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At a Crossroads in Afghanistan
Should the United States Be Engaged in Nation Building?

by Subodh Atal

Executive Summary

Despite progress in the return of refugees and the prevention of humanitarian disasters, stability in Afghanistan is threatened by ethnic tension, feuding warlords, and violence perpetrated by regrouping elements of the Taliban and their allies. The United States is being asked to increase its level of commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan as a means of stabilizing the country, even as American troops battle the resurgent Islamic extremists who operate along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

An increase in the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction is unlikely to speed up that nation's progress toward stability and peace. With fighting between rival warlords still raging, and neighboring nations vying for influence in Afghanistan, American entanglement in Afghan civil affairs will only distract from the major goal of eliminating the anti-American forces that were instrumental in the 9-11 attacks. The United States can best aid Afghanistan by accelerating the war against Islamic extremists, paving the way for Afghans to reconstruct their own political and economic systems. The alternative—a U.S.-imposed political structure—will only serve to increase anti-American sentiment.

America's prior nation-building experiences suggest that external aid has a limited effect in the reconstruction of so-called failed states. Afghanistan provides a model for a broader policy framework wherein American intervention would be confined to eliminating national security threats rather than getting entangled in counterproductive nation-building exercises around the globe.

Subodh Atal is an independent foreign affairs analyst based in Washington, D.C.

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Introduction

Two years after the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent defeat of the Taliban and al Qaeda by U.S.-led forces, Afghanistan remains highly unstable, and the U.S.-led war to rid the nation of Islamic extremists is faltering.[1] According to numerous recent reports, the Taliban is regrouping, in partnership with Al Qaeda remnants. Meanwhile, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Afghan prime minister and leader of the radical Islamic party Hizb-e-Islami, has called for a jihad against foreign occupiers and the creation of an Islamic state. These groups are attacking Afghan government targets, U.S. and other coalition forces, and civilian reconstruction projects.[2] Warlords continue to feud with each other, undermining Afghan president Hamid Karzai's regime, and they have resuscitated the narcotics trade.[3] Karzai is secure only inside his own compound, and doesn't trust his own defense ministry troops to act as his bodyguards.[4]

In this worsening environment, there are renewed calls for the United States to intensify its involvement in Afghanistan. A report by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society recommends an expanded U.S. peacekeeping role, billions of dollars in new reconstruction aid, and active support for Karzai in his disputes with Afghan warlords.[5] The Bush administration revealed in late July 2003 that it would request an additional $1 billion in aid for Afghanistan.[6]

Proponents of an increased U.S. commitment suggest that failed nations are potential hotspots for terrorist activity. In November 2001, Clare Short, then the British government's International Development Secretary, accused the United States of "turning its back" on the developing world, and she asserted that the alleviation of poverty worldwide was central to a global effort to fight terrorism.[7] The United States has been admonished for "abandoning" Afghanistan after the Cold War, precipitating its descent into the Taliban-dominated era,[8] and is now being criticized for not committing whole-heartedly to the nation's reconstruction following the war that ousted the Taliban.[9] A recent report by Human Rights Watch chastised the U.S. government and other coalition partners for failing to restore order and security in the country, and called on the international community to rein in local and regional warlords and to expand peacekeeping operations.[10]

This paper examines various impediments to a wider U.S.-led reconstruction of Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan is the biggest hurdle to such efforts. The nation is divided along ethnic lines, and feuding warlords further undermine the chances for sustaining a strong central government. The U.S. presence has already begun to trigger resentment and has even renewed sympathy for the Taliban in significant sections of the country.[11] The Afghan situation closely parallels that of other countries where U.S. intervention failed in the past. Given America's prior experiences in similar situations, policymakers should refuse to widen the U.S. role in Afghanistan's reconstruction and focus instead on rapidly eliminating the anti-American forces that are resurgent in the region.

Calling for Nation Building in Afghanistan

President Karzai's visit to Washington in February 2003 was aimed at refocusing American attention back on his nation despite the impending war on Iraq and the other crises occupying center stage at the White House.[12] While speaking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Karzai reported a long list of achievements including the return of refugees and increased control by his central government over Afghan provinces, and he requested increased U.S. involvement and funds in various Afghan reconstruction efforts.[13] Several individuals representing a diverse spectrum of opinion, including Sens. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), and Joseph Biden (D-Del.), responded favorably to Karzai's call for increased U.S. aid.[14]

Less than a month later, the United Nations Security Council outlined a series of high-level political goals for Afghanistan, including the

creation of "a multi-ethnic, gender-sensitive and fully representative government," with elections targeted for June 2004.[15] Apart from the building of political institutions, other major Security Council goals that remain unfulfilled are enhancing internal security; disarming militias; countering the narcotics trade; building an effective, independent judiciary system; expanding human rights; improving health and education; and building critical infrastructure such as roads.

The costs of this ambitious set of goals are substantial. Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution estimates that between $15 billion and $50 billion is needed for the rebuilding of Afghanistan over a 10-year period and suggests that the United States provide at least 15 percent of the total aid to retain influence over "how the aid effort is administered and how the country is rebuilt."

"Assuming for the sake of argument," O'Hanlon continues, "a total annual aid package of $3 billion, the U.S. share might then be $400 million to $500 million."[16] Over a 10- or 15-year period, such aid could total as much as $7.5 billion. As daunting as that figure seems (O'Hanlon offered his proposal in December 2001), the actual amount being spent in Afghanistan might already be much more. A report in the *New York Times* quoted unnamed American officials who projected that the cost in 2003 for operations in Afghanistan would likely equal the $935 million spent in the previous year. That figure did not include the cost of maintaining troops in the country and reflected expenditures on a number of civilian reconstruction projects including the building of roads and schools.[17]

Other reports show American aid totaling more than $300 million, but it is not clear that this aid will be sustained at those levels for many years. The *Washington Post* reports that the $1 billion package proposed by the Bush administration in July 2003 is "designed to fund projects that can be completed within a year to have a maximum impact on the lives of the Afghan people" in order to boost the Karzai government prior to elections planned for October 2004.[18]

Security before Reconstruction

Notwithstanding past failures, many observers hold out hope that an American-led nation-building effort in Afghanistan will succeed. Such optimism ignores the fact that one of the first prerequisites for successful nation building is a stable security situation—the very condition that does not exist in Afghanistan.[19] In the absence of a secure environment, nation-building efforts can get bogged down and eventually grind to a halt. Lebanon and Somalia are examples of situations in which external aid efforts were stymied by unresolved conflict and a lack of security. Combatants opposed to foreign intervention find it easy to sabotage reconstruction efforts, preventing civilian authorities and outside agencies from performing their tasks.

That is precisely what is happening in Afghanistan. In the words of Ramtanu Maitra of the *Asia Times*, "Afghanistan is not just dicey, but outright dangerous," and the situation there is hardly conducive to reconstruction.[20] In this environment, an Afghan vice president was assassinated last year, and Karzai himself survived an attempt on his life in September 2002. In late January of this year, hundreds of U.S. soldiers, backed by air power, attacked radical Islamic militants in the Spin Boldak area in the Kandahar district.[21] Soon thereafter, a powerful bomb blew up a civilian bus, killing 18 in Kandahar.[22] By April, the militants had regrouped and were carrying out new attacks on U.S. and Afghan government targets. Aid workers were also targeted.[23] Suspected Taliban loyalists killed two U.S. soldiers in March 2003 in an ambush, and two other U.S. military personnel died in a firefight in April.[24] In July 2003, a landmine planted by the Taliban killed eight Afghan soldiers.[25]

The Afghan rebels have demonstrated an ability to regroup and return after U.S. operations temporarily drive them out of their strongholds. This is especially true in the eastern provinces. It suggests that the militants have support in the tribal areas bordering

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Figure 1. Map of Afghanistan Showing Major Ethnic Groups and Areas of Control of Some Key Warlords

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Warlord Games

Provincial and local leaders, better known as warlords, each backed by his own militia, have been the powerbrokers in Afghanistan since the days of the anti-Soviet resistance. (For a map depicting the areas of influence of some key warlords and the associated ethnic groups in Afghanistan, see Figure 1.) The U.S. strategy of stabilizing Afghanistan following the collapse of the Taliban includes partnering with many of the warlords and securing their support for Karzai's central government. The warlords' agendas, however, do not parallel with those of the Americans. Many of the warlords have survived for decades through a combination of aid from external forces, their own ruthlessness, and a lucrative role in drug smuggling. The loyalties of these warlords are accordingly fickle, and they have little interest in supporting a strong central government that would encroach on their power.

Among the warlords who collaborated with U.S. forces to oust the Taliban is Abdul Rashid Dostum who controls the Uzbek-dominated territory around Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum is funded by Uzbekistan, and may also be in the pay of Iran.[26] Dostum's militia has clashed for control of northern Afghanistan with the forces of fellow Uzbek Mohammed Atta, and with those of Tajik leaders Burnahuddin Rabbani and Mohammed Fahim. Those sporadic battles prompted the UN to suspend aid

operations in July 2002.[27] Rabbani, a former prime minister, has his own ambitions of coming back to power in Kabul and is reportedly trying to influence local commanders by bribing them.[28]

In Herat, near the Iranian border, governor Ismail Khan has largely supported the United States but is reported to have connections to Iran, and has expressed impatience with the continued U.S. troop presence in the province. Khan's militia has clashed with that of a rival warlord, Amanullah Khan, who is reportedly supported by the Taliban.[29] In this region, therefore, the United States faces an interesting dilemma, as it may be forced to choose between an Iranian-backed warlord and one connected to the Taliban.

Khan is challenged to the east by Gul Agha Sherzai. Sherzai's sphere of influence includes the provinces of Kandahar, Oruzgan, and Helmand, where the Taliban were strongest. Although Sherzai was "bought off" by millions of dollars in U.S. and British money, the amount was apparently not sufficient to deter him from clashing with rivals such as Khan.[30]

In eastern Afghanistan, where infiltration across the Afghan-Pakistan border is a major concern, U.S.-led stabilization efforts also face considerable obstacles. Bacha Khan Zadran, whose militia operates in Khost and Paktia provinces, collaborated initially with U.S. Special Forces in the U.S.-led Operation Anaconda to drive out massing Al Qaeda fighters in March 2002. In return for his support, Zadran was paid nearly a half a million dollars.[31] Having secured that amount, Zadran assaulted the Khost capital of Gardez, home to a U.S. base. The May 2002 rocket attack killed more than 30 civilians. Last fall, when U.S. forces asked Zadran to dismantle some checkpoints, rival leader Hakim Taniwal's fighters took it as a cue to attack Zadran's militia.[32] Zadran, whose ambition is to rule over not only Khost and Paktia provinces, but also neighboring Paktika, has now turned against the United States. In March 2003, his militia attacked U.S. and Afghan government forces. In one of the clashes, Zadran's eldest son was killed, an incident that has only further alienated the warlord against the United States and the Afghan central government.[33]

It is thus becoming increasingly clear that partnering with and bribing Afghan warlords is unlikely to accelerate the nation's recovery. The Soviets tried, and failed, to secure their hold on the country by buying the warlords' loyalty. The United States is experiencing a similar phenomenon.

Growing Anti-U.S. Resentment in Afghanistan

Insecurity and infighting among warlords are not the only impediments to a successful nation-building effort in Afghanistan. One of the many perils of nation building is that, despite the best intentions and efforts of the foreign power, the local population starts to resent its presence. This phenomenon was evident in Iraq as early as April 2003, mere days after the fall of Baghdad. After Saddam Hussein's ouster, many Iraqis—including Shias who had been suppressed by Hussein and who had been protected under the southern no-fly zone by the U.S.—turned against American troops. The anti-American feelings surprised the troops as well as America's wartime leaders. Americans are also surprised to learn that there is considerable resentment toward U.S. troops in South Korea, Japan, and Germany, where U.S. soldiers have been stationed for decades.

Many factors can contribute to such resentment, and each nation-building endeavor must contend with unique circumstances. Afghans have bitter memories of Soviet occupation and have traditionally resisted the imposition of foreign ideologies.[34] In the past, once this resentment built above a certain threshold, the presence of the foreign power became a flashpoint for violent resistance, as happened to the Soviets after the first year of their military intervention. Going even further back in history, the first British invasion in 1838 was at first welcomed by some Afghans. However, resentment against the foreign occupation built quickly, especially over the clash of

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cultures between the occupation forces and local Afghans.[35] Shah Shuja, the Afghan leader anointed by the British, was secure only under their protection, similar to Karzai's situation today.

In the case of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, several mitigating factors have slowed the development of massive resistance. Many Afghans opposed the Taliban and they fought side by side with American troops to expel the medieval regime. Those individuals continue to work closely with U.S. authorities. Other Afghans have simply tired of the incessant fighting, and they look hopefully for a chance for peace.

Ethnic tensions were exacerbated during the period of anti-Soviet resistance. However, the roots of those tensions are deeper.

An initial welcome for foreign intervention can quickly turn into a deeply antagonistic relationship, however. In such situations, the presence of outside peacekeepers can become counterproductive.[36] In Afghanistan, there are signs that resentment of the U.S. presence is building. Continued conflict, including U.S. operations against Al Qaeda, have killed and injured dozens of civilians. Notwithstanding the unfortunate accidents that have claimed civilian lives, the continued U.S. military presence also bruises cultural sensitivities. Afghan civilians have complained of raids on their houses by U.S. troops while women were present.[37] Errant U.S. bombs in civilian areas, including one that killed 11 civilians in April 2003, have exacerbated an already tense situation.[38] On May 6, 2003, the first large-scale anti-U.S. protests took place in Kabul.[39]

Central Authority vs. Federal Structure

The bitter fighting among the various warlords and persistent foreign meddling have contributed to an ethnic fragmentation that cannot be readily overcome by nation-building activities. Ethnic tensions were clearly exacerbated during the period of anti-Soviet resistance when different factions were the beneficiaries of external assistance. However, the actual roots of those tensions are deeper. The British imperialists had a tough time keeping the region under their control and out of the Russian realm. The Afghan-Pakistan border is actually an artifact of British colonial rule. In the face of frequent and nagging Afghan resistance, the British drew an arbitrary line—the Durand Line—which demarcated Afghanistan from imperial India, and divided the rebellious Pashtuns.[40] Populations on either side have never accepted the division, and today the Pashtun tribes on the Afghan side have more in common with their brethren across the Durand Line than they do with the Uzbeks and Tajiks in northern Afghanistan.[41]

Those persistent ethnic tensions are equally important today, as Afghans and outsiders attempt to shape the nation's future. The southern Pashtuns harbor significant resentment over the degree of control that the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras of the Northern Alliance have over the Karzai regime. While considerable attention is being paid to the establishment of a strong central government as a milestone of Afghanistan's nation-building process, the lack of respect commanded by Karzai's central government and the de facto autonomy practiced in the warlord-led Afghan provinces suggests that other alternatives to nation building should be considered. Above all, policymakers should recognize that it is unwise for external actors, including the United States, to dictate the structure of the Afghan government. A centralized regime imposed from the outside will likely result in further resentment against the United States. Given the deep divisions within the country, a federal structure, with a considerable degree of autonomy granted to provincial leaders, may be the only practical solution—but that decision should be left up to the people of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Entanglement in the Great Game

During the better part of the past two centuries, Britain and Russia competed for influence directly or indirectly in Afghanistan, which is strategically located at the crossroads between the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. After the British Empire crum-

bled, the nation became a Cold War hotspot, with the Soviets steadily gaining the upper hand in the region. Paradoxically, the Soviets' influence waned after their invasion of the country in late 1979. After the Soviet military withdrawal, which began in 1988, and the collapse of the Soviet-backed Afghan government in 1991, Afghanistan gradually became an extension of the India-Pakistan conflict, with India supporting the Northern Alliance against the Pakistan-backed Taliban.[42] The Northern Alliance was also supported by governments in Iran, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, which were all concerned about Taliban advances into their respective spheres of influence.[43]

The ousting of the Taliban regime has not altered the tendency of neighboring states to meddle in Afghan affairs. Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan still back various factions of the Northern Alliance, as does India, which has established consulates in Afghan cities close to the Pakistan border. Meanwhile, elements in the Pakistani intelligence service have helped the Taliban reconnect with the Al Qaeda and with the resurgent forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami. The United States supported the radical Islamic party during the years of Soviet occupation, but Hekmatyar and his followers have turned against their former patron, who they now see as yet another foreign occupier. In December 2002, Hekmatyar, a former Afghan prime minister, issued a statement declaring that Hezb-i-Islami would "fight our jihad until foreign troops are gone from Afghanistan and the Afghans have set up an Islamic government."[44]

If the United States becomes more involved in Afghan civilian affairs, American interests will inevitably clash with those of one or more of the regional players vying for proxy influence in the country. Such entanglements are likely to further undermine Afghan security. Rather than keep forces in Afghanistan for the long term, the United States should accelerate operations aimed at eliminating the anti-U.S. forces now massing along the Afghan-Pakistan border but should otherwise avoid getting mired in a renewal of the so-called Great Game.

Preemptive Nation Building as a Policy Framework?

To assess the future of American policy in nations such as Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. officials would do well to look at history and consider the results of past interventions. A recent study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace estimated that out of more than 200 military interventions by the United States since 1900, only 16 were aimed at creating democratic institutions. Of those 16, only 2 countries—Japan and Germany—made the successful transition to stable democratic governments.[45] Two other nations—Grenada and Panama—are too small to be significant. In all other cases, there was no functioning democracy in place 10 years after the end of American involvement. It is impossible to predict whether there will be democracy in Afghanistan in 10 years; however, given the myriad aggravating factors in that country, including continued conflict, resistance to external meddling, and a cultural gap between western objectives and the traditional Afghan approach to problems, the prospects for successful nation building are bleak.

Nonetheless, there has been no shortage of calls for nation building. Much of this derives from the argument that terrorism thrives amidst poverty and political chaos. Susan Rice of the Brookings Institute classifies a large number of states as failed, failing, or "causes for concern" and suggests that the United States follow a policy of "early and aggressive" intervention in those nations.[46] Her rationalization is that without early intervention such states act as hosts to terrorist groups, trigger regional conflagrations, and ultimately require far greater resources in terms of conflict resolution and peacekeeping. However, many of the nations that Rice characterizes as either failed or failing—such as Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Cote D'Ivoire—do not serve as significant hosts of terrorist groups. On the other hand, terrorist groups such as the Irish Republican Army and the Basque separatists have operated for years in the United Kingdom and Spain, two nations

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that can hardly be considered candidates for nation building.

Rice also fails to consider that foreign intervention often has unintended consequences, and may even result in wider regional conflict, as happened in Afghanistan itself during the 1980s, or in Southeast Asia in the 1960s. She does consider the costs of exacerbated regional tensions and weapons proliferation that could be incurred by the United States if it doesn't preempt state failure, but she ignores the cumulative cost to the United States of "early and aggressive" intervention in what may amount to dozens of countries around the world. Such a policy is questionable in any era, but it is especially so today, when American military forces are already strained to the breaking point as they police the sprawling American empire. More importantly, the tremendous drain on resources from nation-building exercises provides little value to national security, a security that appears shakier today, following the events of September 11, than it did at the end of the Cold War.

Rice is not alone in her calls for preemptive nation building. In 2002, Sen. Chuck Hagel sponsored a $3.3 billion program for economic, political, humanitarian, and security assistance for Afghanistan over four years. Less than three months after President Bush signed the aid package into law, Hagel was back for more, calling for still more money for Afghanistan to create stability and prosperity.[47] Sen. Barbara Boxer is even more ambitious, calling for the expansion of International Security Assistance Force operations to areas outside Kabul because "women face harsh restrictions under local leaders."[48] Such calls ignore prior lessons in Afghanistan, where the imposition of a foreign ideology by the Soviets only served to deepen resentment by locals who then focused their attention on hastening the end of the foreign occupation.[49]

Sen. Joseph Biden has been one of the most vocal supporters of nation building in Afghanistan, calling for an Afghan Marshall Plan. However, the Marshall Plan analogy for Afghanistan is inappropriate. Local conditions contributed more to Europe's recovery from the Second World War than did Marshall Plan aid. The total amount of aid never amounted to more than 5 percent of GNP in the Marshall Plan countries, and there is no data to suggest that this aid was instrumental: Belgium's post-war recovery was the fastest in Europe even though the Belgians received a relatively small share of Marshall Plan money; the British, on the other hand, received the most aid, but had the slowest rate of economic growth in post-war Europe. Economic freedom, respect for private enterprise and entrepreneurship, and the rule of law are the key elements of growth and prosperity. Foreign aid is often counterproductive to these ends.[50]

Simply put, there does not appear to be a positive correlation between the extent of economic and political intervention and the ability of outside forces to shape a nation's destiny. The recent Council on Foreign Relations–Asia Society task force report recommends increased U.S. intervention in the Karzai-warlord disputes and an enlarged role in Afghanistan's reconstruction, ostensibly to prevent the nation from slipping back into anarchy and again becoming a terrorist haven.[51] But the longer the United States and other foreign governments remain in Afghanistan, the greater the likelihood that their efforts—notwithstanding their noble intentions—will be seen as an attempt to subvert the will of the Afghan people. An extended American presence, therefore, will create an atmosphere conducive to supporting the very terrorist elements that presence is intended to eliminate.

Conclusion

Afghanistan was freed from Taliban rule approximately 18 months ago. Since then, attacks by Taliban loyalists, al Qaeda remnants, and renegade warlords have undermined fledgling reconstruction efforts in the nation and exposed the Karzai regime's lack of control outside Kabul. Karzai has pressed the Bush administration for an expanded commitment to the rebuilding of Afghanistan, and

many observers, including some in the U.S. Congress, have seconded his calls.

However, a number of factors in Afghanistan, and past experiences in nation-building exercises around the world, suggest that pumping resources and effort into reconstruction in the absence of security and economic order will not have the desired outcome. An increased U.S. commitment to civilian reconstruction may only distract us from the goal of eliminating anti-U.S. Islamic extremists who will sabotage any rebuilding efforts. Although much of the focus to date has been on empowering a strong central government in Afghanistan, deep ethnic fissures and the persistent strength of the regional warlords suggest that such an aim is too ambitious.

The U.S. military forces currently operating in Afghanistan should concentrate on smashing the Taliban and al Qaeda remnants who are regrouping along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Once this goal is achieved, U.S. forces need not remain in the nation. Following the end of military operations, the focus could then shift to monitoring Afghanistan and its neighbors to ensure that forces that threaten the United States are not resurrected. Most of this work can be conducted by U.S. intelligence services in cooperation with our allies in the region.

"The United States abandoned Afghanistan after the Cold War," was a common refrain heard after the September 11 attacks. Indeed, the national security threat that was incubating in Afghanistan since the mid-1990s was ignored at a grave cost. A preemptive move against al Qaeda and the Taliban, and their allies, might have headed off the threat that culminated in 9-11. However, it is far from clear that sustained nation building by the United States after the Soviet withdrawal would have been successful in the 1990s or would even be feasible today.

In the aftermath of the disastrous Soviet attempt at nation building in Afghanistan, any peace enforced at the point of the gun would have served to turn many of the mujahadeen factions against the United States. The U.S. military would have had to take sides in the competition among the irregular forces led by the likes of Burnahuddin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Masood, Rashid Dostum, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Ismail Khan. A similar attempt to interpose American troops between competing warlords following a Soviet withdrawal from an impoverished country met with an unfortunate and embarrassing end, and the situation in Afghanistan is far worse than the one encountered in Somalia in 1993. Furthermore, given the intense rivalry among neighboring powers over influence in Afghanistan, a long-term military presence could well have enmeshed the United States in regional quagmires such as the India-Pakistan conflict and confrontation with Iran. Instead of recrimination, instead of replaying the errors of the past, U.S. policy toward Afghanistan in the 21st century should focus on the known threats that still operate there.

Lessons from prior experiences in nation building can be applied beyond Afghanistan to a broader policy framework. A blanket policy of early and aggressive intervention in overseas hotspots is likely to be counterproductive and costly. Although the United States cannot afford to ignore national security threats in the post 9-11 era, neither can it afford to get entangled in the innumerable conflicts and tensions around the globe, risking distraction from the crucial goals of hunting and eliminating America's enemies.

The U.S. military should focus on smashing Taliban and al Qaeda remnants that are regrouping along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Notes

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