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## STATE BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN: NEW IDEAS

Effective state building in Afghanistan depends on strengthening security, providing serious new monetary incentives for wheat growing instead of poppy production, decreasing the hold of narco-terrorists, improving regional commercial linkages, enhancing the country's sense of nationhood, and bolstering good governance. Those were the conclusions of a private, free-ranging, off-the-record discussion on Afghanistan's future held very late in 2005 at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Senior Afghans, Europeans, and Americans participated.

The current security situation throughout Afghanistan, especially along the Pakistan border, is deteriorating. Suicide bombings and convoy ambushes are frequent, Taliban or Taliban-affiliated attacks are virulent, and Al Qaeda-tied insurgents are more active than ever. Afghans are the perpetrators. The impending reduction of United States troops in Kandahar and their replacement by Canadians from NATO will not necessarily boost security. Indeed, the overall impact of NATO engagement in the worsening security situation in Afghanistan has yet to be measured. Likewise, Afghan security forces are not yet sufficiently disciplined or sufficiently numerous to cope alone with the national security crisis. Many participants in the Harvard meeting suggested that neither Washington nor Kabul were taking the deteriorating security atmosphere with sufficient seriousness.

Many emerging security problems are related to poppy-growing; opium and heroin production in clandestine, portable, mountain laboratories; and trafficking. Growers receive but 4 percent of the total in-country revenues from Afghanistan's massive dominance of the European heroin supplies. Afghan warlords, linked to Chinese, Russian, Turkish, and other trading networks, move raw and refined products and profit.

The Harvard meeting overwhelmingly decried the value and efficacy of eradication. It criticized the remedy of legalization, fearing much greater poppy planting and an intensification of the problem. It also opposed buying up and burning the entire Afghan crops, annually, even though doing so would be less costly than the funds now being spent on eradication.

Participants instead proposed introducing massive monetary incentives for growing wheat—an essential alternative crop that Afghans already grow and desperately depend upon for subsistence. It was estimated that using outside assistance funds to triple the current world price for wheat, and providing guaranteed purchases through a marketing board mechanism, would cost less than expenditures on eradication, be effective in removing the current income incentives for poppy growing, and rapidly reduce the production of poppies and opium. Wheat purchases of this kind would have to be guaranteed for five or ten years, however, to ensure smallholder confidence and maximize the incentive structure. Greater wheat production would be good for hungry Afghans. It would also reduce the growing linkages between narco-trafficking and terror.

Land-locked Afghanistan's future prosperity depends on lessening today's dependence on opium and also on returning the country to its former economic status as a critical part of Central Asia or greater Eurasia, rather than its more recent position on the far periphery of South Asia. Putting Afghanistan back on the Silk Road would enable its traders to take advantage of potential trade relations with its northern and western neighbors as well as with Pakistan and India, and possibly China. An export corridor through Pakistan to India would be a great boon to the vegetable and fruit farmers of Afghanistan and should not remain hostage to the Indo-Pakistani battle over Kashmir.

A sense of common purpose would help develop Afghanistan economically, but because the country is not completely united, with the central government having only limited visibility and legitimacy beyond Kabul, a sense of common purpose would strengthen the nation as well. Existing competition between powerbrokers and elites at the center and those on the periphery should not be ignored and must be managed. With outside assistance and adroit political activity at the center, Kabul's reach—the projection of the power of the central government—could be extended and a sense of unity magnified. However, if the center loses confrontations with the different sources of power on the periphery, Afghanistan could well remain underdeveloped and prone to security and developmental constraints.

Like so many post-conflict countries, to accomplish any of these and other critical objectives Afghanistan needs to be better governed. The key governance deliverable is security. Second is a much enhanced rule of law. A climate of impunity for powerful people now prevails, and must be altered. The state must not continue to be complicit in the abuse of ordinary civilians. Afghanistan, said the Harvard meeting, desperately requires a robust legal framework. A transparent local legal apparatus and code, plus even a rudimentary system of trained jurists, would help to bring order out of what is now chaos and corruption. Afghanistan now requires a greater ability to recognize and protect individual rights. Recently trained police may arrest miscreants, but prosecutors cannot investigate and judges cannot adjudicate. There is little assurance of predictability or integrity, and many local warlords impose their own dictates on civil and criminal disputes. Without reform in this sector, Afghanistan cannot move forward and become more democratic or prosperous.

Despite all of the careful efforts of the national government of President Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan is not yet ready to emerge as a confident, if weak, independent nation. The transition is not yet over. Too many issues of knitting the nation, providing meaningful political

freedoms, enabling economic opportunity, building a rule of law, and creating human and national security remain. Human capacity must be bolstered.

These issues must be resolved locally, and not by outsiders. But the role of foreign security forces and foreign donors will remain vital for at least another decade. Too much of this outside activity is random and not coordinated with other donors and with the central government so as to ensure maximum benefit to Afghans. Only 23 percent of outside assistance is today being channeled through the government in Kabul. Afghanistan must now become the lead nation in this respect. The meeting urged well-meaning donors to pay more attention to Afghan-articulated needs, and less to donor-driven assumptions and prerogatives. It also noted the massive levels of corruption within Afghanistan and urged President Karzai's government and donors to begin to crack down on corrupt practices.

State building in Afghanistan is not a sure thing. But if the drug-related and judicial reforms outlined in this Policy Brief, and if Afghan, NATO, and U.S. forces can greatly reduce insecurity, then—and only then—Afghanistan has a chance of emerging stronger rather than weaker in the years to come.