, 06		Helmand	8
8 day laborers			March 24/25, 06	Khwaja Ali village		
	M	adult			Helmand	8 20-30 4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Curt Goering, "Losing Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan," Minuteman Media (February 8, 2006) at <a href="http://www.minutemanmedia.org/GOERING%20020608.htm">http://www.minutemanmedia.org/GOERING%20020608.htm</a>

Source: details for each incident provided in Marc W. Herold, *The Afghan Victim Memorial Project* at <a href="http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold">http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold</a>

The expectation (and hope) is that U.S forces will periodically engage in outrageous behavior which can then be amply broadcast, serving to further alienate local populations. One recalls here the incident in October 2005 of U.S. troops burning two Taliban bodies in the mountains north of Kandahar, a desecration of Muslim practice.<sup>247</sup> Stories of torture by U.S. soldiers of abducted persons at U.S. forward operating bases fan the flames of the insurgency.



U.S. occupation forces of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Army Airborne burning bodies of two dead Taliban above the village of Gonbaz, Kandahar Province, on October 1, 2005

In effect, a stalemate – or an empty space - has been created where neither the U.S occupation forces nor the insurgency can prevail. Knowing this, each side adjusts accordingly in order to carry on the war-without-end at least cost.

On the U.S. side, efforts are being made to reduce the level of its ground forces in Afghanistan, which has both a financial savings effect, but far more importantly, it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> Rupert Cornwell, "Film Shows US Soldiers Burning Taliban Corpses," <u>The Independent</u> (October 21, 2005). See also "Grotesque 'PsyOps' in Afghanistan" (October 20, 2005) at <a href="http://hopeandonions.blogspot.com/2005/10/grotesque-psyops-in-afghanistan.html">http://hopeandonions.blogspot.com/2005/10/grotesque-psyops-in-afghanistan.html</a> and <a href="http://news.sbs.com.au/dateline/index.php?page=archive&daysum=2005-10-19#">http://news.sbs.com.au/dateline/index.php?page=archive&daysum=2005-10-19#</a>

defuses political opposition in the United States. Lower levels of casualties and fewer troops abroad simply alleviate the pain experienced by injury, death and absence. It defuses the popular slogan, "Bring the Troops Home."

Another critical element of the United States involves having NATO forces do the ground fighting and actual occupation (including possibly carry out the very unpopular poppy eradication campaign). The idea here is that if a number of different countries contribute occupation forces and casualty levels remain what they have been over the past couple years, then the political price is bearable as it will be spread over different nations.

The training of local satrap army and police forces has lagged far behind schedule. A former Afghanistan policy officer at the State Department had this to say in late 2005 about Afghan forces,

The Pentagon has played a numbers game for three years with the fledgling Afghan army, which looks big on paper but has virtually no ability to move itself, sustain itself or fight by itself. In Paktika, Afghan soldiers were carted to operations in rented civilian trucks and quietly given MREs to keep them from going hungry.<sup>248</sup>

The U.S. military even admits that it carefully chooses where to send its Afghan satrap forces, never sending them into combat where they might suffer defeat.<sup>249</sup>

On the side of the insurgency, the least-cost adjustments are quite obvious. The use of remote-controlled or timed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is a very low-cost, effective weapon – no insurgent casualties and very inexpensive to build. A slightly more

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Chris Mason, "Déjà vu in Kabul," <u>Los Angeles Times</u> (November 14, 2005) at <a href="http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mason14nov14,0,4399335.story?coll=la-news-comment-opinions">http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mason14nov14,0,4399335.story?coll=la-news-comment-opinions</a>
<sup>249</sup> see Colonel David Lamm's (National War College) in Panel 1. Counterinsurgency and Military Strategy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> see Colonel David Lamm's (National War College) in Panel 1. Counterinsurgency and Military Strategy (Washington D.C.: conference "Winning Afghanistan," American Enterprise Institute, Washington D.C. (October 2005)) at <a href="http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all.eventID.1159/summary.asp">http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all.eventID.1159/summary.asp</a>

costly weapon is the deploying of suicide bombers. Suicide attacks are effective because of their maximum impact and minor resource costs.<sup>250</sup> Data show that when fighting force on force, the insurgent group's chance of inflicting casualties on U.S.-led forces are only around five percent, but with suicide tactics, the success rate is much higher. Another attractive aspect of suicide attacks for the insurgents is that they instill fear in the population, leading people to believe that the government is unable to provide protection, thereby further destabilizing the government. Thirdly, the suicide attacks get widely reported (unlike the battles in the mountains and small villages) which provides visibility to the insurgents.

Use of both these low-cost weapons have has risen exponentially since 2004. During 2005, there were 21 suicide bombings (compared to 1 in 2002, two in 2003, 6 in 2004) and 11 during the first two months of 2006. In March 2006, Mullah Razayar Noorzai, a senior Taliban commander in Helmand, announced to the British, "I have 600 suicide bombers waiting for your soldiers." To repeat, this has *absolutely nothing to do with the weakness of the insurgency* – a message which is broadcast by the Pentagon, the lieutenant colonels at Bagram Air Base, and the Pentagon's corporate media boosters as part of the all-important information war. The effect of increased attacks has been to significantly elevate a general sense of insecurity across much of Afghanistan, even in such places as Kabul where foreigners are on curfew as of the early evening.

The thinking on the insurgency side is that time is on their side. The slow bleeding of occupation forces, their deteriorating morale, continuing chaos in the countryside and towns of Afghanistan, and the high cost of keeping a sufficient military presence to

argued in Hekmat Karzai, "Afghanistan and the Logic of Suicide terrorism," Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies (Singapore) (March 30, 2006) at http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/D6E2531BC371FEE287257141005816ED?OpenDocument

ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/D6E2531BC371FEE287257141005816ED?OpenDocument

251 excellent analysis in Griff Witte, "Afghans Confront Surge in Violence. Foreign Support Seen Behind Attacks That Mimic Those in Iraq," Washington Post (November 28, 2006) at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/27/AR2005112700831.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Irwin Arieff, "Attacks, Bombings Challenge Afghan Government: UN," Reuters (March 8, 2006) at <a href="http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20060309/wl\_nm/afghan\_un\_dc\_1;\_ylt=Andx4sdfFX1hCyp7aKoJ.aPOVooA;ylu=X3oDMTBiMW04NW9mBHNIYwMIJVRPUCUl">http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20060309/wl\_nm/afghan\_un\_dc\_1;\_ylt=Andx4sdfFX1hCyp7aKoJ.aPOVooA;ylu=X3oDMTBiMW04NW9mBHNIYwMIJVRPUCUl</a>

vlu=X3oDMTBiMW04NW9mBHNIYwMIJVRPUCUI

253 Massoud Ansari and Qamaruddin Karaiz, "I Have 600 Suicide Bombers Waiting for Your Soldiers',"

The Telegraph (March 26, 2006) at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/03/26/wtali26.xml

maintain Afghanistan as "an empty space"- at a military cost of about \$1 billion a  $month^{254}$  - will sooner or later lead to U.S. occupation fatigue. The Taliban and AlQaeda know about Afghanistan's war-filled history,

and the propensity of Afghan warriors for taking the long view of things and finding ways to ultimately defeat all the occupiers they have ever faced.<sup>255</sup>

Such will be compounded as the public realizes that average operational military costs – amount needed to keep a soldier in each war theater - in Afghanistan were and probably still are higher than in Iraq.<sup>256</sup> The war in Afghanistan is costing close to \$10 billion annually (**Table 2**) just in narrowly-defined military terms – about 16% of total war expenditures. But the total expenditures in 2005 on the Iraq and Afghan wars were \$100 billion in 2005, and are estimated to be at least \$120 billion in 2006, that is, a 20 per cent increase despite plans to draw down troops in both areas.<sup>257</sup> Douglas Holtz- Eakin, formerly at the independent Congressional Budget Office, said in January 2006, that "fighting terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan" is costing the United States \$6-7 billion a month.

Table 2. Current (2006) Military Costs of U.S. Wars

	DoD annual	DoD monthly	DoD spending per	
	spending	spending	minute	
Iraq	\$54 billions	\$ 4.5 billions	\$ 100,000	

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> see Steven Kosiak, <u>The Cost of US Military Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through Fiscal 2006 and Beyond</u> (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 4, 2006) at <a href="http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2006/US-2006-Military-Cost4jan2006">http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2006/US-2006-Military-Cost4jan2006</a>.htm See also bibliography at <a href="http://www.comw.org/warreport/iraqarchive5.html#cw">http://www.comw.org/warreport/iraqarchive5.html#cw</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup>Michael Scheuer, "History Overtakes Optimism in Afghanistan," <u>Terrorism Focus</u> (The Jamestown Foundation) 3, 6 (February 20060 and especially fascinating analysis of Al-Qaeda's strategy in his "Al-Qaeda's Insurgency Doctrine: Aiming for a 'Long War'," <u>Terrorism in Focus</u> (The Jamestown Foundation) 3, 8 (February 28) at <a href="http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369915">http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369915</a>

<sup>256</sup> see Bradley Graham, Disparity in Iraq, Afghanistan War Costs Scrutinized," Washington Post (November 11, 2003) at <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A23970-2003Nov10?language=printer">http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A23970-2003Nov10?language=printer</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> Julian Borger, "Cost of Wars Soars to \$440bn for US,"

The Guardian (February 4, 2006) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,1702039,00.html

Afghanistan	\$ 9.6 billions	\$800 million	\$ 18,000
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Source: Mark Manzetti and Joel Havemann, "Iraq War Costing \$100,000 Per Minute," <u>Seattle Times</u> (February 3, 2006) at <a href="http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/politics/2002780385">http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/politics/2002780385</a> spending03.html

Thanks to National Priorities Project research, one can now estimate how much the Bush Administration's Iraq war (FY 2001 – FY 2006) is costing each American state and community. For example, the cumulative cost per American household is \$2,992 (based upon a total Iraq war cost of \$315.8 bn). The cumulative cost to the state of New Hampshire, for example, is \$ 1.3 billion. Simple arithmetic suggests then that cumulative cost for Afghanistan per American household is \$ 680 and for the state of New Hampshire \$342mn (based upon total military costs of \$83bn in Afghanistan).

Sooner or later, a war-weary American public will estimate that the soaring opportunity cost of this endless war in Afghanistan (to maintain an "empty space") is simply not worth it. The \$316 bn spent on Iraq could have been spent so that,

over 71 million people could have received comprehensive health care (36 million are currently uninsured); 61 million students could receive university scholarships; nearly 5 million workers could be employed as port container inspectors (only 6 percent of the 9 million containers arriving annually are currently inspected); or every child in the world could be given basic immunizations for the next 80 years...<sup>259</sup>

War critics' message that the war *is not making* the United States safer and *is harming* U.S. citizen taxpayers by saddling them with an enormous debt burden because the was is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> "Local Costs of the Iraq War," National Priorities Project (February 21, 2006) at <a href="http://www.nationalpriorities.org/index.php?option=com\_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=61">http://www.nationalpriorities.org/index.php?option=com\_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=61</a>
<sup>259</sup> from National Priorities Project as cited in Katrina vanden Heuvel, "The Costs of War," <a href="https://www.commondreams.org/views06/0301-25.htm">https://www.commondreams.org/views06/0301-25.htm</a>

being financed by deficit spending, is gaining greater and greater acceptance even amongst conservatives. <sup>260</sup>

Michael Scheuer, a former counterterrorism official at the CIA in charge of tracking down Osama bin Laden, says

Osama (bin Laden) doesn't have to win; he will just bleed us to death...He's well on his way to doing it."<sup>261</sup>

But such thoughts and other bad news need to be kept from the general public and that is where the Pentagon's news management enters the picture. It begins at the lowest level with the coterie of U.S. lieutenant colonels in Afghanistan who regularly: deny any civilian casualties occur as a consequence of U.S. military action; forbid media access to areas of U.S. bombing and raids; report on alleged U.S. military successes in the field which regularly kill scores of enemy combatants; give preferential access to reporters who will portray the military very favorably (e.g., Lara Logan of CBS is a favorite with a special penchant for hanging-out with U.S. Special Forces and Kevin Sites who reports "From the Hot Zone" on Yahoo!News<sup>262</sup>); repeatedly assert that the Taliban and its allies are on their last gasp and resorting to "desperate tactics"; and very likely under-report U.S. casualties. Recently, the U.S. State Department has orchestrated a public relations campaign towards U.S. domestic audiences as well as the international community which states that Afghanistan has an effective anti-drug strategy.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> James Sterngold, "Many Question Long-Term Cost," <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u> (July 17, 2005) at <a href="http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/07/17/IRAQCOST.TMP">http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/07/17/IRAQCOST.TMP</a>
Sterngold, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> see "Special Forces in Afghanistan. 19 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne). A CBS Report. Lara Logan Follows U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan" (May 19, 2004) at <a href="http://www.groups.sfahq.com/19th/afghanistan.htm">http://www.groups.sfahq.com/19th/afghanistan.htm</a> and Kevin Sites, "The Black Line" (March 17, 2006) at <a href="http://hotzone.yahoo.com/b/hotzone/blogs2976">http://hotzone.yahoo.com/b/hotzone/blogs2976</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Jerry Seper, "State Adopts PR Plan for Opium," <u>The Washington Times</u> (March 22, 2006) at <a href="http://washingtontimes.com/national/20060321-102848-8134r.htm">http://washingtontimes.com/national/20060321-102848-8134r.htm</a>

At a higher level, the U.S. military media center located in Fayetteville, N.C., which "would be the envy of any global communications company," functions to support U.S. government objectives around the world. Jeff Gerth wrote in the <u>New York Times</u>,

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the focus of most of the activities, the military operates radio stations and newspapers, but does not disclose their American ties. Those outlets produce news material that is at times attributed to the 'International Information Center,' an untraceable organization.... The United States Agency for International Development also masks its role at times. AID finances about 30 radio stations in Afghanistan, but keeps that from listeners...<sup>264</sup>

Defenders of programs to influence media, such as Lt. Col. Charles A. Krohn, argue

Psychological operations are an essential part of warfare, more so in the electronic age than ever...if you're going to invade a country and eject its government and occupy its territory, you ought to tell people who live there why you've done it. That requires a well-thought out communications program.<sup>265</sup>

The Pentagon out sources programs for "media analysis....and damage control planning" to companies such as the Rendon and Lincoln groups. In early 2004, the Rendon Group was hired to help Karzai improve his media image ("to train staff...in the art of public relations"), though the effort was soon admitted to have been "...a rip-off of the US

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Jeff Gerth, "Military's Information War is Vast and Often Secretive," New York Times (December 11, 2005) at <a href="http://www.freepress.net/news/12802">http://www.freepress.net/news/12802</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> Gerth, op. cit. The Lt. Colonel, now retired from being an Army spokesman is a professor of journalism at the University of Michigan.

taxpayer."<sup>266</sup> The U.S. propaganda machine also includes the Washington-based Lincoln Group.<sup>267</sup>

But the truth is too big to be hidden. Scott Baldauf, a long-time reporter of the Afghan scene, begins a recent article with

Grim phrases are on the lips of diplomats, government officials, and aid workers in Kabul when describing Afghanistan these days. Narco state, political disillusionment, military stalemate, donor fatigue, American military pullout.<sup>268</sup>

But such reality need not be dwelled on. The day after the director of the United States' Defense Intelligence Agency told the U.S. Congress that the Afghan insurgency was growing – that "the volume and geographic scope of attacks had increased last year [2005]" – President Bush alighted amidst great secrecy in Kabul to announce at a photo op in the heavily-guarded Presidential Palace in Kabul,

we are impressed by the progress that your country is making.....we like stories of young girls going to school for the first time so they can realize their potential...

Former Taliban defense minister, Mullah Obaidullah Akhund commented on the president's visit,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> Kim Barker and Stephen J. Hedges, "US Paid for Media Firm Afghans Didn't Want," <u>Chicago Tribune</u> (December 13, 2006) at <a href="http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0512130124dec13,1,3302014.story">http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0512130124dec13,1,3302014.story</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> for details see Andrew Buncombe, "The US Propaganda Machine: Oh, What a Lovely War," <u>The Independent</u> (March 30, 2006) at <a href="http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article354473.ece">http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article354473.ece</a>
<sup>268</sup> Scott Baldauf, "Mounting Concern Over Afghanistan," <u>The Christian Science Monitor</u> (February 14, 2006) at <a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0214/p01s02-wosc.html">http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0214/p01s02-wosc.html</a>
<sup>269</sup> Pincus, op. cit.

if the American president's visit had been announced in advance, the Taliban mujahideen would have greeted him with rockets and attacks. But Bush proved his cowardice by coming on a secret visit as a thief.<sup>270</sup>

Steven Simon, senior analyst at the RAND Corporation, is very blunt, "we are losing the war."<sup>271</sup> In February 2006, ABC News reported that President Bush will ask Congress for an additional \$65.3bn for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing total war spending close to the half trillion dollar mark.<sup>272</sup>

With what results? While some debate might exist as to whether the U.S. is "loosing" the war in Afghanistan – and the insurgency need not win to succeed - what is beyond doubt is that the *U.S. attempt to maintain Afghanistan as an "empty space" at least cost, has utterly failed.*<sup>273</sup> Afghanistan' space is increasingly filled with insurgents, poppies, and violence as the cost of the U.S. occupation in dollar and body terms soars. If this is a success story, one wonders what failure might look like.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Steve Holland and Sayed Salahuddin, "Bush Pays Surprise First Visit to Afghanistan," Reuters (March 1, 2006)

Ambika Behal, "Still a War in Afghanistan," United Press International (January 19, 2006) at <a href="http://www.upi.com/SecurityTerrorism/view.php?StoryID=20060119-062314-8846r">http://www.upi.com/SecurityTerrorism/view.php?StoryID=20060119-062314-8846r</a>
"Bush Administration's War Spending Nears Half-Trillion Mark," ABC News (February 16, 2006) at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> "Bush Administration's War Spending Nears Half-Trillion Mark," ABC News (February 16, 2006) at <a href="http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/print?id=1629118">http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/print?id=1629118</a>
Even the announced gradual transporting of U.S.-held prisoners in Guantanamo to the Bagram Base in

Afghanistan supports the idea of Afghanistan as an empty space where those in power do not care. Reports have documented that conditions in the Bagram gulag are even worse than in Guantanamo. The Afghan regime is completely dependent upon U.S. support and hence will obey all restrictions upon access to or information about prisoners, a situation like the actual U.S. lease of Guantanamo. Transferred prisoners will simply descend into an invisible Afghan gulag, a legal void, an empty space where few know and those who care are denied access. As a former senior administration said, "for some reason people did not have a problem with Bagram. It was in Afghanistan" (Alec Russell, "US-Run Jail in Afghanistan 'Worse than Guantanamo'," Telegraph (February 27, 2006) at

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/02/27/wjail27.xml&sSheet=/news/2006/02/27/ixworld.html )

### 6. Conclusion: A Costly 'Empty Space'

The only real importance of Afghanistan to the United States since 9/11 is as part of grander designs. The attacks of 9/11 provided the Bush Administration with the opportunity to launch the attack upon Afghanistan under the pretense of bringing to justice the perpetrators of 9/11. When that goal failed and Osama Bin Laden took off into the mountains behind Tora Bora, the Bush Administration switched the rationale to bringing democracy to Afghans – and education to girls – made possible by the overthrow of the Taliban. More importantly, the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan provided the stepping stone to the real target of Bush'a America: Saddam Hussein and the oil of Iraq.

General Wesley Clark wrote in his book how after the president returned to the White House on Sept. 11, he and other top advisers began holding meetings about how to respond and retaliate. As Clarke writes, he expected the administration to focus its military response on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. He says he was surprised that the talk quickly turned to Iraq. "Rumsfeld was saying that we needed to bomb Iraq.....and we all said ... no, no. Al-Qaeda is in Afghanistan. We need to bomb Afghanistan." And Rumsfeld said *there aren't any good targets in Afghanistan*. And there are lots of good targets in Iraq. I said, "Well, there are lots of good targets in lots of places, but Iraq had nothing to do with it." 274

Afghanistan fits into the grander design as pointed out by Ramtanu Maitra,

The landing of U.S. troops in Afghanistan in the winter of 2001 was a deliberate policy to set up forward bases at the crossroads of three major areas: the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. Not only is the area

reported in "Clark's Take on Terror," CBS News (March 21, 2004) at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/19/60minutes/main607356.shtml

energy-rich, but it is also the meeting point of three growing powers – China, India and Russia. <sup>275</sup>

In effect, the sole value of Afghanistan is its space, pure and simple. Since only an empty space is involved, the implication is that such will be policed and maintained at least cost. Unlike in the colonies of the nineteenth century or the newly independent Third World nations after World War II, little will be done develop economic activity or infrastructure, a reality compounded insofar as Afghanistan offers neither resources nor a market. But the country does offer *a space from which to project power and influence*. In that sense, at a time when First World country finances are strained, the country represents the ideal neo-colony of the twenty-first century: an empty space to be operated at least cost.

However, the need to maintain a centralized, western-oriented puppet government in Kabul confronts traditional steadfast Afghan opposition to "Westernization," especially that variety which downplays religion, visibly displays corruption, ignores deep-seated ethnic rivalries, and seeks to undermine tribal and village politics and loyalties by imposing a central authority.<sup>276</sup>

From the attempt top maintain Afghanistan as an open space, a whole series of implications flow upon which I have elaborated in the previous five sections of this essay. Little effort will be devoted to reconstruction. The Bush Administration is cutting reconstruction aid to Afghanistan during 2006 from \$1 bn to \$600 million (compared to over \$10 billion in military-related outlays). The majestic conclave held at Lancaster House in London in January 2006, which brought forth gushing speeches and bold rhetoric, will no doubt do little more than did similar conferences held in Tokyo in 2002 and Berlin in 2004. Certainly, some very useful projects are being undertaken which genuinely serve to improve the life of common Afghans, but these are taking place in spite of official neglect, questionable official priorities, and the occupation. For example,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> Ramtanu Maitra, "US Scatters Bases to Control Eurasia," <u>Asia Times</u> (March 30, 2005) at <a href="http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2005/US-Control-Eurasia30mar05.htm">http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2005/US-Control-Eurasia30mar05.htm</a>

a similar point is made in Scheuer (Feb. 14, 2006), op. cit.

see Mike Whitney, "Buildings Down, Heroin Up,"

Counterpunch (February 2, 2006) at http://counterpunch.org/whitney02022006.html

the partnership between Bangladesh's BRAC and the National Solidarity Program (NSP) of Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation comes to mind.<sup>278</sup>

A second implication documented in sections 2 and 3 herein is that the United States cares little about average Afghans' daily lives. So long as no insurgent activity or other perceived threat develops, whatever happens in an Afghanistan presided over by its grand satrap, Hamid Karzai, is just dandy so long as he serves as an echo box for the Bush administration.<sup>279</sup> Look aside from poppies, violence, obscene affluence amidst a sea of poverty, deplorable indices of human development, corruption, narco and corruptomansions, a parliament with a vast majority comprised of anti-democratic elements (even if there are some 60 women MP's), etc. However, when signs of a reconstituted emergency begin to flicker, then only meager resources might be devoted to "win hearts and minds." When poppy planting begins to be perceived as possibly funding a revitalized insurgency, then the police and army forces will be dispatched to uproot the blooming stalks caring little for the fate of the dispossessed farmers. 280 As the everastute Simon Jenkins noted, "the occupation of Afghanistan served only to turn the Taliban from opponents to supporters of the opium trade." As he demonstrates, Bush-Blair policy towards Afghan opium has been totally cynical: as reward to warlords for supporting Karzai, they turned a blind eye to the 2002-5 replanting. The campaign to eradicate poppies is directed primarily at the Pashtun South, not the northern regions under the control of Karzai's allies of the Northern Alliance.

A third implication is that the chimera of a central government needs to be maintained. In section 4, I have documented the ways in which 'Brand Karzai' is sold to the world public. No matter that the leader's power four years after the fall of the Taliban barely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> see "News Updates of BRAC Afghanistan (Bangaldesh)" (2005) at <a href="http://www.bracafg.org/nsp1.php">http://www.bracafg.org/nsp1.php</a> see my essay, " Karzai as a Bush Echo Box," cursor.org (September 6, 2002) at <a href="http://www.cursor.org/stories/karzaiechobox.htm">http://www.cursor.org/stories/karzaiechobox.htm</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> "Grow Opium or Die: Afghan Farmers Say Choice is Stark," Agence France Presse (March 10, 2006) at <a href="http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060310/wl">http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060310/wl</a> asia afp/afghanistandrugs 060310053657; ylt=Aq77hAbH3Pl <a href="http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060310/wl">DpMs7g8npyKPOVooA; ylu=X3oDMTBiMW04NW9mBHNIYwMIJVRPUCUI</a>

DpMs7g8npyKPOVooA; ylu=X3oDMTBiMW04NW9mBHNIYwMIJVRPUCUI

281 Simon Jenkins, "Blair's Latest Expedition is a Lawrence of Arabia Fantasy," The Guardian (February 1, 2006) at http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0, 1699144,00.html . See also Tom Engelhardt, "Afghanistan: Drugs, Bases, and Jails," Mother Jones (May 2, 2005) at http://www.motherjones.com/news/dailymojo/2005/04/afghan spring.html

extends beyond the capital.<sup>282</sup> Every effort will be expended by the U.S. to favorably spin Mr. Karzai and the progress in Afghanistan. When rare nay-sayers arise in the flaccid mainstream press, Mr. Rumsfeld declares war on the bad press.<sup>283</sup> During the last two and a half years, the Bush Administration spent \$1.6 billion to sway public opinion with the Pentagon alone accounting for \$1.1 billion spent on media contracts.

Lastly, as the financial and economic costs of maintaining an empty space in Afghanistan have soared way above expectations, the United States is successfully prevailing upon NATO countries to do more of the heavy-lifting. The Canadians, Dutch and British have been convinced to take over the policing and occupation in three of Afghanistan's most unsettled provinces: Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Helmand.

My analysis differs markedly and casts doubt upon much of what gets said in the mainstream. For example, on the Jim Lehrer Nightly News Hour of March 1, 2006, Afghan scholar Barnett Rubin bemoaned the pitiful levels of resources devoted to economic reconstruction especially when compared to the billions spent on the military. But that is exactly what is to be expected if Afghanistan is to be an empty space maintained at least cost. Another guest of the News Hour, Professor Shahrani, implored that Afghans should learn to better trust the Karzai regime and its U.S. backer. What I have documented herein is that average Afghans have every reason to distrust Karzai, the warlords and the opportunists around him who have done nothing for them.

The Afghan insurgent situation is more complicated than that of Iraq which is largely a communal civil war.<sup>284</sup> Afghanistan certainly has elements of that insofar as the vast bulk of insurgent attacks take place in the Pashtun provinces and, of course, the intramujahideen carnage of the 1990's represented such communal civil strife. But it now is overlaid with nationalist, religious ('living according to the laws of the holy Koran'') and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Declan Walsh and Ewen MacAskill, "Four Years After the Fall of Taliban, Leader's Power Barely Extends Beyond the Capital," <u>The Guardian</u> (March 1, 2006) at http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/6ED8219A591B2710872571250008A93A?OpenDocument

<sup>283</sup> Emad Mekay "Rumsfeld Declares War on Pad Procs." Inter Procs Service (Polymer 22, 2006)

Emad Mekay, "Rumsfeld Declares War on Bad Press," Inter Press Service (February 22, 2006) at <a href="http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\_East/HB23Ak02.html">http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\_East/HB23Ak02.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> Stephen Biddle, "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> (March-April 2006) at <a href="http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060301faessay85201-p0/stephen-biddle/seeing-baghdad-thinking-saigon.html">http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060301faessay85201-p0/stephen-biddle/seeing-baghdad-thinking-saigon.html</a>

class dimensions. The insurgents are correct in seeing – as I have documented herein - the Karzai regime as an illegitimate one representing narrow, urban, secular class interests – a kleptocratic, materialistic pseudo-bourgeoisie backed by a foreign government.

The whole grotesque spectacle is now teetering as a revitalized insurgency effectively employs its least-cost weapons (see section 5). Once again, the common people of Afghanistan are and will bear the hardships – as in the anti-Soviet war, the intramujahideen fighting, under the Taliban and U.S. bombs. In some places like Kandahar where banditry and daily violence – the dead and injured come in many forms - are becoming unbearable, some residents look back longingly to the Taliban. In the empty space of Afghanistan, the simple folks – people like Mohammad Kabir, Sahib Jamal, and Cho Cha – are invisible in their everyday suffering.



The Ties That Bind. March 2006 in Kabul: They Need Each Other

Published by Traprock Peace Center, April 24, 2006 http://www.traprockpeace.org

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> "Afghan City Mourns Its Lost Children, Looks Back to Taliban," Agence France Presse (April 11, 2005) at <a href="http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0411-06.htm">http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0411-06.htm</a>, Michael den Tandt, "New-look Afghanistam Leaves Mullah Longing for Days of Taliban," Globe and Mail (February 10, 2006) at <a href="http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060210.AFGHAN10/TPStory/International/">http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060210.AFGHAN10/TPStory/International/</a>, and especially, Chris Sands, "Kandahar Residents Live 'Under a Knife'," <a href="https://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article\_PrintFriendly&c=Article&cid=1137365412906&call\_pageid=968332188854">https://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article\_PrintFriendly&c=Article&cid=1137365412906&call\_pageid=968332188854</a>