

Afghanistan

A Risk Assessment Brief

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Background

Afghanistan has had a turbulent history of conflict for over three decades. After the collapse of the constitutional monarchy led by King Zahir Shah in 1973 and the establishment of a republic by Muhammad Daud, the country fell into the throws of civil strife. A leftist coup that overthrew and killed Daud in 1978 sparked more civil unrest prompting Soviet intervention and the sending of troops. Resistance to the Soviet intervention was carried out by guerillas of Afghan "mujahedin" backed by the US, Pakistan, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia, who sent money and arms.

In 1989, the Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan without being able to stop the fighting, which continued until the formation of a government led by Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1993, but the shaky government collapsed in the face of the Taliban, a fundamental Islamic movement, in 1996. Afghanistan's new ruling party inspired international criticism and US anger with its domestic policies and support for Usama Bin-Ladin's al-Qa'ida network, accused of carrying out terrorist attacks on US targets in Africa and the Middle East.

The 11 September terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were the straw that broke the camel's back. After tracing the attacks to Bin-Ladin, the United States formed an anti-terrorism coalition and launched military strikes on the Taliban, finally removing them from power in November 2001. A new Afghan government was brokered in a Bonn conference as part of an agreement signed by major Afghan factions. The interim administration will rule for six months, after which an emergency Loya Jirga ("Council of Elders") will be held and select a government to rule for an 18-month term and draft a constitution among other legislative measures. Despite this agreement, sporadic fighting is still taking place in areas in Afghanistan where no central authority exists.

Conflict Factors

1) Continued tension between ethnically diverse factions within the country

- In Herat, Kandahar and elsewhere there are reports of fighting between rival ethnic factions

2) Weak economy:

- Afghanistan is among the lowest ranking socio-economic countries.
- GDP per Capita: \$700/year
- Poverty and deprivation exacerbated by 20yrs of conflict.
- Basic infrastructure needed for a functioning economy has been destroyed or is simply missing- roads, bridges, telecommunications, and electricity.

a) Lack of employment opportunities/ income sources

- Need to provide ex-combatants and unemployed youth an alternative to fighting
- Need to provide sources of income to refugee returnees and other vulnerable groups including ethnic minorities

b) Drought

- Drought has been as disastrous as civil war, causing more than 1 million Afghans to abandon their homes during the last two years
- According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 85% of Afghans depend upon agriculture for their livelihood; it accounts for 53% of the GDP.
- Three years of drought have resulted in a 50% decline in grain production
- Deaths from malnutrition and starvation have been reported

c) Ban on opium production

- Afghan farmers may resume growing opium if alternatives are not available.
- Prior to the ban, Afghanistan produced 80% of the world's opium poppy production.

d) Landmines

- The most affected country in the world/ estimated at 10 million
- 500 or more related incidents/ 150 deaths a month
- Poses a significant challenge to return of agricultural operations and of refugees

3) Large number of refugees:

- There are currently more than 3.6 million Afghan refugees in neighboring countries and approximately more than 1 million are internally displaced

4) Absence of effective central government

- The crime rate in Afghanistan is very high and since there is no formal constitution governing the country, a state of "lawlessness" exists.

- The lack of public service mechanisms and security provide major threats to the domestic conditions of the country.

5) Absence of regional cooperation:

- Afghanistan' s ties with its neighbors, with the exception of Pakistan, have been tense due to Taliban control of the country.

6) Bonn Agreement (5 December 2001):

- The implementation of the Bonn arrangements, particularly the security aspects, may cause disagreement among the factions and lead to a boycott of the whole political reconstruction process.

Peace Factors

1) Bonn Agreement:

- It forms a representative government that corresponds to the ethnic diversity of the country, and aims to establish a central government in the country.

2) Tokyo Conference:

- Pledged \$4.5 billion, \$1.8 billion of which for 2002, for Afghanistan' s reconstruction, which will create a positive atmosphere in the country.

3) Increasing NGO interest in Afghanistan:

- 65 NGOs, and 20 U.N. and other international organizations, are in Afghanistan, and will help with humanitarian and reconstruction work.

4) Deployment of UN International Security Assistance Force (ISAF):

- 5,000 troops have been pledged for the ISAF with a mandate to assist the interim government.

5) Removal of radical elements and terrorist groups, e.g. Al-Qa'ida network.

Scenarios:

Best Case Scenario

- Bonn Agreement will be fully implemented:
 - ❖ A federal-style government will be established with autonomous governments for the ethnic factions
 - ❖ State infrastructure will be rebuilt with services facilities and civil institutions will be established in the country.
 - ❖ The new government will have complete control of Afghanistan and be able to enforce the law.
 - ❖ New government will impose arms control and disarm the militias and ex-combatants.
- Afghanistan's economy will be resurrected:
 - ❖ Unemployment will decrease
 - ❖ Better services will be available for the population
 - ❖ Foreign investments will be encouraged
- Tokyo Agreement will be implemented and international assistance will be sent to Afghanistan on time.
- Afghanistan will join regional projects, bi- and multi-lateral agreements with neighboring countries, which will diminish the risk of neighboring opposition groups making it their base of operations.
- All Afghan refugees will be repatriated and successfully reintegrated.

Worst Case Scenario

- International attention by the 5 UN Security Council permanent members will diminish.
 - ❖ Their commitment to the Tokyo arrangement will wane.
 - ❖ The economic reconstruction process will come to a halt.
 - ❖ An atmosphere conducive for future democracy will not be created.
 - ❖ The Bonn process will be undermined and eventually will collapse.
 - ❖ Power struggle among factions will be renewed.
- Ethnic factions will be dissatisfied with the Bonn Agreement and boycott it. This fact, eventually, will lead to a new power struggle.
 - ❖ Northern Alliance will take over complete control of the new interim government, thus the other factions will be deprived from representation.
 - ❖ Northern Alliance-controlled administration will discriminate against groups that previously sympathized with the Taliban, which will undermine trust-building process and lead to power struggle and resistance.
- General Musharraf's opposition may win the upcoming Pakistan elections and support the return of Islamists to Afghanistan.

- Mass exodus of refugees within the country and the region due to the instability.
- The collapse of a central government will exacerbate the state of lawlessness in Afghanistan and give rise to extremist movements that may launch revenge attacks on the US and its allies, including neighboring countries.

Realistic Scenario

- Southern factions will be mistreated by the new Northern Alliance-controlled administration and flee from Afghanistan. (news reports have already indicated 3,500 Pashtuns have sought refugee in Afghanistan due to discrimination by Northern Alliance)
- The Bonn Agreement will spark disagreements between Northern Alliance factions, which will lead to the break up of the alliance, and a struggle of power. (Warlord Dustom has already warned he will boycott the new government.)
- Media attention on Afghanistan will diminish and promised economic aid will not be fully honored and/or delayed, which will slow down Afghanistan's reconstruction and undermine the whole peace process.
- The 5,000 troops dedicated to the ISAF force will not be enough to enforce security throughout Afghanistan, which will leave certain areas in the country with no central control and supervision and allow for the formation of resistance or dissident groups. (UN officials have said that at least 30,000 troops are needed to reinforce security throughout Afghanistan)
- There will be an increase in NGO presence in Afghanistan, which will improve the humanitarian situation and help reinstate some refugees.
- Relatively more freedom of expression in Afghanistan as Afghan media restart operations.
- ISAF will be divided over the "prisoners of war" issue, weakening its resolve.