

# Warlords, Drugs and the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan: The Paradoxes

Vishal Chandra

## Abstract

*The US-led 'war on terror' in Afghanistan has led to the re-establishment of the warlords, and has failed to adequately address the issue of drug menace in an effective manner. As the Bonn process ended with the September 2005 elections, and the US forces are likely to partially withdraw this year, it is pertinent to evaluate the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and its implications for the post-election Afghanistan. This article seeks to argue that the contradictions inherent in the ongoing political process, primarily due to the paradoxes in the US' 'war on terror', is largely responsible for perpetuating both warlordism and the drug menace in Afghanistan. The apparent failure of the Bonn process in terms of building institutions of governance has reinforced the regressive tendencies in the Afghan polity. This has far-reaching consequences, especially for the crucial reforms process. The answer to the Afghan malaise lies in prioritising the issues of governance and institution-building. Given the history of Afghan civil war, mere holding of elections and pledging of huge funds cannot be the rationale for the international community to re-abandon Afghanistan.*

*These (Afghan mujahideen) are the moral equivalent of America's founding fathers*<sup>1</sup>

Former US President Ronald Reagan referring to a group of Afghan mujahideen who visited White House in 1985.

President Hamid Karzai commenced his presidential election campaign in July 2004 by deriding the private militias of the warlords<sup>2</sup> as the biggest threat to Afghanistan, greater than the Taliban insurgency.<sup>3</sup> On December 9, 2004, two days after his inauguration as an elected President, he declared jihad against drugs during a national counter-narcotics conference in Kabul,

---

*Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Jan-Mar 2006

© Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

calling it a national disgrace.<sup>4</sup> Did President Karzai's forceful assertion against the overarching *mujahideen*<sup>5</sup> factions and the growing drugs menace carry the trappings of a failing 'war on terror' in Afghanistan? The fact that even after four years Karzai's authority remains largely confined to Kabul, and that the poppy cultivation in the country continues to proliferate and grow at a record level, makes the ongoing 'war on terror' in Afghanistan questionable. It is interesting to note the way warlords re-established themselves after the fall of the Taliban and revived their linkages with Afghanistan's extensive drugs network.

### **Contextualising *Mujahideen* Politics**

Except for the Taliban phase, *mujahideen* politics has largely shaped the contours of Afghan politics since the Soviet withdrawal. As Kabul continues to struggle to extend its authority to what western media refers to as 'lawless provinces', it is pertinent to understand the role, position and power of *mujahideen* in the Afghan politics since 9/11.<sup>6</sup>

#### *From Mujahideen to Regional Strongmen – The Changing Semantics*

Afghan *mujahideen* have come a long way since the beginning of anti-Soviet resistance in the late 1970s to the recently concluded parliamentary and provincial council elections on September 18, 2005. Various known as warlords, *mujahideen*, freedom fighters, ethnic or factional or militia commanders, the latest being regional strongmen, they have shown tremendous survival instinct. The changing semantics has been indicative of the changing perception of the West about their role and position in the seemingly endless Afghan conflict. Hailed as *mujahideen* and freedom fighters at the peak of anti-Soviet resistance in the 1980s, and referred to as warlords when they endlessly fought among themselves until displaced by the Taliban, they are now being preferably addressed as regional strongmen. As the United Nations (UN) and the international community geared themselves up to deal and work with various former *mujahideen* factions for stabilising post-Taliban Afghanistan, a relatively moderate term 'regional strongman' was preferred over the previously common term 'warlord' to refer to them. This should be construed as the changed perception of the West about the expected role of the warlords, primarily from military to civilian, in the political process mandated by the Bonn Agreement.<sup>6</sup>

To what extent has the Bonn process been able to dilute the influence of the warlords or bring about any qualitative change in their role will be subsequently dealt with in the article. Shifting alliances and realignments between various factions has been the hallmark of Afghan politics for long. The alliance and the proxy politics, and the traditional inter and intra-ethnic divide entwined with the interests of regional and extra-regional powers, continues to determine the Afghan political landscape.

#### *Re-engagement of the US and the Return of the Mujahideen*

The events of 9/11 once again turned the international focus on Afghanistan. US having failed to negotiate the extradition of Osama bin Laden with the Taliban, firmed up to wage war against both. The Taliban forces, which were never organised on the patterns of a conventional army, were an essentially infantry based force with guerrilla tactics as its main component. In fact, the initial strategy of the Taliban was to take on the US troops as they took to the ground. Belying their expectations, US decided against risking its elite Special Forces and instead opted for deploying massive air power for dismantling Taliban's military infrastructure. As for the ground offensive, US sponsored arms to the anti-Taliban Afghan factions, especially the Northern Alliance (NA). Probably, aware of the coming winter, US wanted to wrap up their military operations by December 2001. Was this the reason that US courted the *mujahideen* factions?

However, the US air power combined with ground offensive by the heavily armed factions of the NA led to the removal of the Taliban from all the urban centres by the year end. On November 13, 2001, as the Panjshiri Tajik militia led by Mohammad Qasim Fahim took control of the key strategic areas in Kabul despite assurances against it, Kabul went through yet another chaotic transition of power. As the Taliban retreated, various *mujahideen* factions quickly filled in the power vacuum and re-established themselves in their respective power bases, 'leading to inherently unstable situations'.<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan was once again parcelled out among various factions. Pashtun factions re-established their control in south and south-eastern provinces, Muhammad Ismail Khan in western Herat Province, Uzbek commander Abdul Rashid Dostum in north-western provinces, Tajik commander Mohammad Fahim Khan in the north-eastern provinces, and *Hizb-e-Wahdat* in the central Bamiyan Province. The *Hizb-e-Islami*

faction of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, once the blue-eyed Pashtun boy of Pakistan and the US, also began to make its presence felt in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in and around Jalalabad. Kabul was to again become a centre of hectic international political engagement. As for the Taliban, they dispersed and melted into the local population, receded to the countryside, or crossed over into Pakistan. They were to soon reorganize themselves and wage guerrilla war against the US-led coalition troops which continues to this day.

*Bonn Agreement – Legitimising the Mujahideen Warlords*

Do not let them break up. Keep them there. Lock them up if you have to. We do not want this to go anywhere else. We're almost there, and this is the time to grind it out on this line. If they go off, I don't know when I'll get them all back together.<sup>8</sup>

Colin Powell, Former US Secretary of State, reacting to the possible collapse of the Bonn Conference.

Subsequently, negotiations among four Afghan groups<sup>9</sup> followed under the UN auspices at Bonn. What the Bonn Conference (November 27-December 5, 2001) clearly brought out was the resumption of the old power rivalry among the *mujahideen* factions and the divisions along ethnic lines. The Conference was marred by walkouts and protests by delegates of different Afghan groups over lack of representation and improper distribution of portfolios.<sup>10</sup> The divisions within the NA, which has always been a loose *mélange* of minority ethnic *mujahideen* factions from the north, also came to the fore. It certainly goes to the credit of the US and the UN interlocutors for bringing various Afghan factions together and making them reach a compromise. The very fact that the *mujahideen* warlords were invited by the UN to prepare a roadmap for stabilising and rebuilding Afghanistan made clear would be actors in the new political set-up at Kabul. Thus, the Bonn Agreement facilitated and legitimised the role for *mujahideen* factions in the post-Taliban political process.

The Panjshiri Tajik triumvirate of Mohammad Fahim Khan, Mohammad Yunus Qanooni and Abdullah Abdullah, and the pro-Zahir Shah Rome Group emerged as key players.<sup>11</sup> With the possibility of Taliban being part of the negotiations at Bonn completely ruled out, Hamid Karzai was propelled as a central figure for the anti-Taliban Pashtuns to rally

behind.<sup>12</sup> As both the NA and the US were skeptical about the role of exiled Afghan King Mohammad Zahir Shah, who could have served as a central unifying figure, the latter was marginalised.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, one of the biggest challenges before the US was to strike a balance between the overgrown power of the NA and the sense of alienation and under-representation among the Pashtun majority. In the absence of the predominantly Pashtun Taliban and the political prospects of Zahir Shah curtailed, the issue was of finding an alternate Pashtun leadership which was not only acceptable to the West but was also amiable to the long-term US interests in the region. Karzai, with his blue-blood Pashtun lineage (Popalzai clan), moderate views, fluency in English, sophisticated mannerisms, his connections with the US, antipathy for the Taliban, and a relatively non-controversial image in Afghan politics, became the obvious choice.<sup>14</sup> Karzai's understanding of the complex Afghan politics made him the central figure in the Bonn-mandated political process, which he retains to this day.

Before moving on to analyse the role and politics of *mujahideen* factions within and without the Karzai-led provisional authorities, it is pertinent to briefly examine the sources of their authority and power.

#### *Mujahideen Factions - Their Authority and Power*

The name 'Afghanistan'<sup>15</sup> and the conceptualisation of Afghan State have a recent history. The emergence of Afghanistan was caused more by the political exigency of having a buffer state between the two expanding empires of 19<sup>th</sup> century Asia – Tsarist Russia and Britain, than by the unification brought about by Ahmed Shah Abdali in mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even after various attempts to bring all the territories comprising the present state of Afghanistan under a central authority, the centrifugal tendencies within did not cease to exist. Much of the countryside and the outlying provinces have largely remained autonomous with Kabul having limited or nominal control over them.

The ethnicity of Afghanistan, which is as diverse as its geography, has been a determining factor in Afghan polity. The overlapping distribution of various ethnic groups that make up Afghanistan, and the presence of their respective co-ethnics across the national boundaries have often led to the influence and involvement of neighbouring countries in the Afghan

polity.<sup>16</sup> The geo-strategic significance of Afghanistan, as a land bridge between South and Central Asia and much beyond, has since times immemorial ensured that regional and extra-regional powers have politico-military and economic stakes in Afghanistan. The stridently tribal-ethnic character of Afghanistan imparted an element of factional competition for control of power and resources in the Afghan polity. Often these tribal and ethnic factions played proxy to the Afghan agenda of their respective foreign patrons who in turn provided them with material support and solidarity in their power struggle within Afghanistan.

The Afghan civil war has to be seen in the above context. To begin with, it was in reaction to the radical socio-economic modernisation policy pursued by the communist regime in the late 70s and 80s, which was bitterly opposed by the traditional clergy and most of the Afghans in the countryside, that pockets of opposition rose across provincial Afghanistan. The gulf between the vision and belief of the small urban elite fired by the ideals of the Soviet communism, and the large majority of traditionally conservative people in Afghanistan's vast countryside, came to the fore. It also brought out the fault lines in the Afghan state structure which has always been powerful in and around Kabul and weak in the outlying provinces. Due to the absence of effective state institutions in the provinces, people in the provinces have by and large relied on traditional tribal-ethnic leadership and age-old tribal institutions and codes of conduct. The leadership of the resistance movement in different parts of Afghanistan was largely a mix of traditional clergy, radical Islamists, and the tribal heads, representing classes least likely to be benefited from the reforms and the system put in place by the communist government in Kabul.<sup>17</sup>

The anti-Soviet resistance which began as an indigenous Afghan opposition to the radical reforms being carried out by Kabul soon metamorphosed into a CIA driven Cold War agenda of US, with full political and logistical support from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan.

US realised the potential of engaging different *mujahideen* factions as their leadership was well-embedded in the tribal-ethnic structure of Afghanistan. They controlled the resources and commanded the loyalty of the people in their respective areas. US continued to arm these factions heavily with Pakistan playing conduit between the two. This led to the linking of various *mujahideen* factions to the international system (more

precisely to the US bloc). It has been aptly stated by Barnett R. Rubin that,

*...there is an interrelationship between the patronage connections in Afghanistan (which are partly based on so-called tribalism or clan relations, which themselves are not static but are constantly re-formed in various ways) and the international system. The patronage relations have become internationalised because resources are imported into the networks through global and transnational political, military, and economic networks. We should not think that Afghanistan is backward or pre-modern. No, Afghanistan is part of the process of globalisation. But it is the other side of globalisation.*<sup>18</sup>

Afghan *mujahideen* leadership draws its authority from traditional sources and also by virtue of being in command of resources. By sharing and distributing the resources they maintain a network of patronage relations which helps in sustaining their leadership. Loyalty to the tribal or ethnic leadership by the co-ethnics is supposed to be traditionally unquestionable. In fact, ethnic-tribal loyalties and identities have always stood in stark contrast to the religious homogeneity of the Afghan population. It is noteworthy that majority of the resistance groups remained primarily mono-ethnic and failed to become ethnically diverse. The strong sense of ethnic identity prevalent among the Afghans thwarted all attempts by radical Islamists for a united Islamic front cutting across tribal, ethnic, linguistic and sectarian identities and loyalties. In fact, the traditional resistance parties have been more successful than the Islamist resistance parties.<sup>19</sup> This also led to alliance politics among the competing *mujahideen* factions, which remains a determining factor in the power politics of Afghanistan to this day.

The destruction of central authority at Kabul during the civil war further reinforced the tribal-ethnic leadership at the local and regional level. Even historically, provincial Afghanistan has largely remained autonomous with Kabul having nominal presence by way of institutions or governance. It has been rightly stated by Magnus and Naby that,

*...the basic elements of the Afghan lifestyle depend on family relationships, multigenerational living patterns, dependence on agriculture, symbiotic living with the natural world, including domestic animals, and a sense of permanence, not of the individual but of the community. Loyalty patterns begin with family and extend to village or tribe, and then to ethnic group. The extension of loyalty to country has not achieved universal acceptance as has allegiance to Islam, which is imbedded in the community traditions rather than in the intellect or the written word.*<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the near absence of modern state institutions of governance in Afghanistan's vast countryside coupled with the traditional tribal institutions based on personalised networks forms the repository of *mujahideen* power and authority. The ethnic and ideological divide and interest disparities among Afghanistan's various factions, enmeshed with the involvement of foreign powers, have for long fashioned the Afghan polity.

#### *Mujahideen and the Bonn Process – Rivalry and Political Contest Resumes*

The ethno-political and ideological divide that was witnessed during the Bonn Conference continued to unravel all through the provisional phase of the Karzai-led government. It turned out to be a saga of continued Tajik domination over the political set up at Kabul, with Pashtuns clamouring for a greater political space and representation. The strong sense of political alienation among the largely divided and leaderless Pashtuns, more as a result of Tajik domination over Kabul from 1992 to 1996 and then after the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001, made them initially indifferent towards the Bonn-mandated political process.<sup>21</sup> The gruesome murder of Abdul Rahman, Minister of Civil Aviation, in February 2002 at the Kabul airport,<sup>22</sup> and the assassination of Vice-President Abdul Qadir in July 2002<sup>23</sup> brought out the intense power rivalry between the Panjshiri Tajiks and the Rome Group, the two major constituents of the nascent provisional administration.<sup>24</sup>

The dominance of the Panjshiri triumvirate throughout the provisional phase was resented by the older Pashtun *mujahideen* leadership.<sup>25</sup> After the Emergency *Loya Jirga* (June 11-19, 2002), where Hamid Karzai was elected to lead the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA)<sup>26</sup>, it was expected that the Pashtun representation would increase in the government. But the security organs – army, intelligence and police - continued to be dominated by the Panjshiri Tajiks with the exception of Yunus Qanooni who was shifted from interior to education ministry. However, Karzai was successful in augmenting Pashtun representation in the financial affairs.

The prevailing divide in the Afghan polity was well reflected during the deliberations in the Constitutional *Loya Jirga* (CLJ) and in the run-up to both presidential and parliamentary elections. One gets an unmistakable sense of old Pashtun-NA political divide and the ethnic chasm between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns all through the Bonn process. The influence of the *mujahideen* factions in the political process has remained an anathema

to Karzai and a powerful impediment to his reforms agenda. The credibility of many of the *Jirga* delegates was questionable as they had the backing of one or the other *mujahideen* factions. That the inter-*mujahideen* rivalry will be fully played out in the *Jirga* was an anticipated fact.<sup>27</sup>

In the 502-member CLJ (Dec 14, 2003-Jan 4, 2004), there was complete lack of consensus among delegates representing diverse factions and political voices from across Afghanistan on such contentious issues as the nature of the Afghan state, the form of government, status and role of Islam, centre-province relations, question of double citizenship, status of women and minorities, human rights and the language issue. The issue of division of power and the nature of the Afghan state nearly wrecked the CLJ. Pashtun delegates vociferously defended a strong presidential form of government as envisaged in the draft Constitution, whereas the delegates from minority ethnic groups owing allegiance to NA demanded a parliamentary and a more representative form of government. Here, on the one hand, we find provincial Afghanistan at loggerheads with the Centre over the issue of power sharing. On the other, one finds Pashtuns struggling for a centralised Afghan state and minority ethnic factions striving for a greater autonomy for the provinces and assured representation at Kabul. It is also noteworthy that the post of prime minister was controversially removed from the draft Constitution before it was placed for approval in the CLJ, probably to ensure a strong Pashtun presidency. Similarly, the issue of national language also led to serious rift in the *Jirga*.

However, by making certain amendments in the draft Constitution, largely through behind-the-scenes diplomacy or brokerage of deals between quarrelling *mujahideen* factions by UN and US officials, the draft Constitution was finally approved on July 4, 2004.<sup>28</sup> The new Constitution is certainly more of a compromise document as severe differences among delegates were 'settled' and not 'resolved' through debate and consensus. Nevertheless, despite more than 40 amendments, the 162-Article new Constitution<sup>29</sup> successfully retained the fundamentals of the draft Constitution.

The new Constitution paved way for national elections which was to see yet another round of power jockeying among the various *mujahideen* factions. After successive postponements due to deteriorating security situation and inadequate logistics, the presidential election was finally held on October 9, 2004 and parliamentary and provincial elections were

postponed until 2005. Of particular interest in the run-up to the presidential election was Karzai's increased political assertion and attempt to break the stranglehold of *mujahideen* leaders on Kabul, particularly of the Panjshiri Tajiks. Karzai had been under tremendous pressure to shore up his image among fellow Pashtuns, who largely regarded him as too dependent on West and his government as weak and ineffective. Added to it were Karzai's shrunken authority and his inability to curb violence and pace up the reconstruction and rehabilitation process since he took over in December 2001.

Broadly speaking, Kabul's authority was limited in much of the northern, western and central provinces by the factions of the NA who have also been part of the government, and in southern and south-eastern provinces by the guerrilla offensive of the Taliban and their allies. In the absence of an effective national army and the police force, Karzai's authority stood in stark contrast to that of the *mujahideen* leaders who commanded enormous resources and controlled much of Afghanistan. There were instances where factional or regional *mujahideen* commanders openly challenged the central authority and the appointees from Kabul in the provinces.<sup>30</sup>

The dramatic removal of self styled 'Amir' and Tajik Governor of Herat Province, Mohammad Ismail Khan, just before the presidential election was the first concrete step taken by Karzai to take on the *mujahideen* warlords. The next in line was his powerful Tajik defence minister, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, whom he refused to have his vice-presidential nominee. Fearing that the minority ethnic factions might put up a united front or a common candidate against his candidature, Karzai chose Hazara leader, Mohammad Karim Khalili, and Ahmed Zia Masoud, brother of late Tajik commander Ahmed Shah Masoud, as his two vice-presidential nominees. Karzai's stated intention of not working with the *mujahideen* warlords if elected as President was a non-starter from the very beginning. By favouring one warlord to counter another he ended up co-opting them in his elected government. Karzai, aware of his fragile position in the Afghan politics, and given the US strategy of working with the *mujahideen* warlords to destroy the Taliban and their allies, had been conscious of the political exigency of working with the *mujahideen* factions of all hues.

In fact, Karzai's attempt to take on the mainly NA warlords had more to do with the internal ethno-political dynamics of the Afghan polity. The

urgency of cobbling support across the Pashtun spectrum led him to assert himself against the overarching influence of the NA factions. However, despite removing Ismail Khan and sidelining Mohammad Fahim, Karzai had to still seek their co-operation and support of other warlords for peace and stability during the elections.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the political-ethnic polarisation was further deepened in the run-up to the presidential election. The differences among the factions of the NA also came to the fore as they failed to field a common candidate against Karzai.

However, Karzai won the October 2004 presidential election with a comfortable lead over his nearest Tajik rival and former cabinet colleague, Yunus Qanooni.<sup>32</sup> The very fact that all the top four presidential candidates, including Karzai, were either *mujahideen* leaders or had the backing of one or the other *mujahideen* factions is a testimony to the position and power of the warlords in the Afghan polity.<sup>33</sup> Karzai took fifteen days to decide on his cabinet composition after swearing in as President on December 7, 2004 as he had to carry out tough negotiations with the *mujahideen* warlords, particularly with the NA.

He finally announced his 27-member cabinet<sup>34</sup> on December 23, 2004 which largely comprised of technically and professionally qualified people. Though his new cabinet is largely free of the warlords and has a stronger Pashtun presence, the influence of various powerful ethnic *mujahideen* factions on the cabinet and on the larger Afghan politics cannot be underrated.

It would be a misnomer to think that the power of the *mujahideen* warlords is on decline. Given the urgent need for reforms and the powerful influence of the *mujahideen* factions, Karzai has been attempting to strike a balance between the aspirations of the reformists and his international-backers on the one side, and the older *mujahideen* leadership on the other.<sup>35</sup> Karzai has tried to keep the *mujahideen* leadership out of the political structure at Kabul by giving them posts in the provinces or largely ceremonial and inconsequential positions in Kabul. The appointment of Uzbek commander Dostum as Chief-of-Staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan armed forces in March 2005, a largely ceremonial post, has to be seen in the above context.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Karzai appointed Pashtun warlords and his former ministerial colleagues, Gul Agha Sherzai and Syed Hussain Anwari, as provincial governors. In an attempt to mollify the *mujahideen* who were opposed to the policies of former Finance Minister

Ashraf Ghani, he had him replaced with the Central Bank Governor, Anwar-ul Haq Ahadi in his new cabinet. By inducting Ismail Khan in the cabinet, Karzai sent a clear message to the warlords that they will be rewarded with top civilian positions provided they recognise the Kabul authority and adhere to a civilian role within the purview of the Afghan Constitution.

As for the powerful Panjshiri Tajik faction, Karzai has apparently kept the doors open for them in his government. Muhammad Qasim Fahim has been allowed to retain the title 'Marshal' and has been conferred with special lifetime privileges.<sup>37</sup> Karzai and his backers are well aware of the fact that without the co-operation of the powerful Tajik faction, Kabul will not be able to extend its reach to much of the north. In fact, while forming his cabinet, Karzai tried to persuade Yunus Qanooni to join the government, probably as defence minister, which he later refused.<sup>38</sup> The results of the September 18 parliamentary elections further testify to the fact that Karzai will have to constantly deal with the *mujahideen* leaders and seek their co-operation and at times co-optation in times to come.<sup>39</sup> The politics that preceded the election of the chairmen for the *Wolesi Jirga* and the *Meshrano Jirga* is a telling instance of *mujahideen* influence and alliance politics in the new Afghan Parliament.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Mujahideen and Drugs – The Booming Menace***

*The Taliban government and Al Qaeda – the evil ones – use heroin trafficking in order to fund their murder. And one of our objectives is to make sure that Afghanistan is never used for that purpose again<sup>41</sup>*

— US President George W. Bush on November 15, 2001

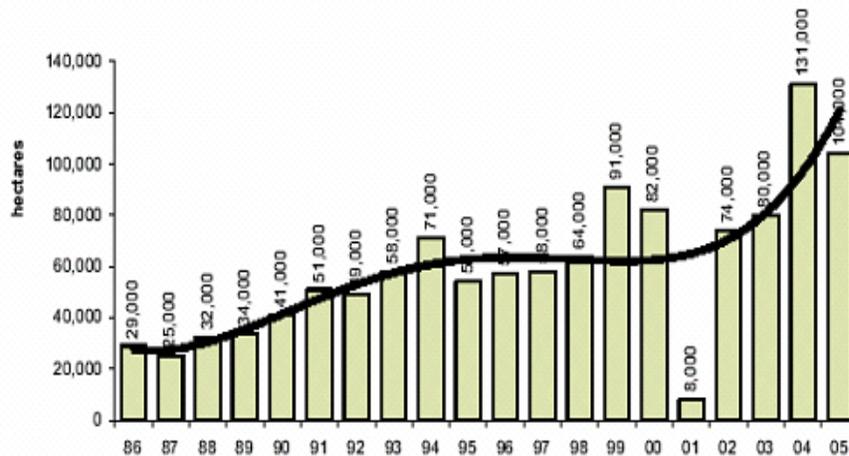
*God knows how hard it is for me when [international representatives] come to my office and say that Afghans cultivate poppies. I feel terribly ashamed; it's very difficult for my Afghan pride to listen to it. I cannot tolerate it when they come to my office and say Afghans cultivate poppies. This shame must be removed from our country. Free us from this insult. Let's repeat in one voice, 'We don't want poppy cultivation!' 'We want life, honour and respect'<sup>42</sup>*

— President Hamid Karzai during a National Counter-Narcotics Conference in Kabul on December 9, 2004

According to the latest Afghan Opium Survey, Afghanistan continued to be the world's largest opium producing country in 2005, accounting for almost 87 per cent of the world's total illicit opium production as in 2004. However, the report says that some progress has been made in curbing the poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2005. For instance, the opium production

registered a negligible decline of 2.4 per cent, from 4,200 metric tonnes in 2004 to 4,100 metric tonnes in 2005. The total area under poppy cultivation went down by 21 per cent, from 131,000 hectares in 2004 to 104,000 hectares in 2005 (See the graph given below)

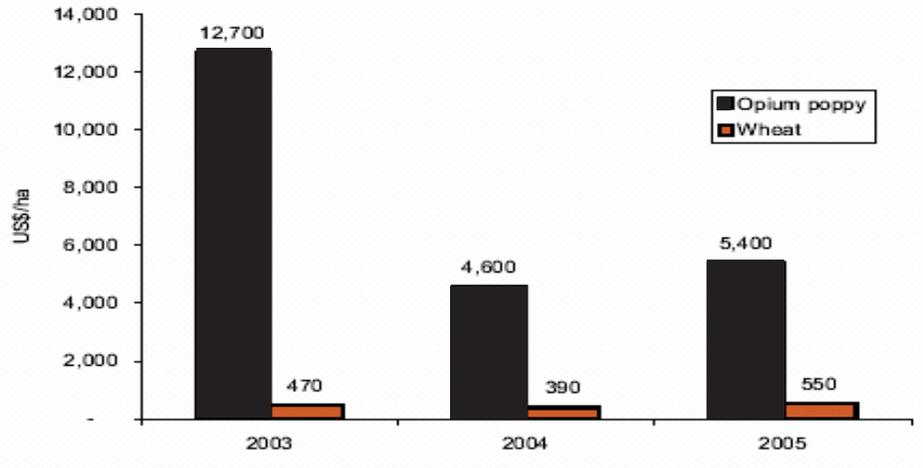
**Afghanistan: Opium poppy cultivation from 1986 to 2005 (hectares)**



**Source:** *Afghanistan Opium Survey*, UNODC and Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Government of Afghanistan, November 2005, p. 3.

But the registered decline remains uneven or nominal. The decline in poppy cultivation in the three largest poppy producing provinces of Helmand by 10 per cent, Nangarhar by 96 per cent and Badakhshan by 53 per cent in 2005 was compensated by the rise in poppy cultivation in Kandahar (+162 per cent), Nimroz (1370 per cent), Farah (348 per cent) and Balkh (334 per cent). Similarly, there was a nominal decline in the export value of opium, from \$2.8 billion in 2004 to \$2.7 billion in 2005. Of particular note in the report is the wide gap between the gross income from opium per hectare (US \$5,400) and the gross income from wheat per hectare (US \$550).<sup>43</sup> This explains the level of incentive that an Afghan farmer has to grow poppy (see the following graph).

## Gross Income of Opium Poppy and Wheat in US\$ per Hectare



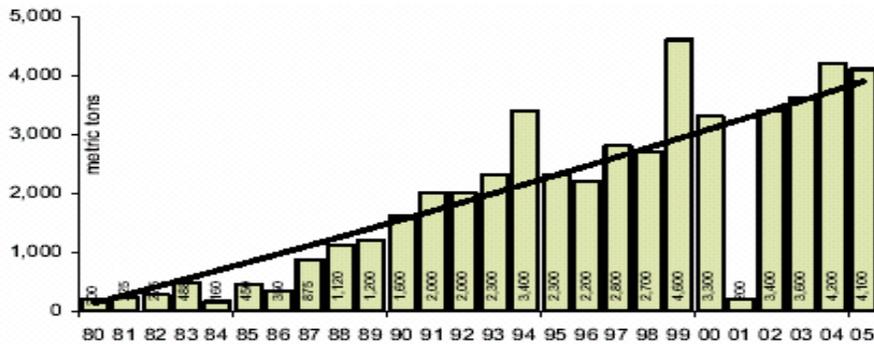
Taliban in 2001 coincided with the return and re-establishment of *mujahideen* dominance in Afghanistan. *Mujahideen* warlords were quick to revive the networks that they had run and maintained so successfully during the civil war. Drugs have been the chief source of weapon procurement and financing of militias for the various Afghan factions since the early years of the civil war. Drug production in Afghanistan has both internal and external dimensions to it. The geo-strategic situation of Afghanistan made it the transitional epicentre of drugs trade across the Golden Crescent since mid-1970s, which mainly comprises of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>44</sup>

The 1979 Soviet intervention and the subsequent US involvement to counter the former by arming the various *mujahideen* groups leading the anti-Soviet resistance, further created conditions for a phenomenal growth in Afghan opium production. The linkages between Afghan jihad and drugs grew thicker as CIA decided to promote drugs as a weapon to weaken the physical ability and morale of the Soviet soldiers on the one hand, and to finance the anti-Soviet resistance on the other.<sup>45</sup> The large-scale destruction of agricultural infrastructure, particularly the irrigation networks, and land mining of cultivable lands, caused by decades of civil war, further made poppy cultivation lucrative for the poor Afghan farmers. By 1991,

Afghanistan had overtaken Burma (now Myanmar) as the largest opium producer in the world. The focus of international illegal drugs business shifted from Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) to the Golden Crescent.<sup>46</sup>

Over the decades of civil war, a well-knit network evolved between poppy cultivators, local commanders, warlords, government officials, heroin processors, smugglers, drug dealers and traders. As warlords, who often doubled up as druglords, re-established themselves after overthrowing the Taliban in 2001, they needed to finance their huge militias, often running into thousands. *Mujahideen* warlords were quick to revive the drugs network that was built during the 1980s and was left untouched during the Taliban period. In fact, it was during the Taliban regime that poppy production peaked to an all time high of 4,600 metric tonnes in 1999. Though a ban imposed by the Taliban in 2000 brought down the poppy production to a mere 185 metric tonnes in 2001, but when the US invasion began in October 2001 Afghan farmers were already busy sowing poppy. By early 2002, the opium price was almost 10 times higher than in 2000. The poppy production immediately shot up from 185 in 2001 to 3,400 metric tonnes in 2002 and since then Afghanistan has not looked back (see the graph given below).

**Opium Production in Afghanistan from 1980 to 2005 (in metric tonnes)**



Source: *Afghanistan Opium Survey*, UNODC and Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Government of Afghanistan, November 2005, p. 5

Despite all rhetoric and British-led efforts, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan continues to spread and grow at a record level. Any aerial

spraying of poppy fields has been resented by both the farmers and the Karzai Government.<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that many of the warlords who encourage farmers to cultivate poppy in their fields have been and still are occupying positions in the government.<sup>48</sup> According to the US estimates, the poppy production and heroin trade in 2005 could earn Afghan warlords up to \$7 billion or even more, up from a record \$2.2 billion in 2004.<sup>49</sup> The militias of various warlords which are primarily financed by the drug money, and often accounted under the Afghan Defence Ministry as Afghan Military Force, have been assisting US coalition troops against the Taliban and their allies in the south and south-eastern Afghanistan. This has been a serious restraining factor in both the disarmament of the militias and in initiating counter-narcotics operations.

In the absence of cash incentives and subsidies, Afghan farmers too are reluctant in shifting from poppy cultivation to food crops. Contrarily, more and more of Afghan farmers are producing opium and are dedicating more of their cultivable land to growing poppy. In the absence of alternate livelihood and years of drought, the high margin of narco-profit continues to allure Afghan farmers. The drug traffickers are extending credit to the farmers switching to poppy cultivation. Keeping in view the heavy drugs component of the Afghan economy and the stakes that various sections of the Afghan society has in it, it has been aptly remarked by Barnett R. Rubin that, opium is a product that keeps people afloat in Afghanistan and “is one of the key reasons that Afghanistan is more stable than Iraq.”<sup>50</sup> For times to come, the US-backed government at Kabul is unlikely to take on the drug menace, and the Afghan economy will continue to be majorly informal and illicit.

### **‘War on Terror’ in Afghanistan – Inherently Paradoxical?**

*Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists*<sup>51</sup>

– US President George W. Bush on September 20, 2001

*We did not ask that the blood of the innocent people, who perished on September 11, be avenged with the blood of innocent villagers in Afghanistan*<sup>52</sup>

– Dennis Kucinich, a US Democratic Congressman, on war on terror in Afghanistan.

Afghans did not attack America on September 11, 2001. The Bush Administration, within a month after the tragic events of 9/11, led US to

war in Afghanistan. A country bombed to pieces in its over two decades of civil war by powers within and without, was spectacularly re-bombed. The 'collateral damage' which was too high to be accounted quietly drifted into the realm of speculation and became the subject of research. Officially, US went to Afghanistan with three main policy objectives – counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and political stability. Unofficially, it went with the short-term objective of capturing two individuals. After four years of US-sponsored and Bonn-mandated political process, what has the US-led 'war on terror' achieved in Afghanistan?

The latest warden message issued on January 9, 2006 by the US State Department for the US citizens best sums up the current situation in Afghanistan. Exhorting US citizens against travelling to Afghanistan, the message says,

*the ability of Afghan authorities to maintain order and ensure the security of citizens and visitors is limited. Remnants of the former Taliban regime and the terrorist al-Qaida network, and other groups hostile to the government, remain active. U.S.-led military operations continue. Travel in all areas of Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, is unsafe due to military operations, landmines, banditry, armed rivalry among political and tribal groups, and the possibility of terrorist attacks, including attacks using vehicular or other Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and kidnapping. The security environment remains volatile and unpredictable.*<sup>53</sup>

The most coveted targets of the US' air and military operations, Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, have since continued with their disappearing acts. Much of the country continues to reel under the threat of warlordism and narcotics. President Karzai remains confined to Kabul with no control to the north, south, east or west of it. The government at Kabul is strongly influenced by extra-constitutional authorities. Poppy is now grown in nearly whole of the country and a yet another bumper harvest is expected this year as economy remains largely moribund. The Taliban and their allies still have influence over large swathes of south and south-eastern Afghanistan. The socio-political divisions and polarisation stands further reinforced. The core idea of the Bonn process, building institutions of governance, remains largely external to the ongoing scheme of things due to the paradoxes in the 'war on terror'.

The US sponsored Bonn process has failed in bringing about any qualitative changes in the Afghan polity. The inclusion and participation of the differing *mujahideen* factions has led to contradictions in the central scheme of the Bonn political process, which was to build institutions of

governance. Being part of the problem, the competing political agendas of the various Afghan factions was bound to come in direct conflict with the reforms and re-building aspect of the Bonn process. The ideological divide and interest disparities among Afghanistan's various factions, which neither allowed them to put up a united front against the Soviets in the 1980s nor have consensus over any power-sharing agreements in the past<sup>54</sup>, simply resumed after the ouster of the Taliban.

The contradictions inherent in the Bonn process were primarily due to the paradoxes in the US' war on terror in Afghanistan. The short-term approach adopted by the Bush Administration at the beginning of the war has been the single biggest limiting factor behind the continuing political uncertainty in Afghanistan. US soon realised the limitations of its policy objectives in Afghanistan as it confronted the realities and the complexities of the Afghan politics. When the Bush Administration decided to wage a war on the Taliban and their Al Qaida allies, they had probably thought of destroying the Taliban infrastructure and apprehending both Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar by launching surgical air strikes and swift military operations which could be wrapped up in two to three months before the harsh Afghan winter sets in.

US does not seem to have been very keen in addressing or confronting the greater malaise that afflicted war-torn Afghanistan. US' reliance on *mujahideen* factions and other anti-Taliban groups in overthrowing the Taliban, and their subsequent invitation to the Bonn Conference, made it clear that the scope of counter-terrorism operations will not include recalcitrant *mujahideen* warlords. To this day, US' counter-terrorism strategy in Afghanistan remains restricted to the Taliban and their Al Qaida allies. US forces have also continuously ignored warlords' involvement in the opium trade in exchange for their help in fighting al-Qaida and the Taliban. US' dependence on the warlords and their militias to further its political and military agenda has been detrimental to the disarmament and de-weaponisation programme; creation of a national army and the police force; anti-narcotics operations and, above all, building institutions of governance and extending Kabul's authority in the provinces.

As brought out earlier in the paper, US and its international allies have largely hesitated from pursuing the second policy objective of counter-narcotics for fear of provoking rebellion among the warlords and losing the co-operation and support of the rural people in its fight against the

Taliban. The economic fallout of clamping on drug trade which keeps the largely illicit economy of Afghanistan afloat too has been a restraining factor. Even otherwise, the US-led coalition has not been in a position to spare more troops and logistics to open a large-scale front against the drug menace in Afghanistan. The volatile security situation in Iraq on the one hand, and the reluctance of the NATO member-states to spare more troops or take to counter-terrorism on the other, has left US forces too stretched to take on the warlords or open a large-scale front against the drug menace. As US could not divert its forces engaged in counter-terrorism in south and south-eastern Afghanistan, the warlords and druglords will continue to be powerful and will continue to undermine the authority of Kabul for times to come.

With a narrow counter-terrorism and a narrower counter-narcotics policy, the third US policy objective of establishing long-term political stability in Afghanistan is a failure. What one notices all through is Bush Administration's constant focus on the Taliban and the Al Qaida in the region even at the expense of Bonn process. There is certainly something more to it, both at the level of US' domestic politics and the larger Asian energy politics. President Bush's 'war on terror' in Afghanistan was a hotly debated issue during the November 2004 US presidential election. The October 2004 presidential election in Afghanistan was projected by Bush as his foreign policy success and a major step in making America and the American people safer by establishing democracy in Afghanistan. Bush Administration ensured that the Afghan presidential election preceded the US elections even in the face of deteriorating security situation and logistics problem in Afghanistan.

On the level of the larger game being played over Central Asia's energy resources, the war in Afghanistan had initially provided US with a foothold in Central Asia in the form of two bases, one in Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan<sup>55</sup> and the other in Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. US' interest in Afghanistan has to be seen in the larger context of long-running oil and pipeline politics between US and Russia over Caspian energy, and a possible containment of Iran and China.

### **Assessment**

A lingering question has been what after September 18 parliamentary and provincial elections? What will be the fate of Afghanistan if US-led

coalition partially withdraws its forces or US pulls out of Afghanistan in the near future? President Hamid Karzai's role and leadership in Afghan politics is unique and unconventional *vis-a-vis* the *mujahideen* leadership. The centrality of President Karzai in the internationally-backed Bonn process and the centrality of *mujahideen* warlords in the domestic politics of Afghanistan have thus far kept both dependent on each other. During these four years, Hamid Karzai has certainly emerged as a rallying figure, though his position in the political labyrinth of Afghanistan remains delicate. His status in the Bonn process and among the international community has remained steady. In the near-term, the relationship between President Karzai and the powerful *mujahideen* leaders will continue to remain in inter-dependence mode.

However, if the US does not reconcile its regional political and military agenda with the interests of Afghanistan, the past of Afghanistan can catch up with its present. The splendid silence of the *mujahideen* warlords thus far should not be construed as an indication of their waning power and influence. They have shown tremendous survival instinct and have the ability to wait out US and the international community. However, given the geo-strategic significance of Afghanistan, US will not withdraw from its Afghan bases even as it realigns its bases and repositions its troops across the globe.

There appears to be a strong sense of realisation and debate within the US establishment over the contradictions in its objectives in Afghanistan and the very phrase 'war on terror'. In fact, by the beginning of 2005 senior US officials were trying to rephrase the 'war on terror' as the 'Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism'.<sup>56</sup> Probably, the idea was to de-emphasise the military character of the phrase by replacing 'war' with 'struggle'. It was also to widen its ideological scope at the international level and acceptability within the US. There seems to be certain confusion about the appropriate policy to carry Afghanistan through its transition and to deal with the larger threats to America and Europe emanating from Afghanistan. The election of some Taliban members to the new Afghan Parliament is the result of constant attempts made by Kabul since 2003 with full US backing to co-opt Taliban in the post-election political process. As of now, it is difficult to say whether Kabul will be able to cobble together a national unity government.

However, the dominant discourse in Bush Administration for now seems to be to gradually scale down the US involvement, at least militarily<sup>57</sup>, and to widen the scope for the greater involvement of largely unwilling European member-states of NATO<sup>58</sup>. Their hesitancy in sparing troops and logistics for NATO's first out of area operation certainly does not bode well for the security scenario in Afghanistan. Counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics operations in Afghanistan will definitely be a difficult proposition for the NATO forces. In such a scenario, the possibility of NATO forces, like US-led coalition troops, working in cooperation with various *mujahideen* factions cannot be ruled out. Similarly, the possibility of NATO seeking cooperation of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan or the bordering Central Asian states, in the near future too cannot be ruled out. US withdrawal will have an impact not only on the domestic political calculus of Afghanistan but also on the regional politics. With greater role being facilitated for Afghanistan in such regional groupings as SAARC and SCO, the pulls and pressures among the neighbouring countries to play a greater role in Afghanistan are likely to grow. Certainly, Afghanistan's tryst with political uncertainty is far from over.

### References/End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Eqbal Ahmed, "Terrorism: Theirs and Ours", at <http://www.wand.org/issuesact/911stmt3.html>
- <sup>2</sup> The term 'warlord' refers to one who has *de facto* military control of a sub-national area by virtue of a military force which is personally obedient to that warlord. Basically, a name for a figure who has military authority but not legal authority over a sub-national region. The phenomenon is known as warlordism.
- <sup>3</sup> Marc Ricks, "Karzai Says Militias Pose Biggest Threat to Afghan Elections", *RFE/RL Afghanistan Report*, 3(26), July 31, 2004, at <http://www.rferl.org/reports/afghan-report/2004/07/26-310704.asp>. Hamid Karzai, as Chairman of the Afghan Transitional Administration, had said in an interview published in *The New York Times* in July 2004, that Afghanistan's warlord armies, not Taliban insurgents, pose the gravest risk to his country's security. See Carlotta Gall and David Rohde, "Afghan President Describes Militias as the Top Threat", *The New York Times*, Internet Edition, July 12, 2004. On July 14, 2004, Chairman Karzai vowed to crack down on private militias and issued a decree prescribing severe punishment for warlord armies who refuse to disarm, particularly those operating outside the purview of the Afghan Defence Ministry.
- <sup>4</sup> Golnaz Esfandiari, "Afghanistan: President Declares Holy War Against Drugs", *RFE/RL Afghanistan Report*, December 10, 2004, at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/12/C1731D8A-3D90-4B0C-A0AC-0E4807EF8E81.html>

- <sup>5</sup> *Mujahideen* (مُجَاهِدِينَ; also transliterated as mujāhidin, mujahedeen, mujahedin, mujahidin, mujaheddin, etc.) is a plural form of mujahid (مُجَاهِدٌ), which literally translates from Arabic as “struggler”, someone who engages in jihad, or “struggle”, but is often translated as “holy warrior”. In the late twentieth century, the term *mujahideen* became popular in the media to describe various armed fighters who subscribe to Islamic ideologies, although there is not always an explicit “holy” or “warrior” meaning within the word. The root of *mujahideen* is J-H-D (ج-ه-د), meaning “effort”; this is the same root as jihad, which means “struggle”. Mujahid is originally, therefore, someone who exerts effort or struggles. The term has, even in Arabic, taken on meanings that are specifically religious, or specifically military or paramilitary, or both. See <http://www.masterliness.com/a/Mujahedin.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> By December 2001, the term 9/11 had become universal shorthand for the series of terrorist attacks that took place in the United States on September 11, 2001. It is often also written as “nine-eleven” or pronounced as “nine-one-one”. See Jack Rosenthal, “The Language of 9/11”, *Frontline*, 19(19), September 14-27, 2002. p.71
- <sup>6</sup> The Agreement is formally known as *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*. Also known as Bonn Agreement, it had originally given a timeline of two-and-a-half year (i.e., till June 2004) for the objectives of the Agreement to be achieved. However, due to several reasons, Afghanistan failed to stick to the timeline. The Bonn process is said to have concluded with the parliamentary and provincial elections held on September 18, 2005. The text of the Agreement is available at [http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/\\_nonUN%20Docs/\\_International-Conferences&Forums/Bonn-Talks/bonn.htm](http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_International-Conferences&Forums/Bonn-Talks/bonn.htm). Also at: <http://www.uno.de/frieden/afghanistan/talks/agreement.htm>
- <sup>7</sup> Chris Johnson, Jolyon Leslie, *Afghanistan. The Mirage of Peace*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2004. p. 15
- <sup>8</sup> Colin Powell made this statement relating to Bonn Conference during an interview on June 7, 2002 available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/powell.html>
- <sup>9</sup> The four Afghan groups invited to the Bonn Conference were – the Northern Alliance (representing minority ethnic groups from the north); the Rome Group (pro-Zahir Shah Royalists); the Cyprus Group (the Iranian-backed Afghan exiles); and the Peshawar Group (Peshawar-based *mujahideen* exiles), each representing varying background and political interests.
- <sup>10</sup> Haji Abdul Qadir, one of the few Pashtun members of the Northern Alliance, had walked out of the Bonn Conference on the issue of lack of Pashtun representation in the delegation. Karim Khalili, a prominent Hazara leader of the Northern Alliance, had also demanded greater representation for the Hazaras and Uzbeks in the delegation. Similarly, the Uzbek commander, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, a powerful Pashtun leader, both

from the Northern Alliance, had expressed their strong dissatisfaction over the distribution of portfolios. Former President Burhanuddin Rabbani had refused to attend the Bonn Conference.

- <sup>11</sup> In the 29-member Afghan Interim Administration there were 18 ministers from the Northern Alliance, 8 from the Rome Group, 1 from the Peshawar Group and 2 independent ministers, excluding Chairman Hamid Karzai. As for the ethnic composition of the AIA, there were 11 Tajik, 6 Pashtun, 5 Shiite, 4 Hazara and 3 Uzbek ministers. Chairman Hamid Karzai is a Pashtun from the Rome Group. List of the members of the Afghan Interim Administration is available at <http://www.afghanland.com/history/interim.html>. The list also includes the ethnic identity and political affiliation of the members.
- <sup>12</sup> During the Bonn Conference, Abdul Sattar Siret, who was leading the Rome delegation at the Conference, is said to have defeated Hamid Karzai in the internal vote to elect the leader of the interim administration. However, he had to step aside under US pressure to pave way for Hamid Karzai. Abdul Sattar Siret, an Uzbek from Samangan, held several ministerial positions in the 1970s under the former King Zahir Shah. He was also the presidential candidate for the October 2004 presidential election.
- <sup>13</sup> It is said that former King Zahir Shah's appeal cuts across ethnic lines. Apart from Pashtuns, he is known to have support among sections of non-Panjshiri Tajiks, Uzbeks and other minority ethnic groups. The former king now has a largely symbolic role in Afghan politics as father of the Afghan nation.
- <sup>14</sup> Hamid Karzai was also the deputy foreign minister in the first *mujahideen* government led by Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1992. His father Abdul Ahad Karzai was a political leader and Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament during King Zahir Shah's reign.
- <sup>15</sup> It was as recent as the reign of King Amanullah (1919-1929) that the term 'Afghanistan' was first officially used to refer to the whole of country. Prior to him, the official title of the Afghan monarch was "Ruler of the God-Granted Kingdom of Afghanistan, Turkestan, and Their Dependencies." For much of the period before, the term 'Afghanistan' referred mainly to the areas populated by the Pashtuns i.e., present day southern and eastern Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. Some regions have been named after the majority group that inhabited them, for instance, the central region is named Hazarajat after the Hazaras. In fact, until the 1960s, part of the northern Afghanistan was termed as Turkestan, and another part as Katagan after a major Uzbek clan. For details see *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, The Asia Society, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988. p.18
- <sup>16</sup> Many ethnic groups like Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz, Brahuis and Balochis straddle the Afghan borders. There is a substantial Pashtun population in the bordering North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. Similarly, Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks have their co-ethnics residing right across the

*Amu Darya* in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan respectively. The influence of Persian culture and language has been very pronounced over the Herat region. Shia Hazaras together with Tajiks constitute the *Farsiwans* or the *Farsi* speaking population of Afghanistan. Infact, *Dari*, the Afghan Persian dialect, is the second most spoken language after *Pashto*, which itself is written in Persian script.

- <sup>17</sup> *Naqshbandiya tariqa* and *Qadiriya tariqa*, the two prominent sufi orders in Afghanistan, also played a notable role in anti-communist resistance. The role of sufi based parties, which can be considered as within the realm of traditional resistance parties, was more political in nature than military. *Jabha-e-Nejat-e-Milli Afghanistan* or the National Liberation Front of Afghanistan led by Sebgatullah Mujaddedi, and *Mahaz-e Milli-e Islami-e Afghanistan* or the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan led by Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gailani, were the most important political parties of the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya tariqat respectively. Both the parties had their support base mainly among the Pashtuns, with former being strong in the Laghman area and the later in the Kandahar area. They have been supportive of the return of King Zahir Shah and their political stance can be regarded as that of the centrists in the Afghan politics. However, some members of these sufi orders also joined the Islamists, particularly the *Jamiat-e-Islami* of Burhanuddin Rabbani. See Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan. Mullah, Marx and Mujahid*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, 1998. pp. 94-97
- <sup>18</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, "(Re) Building Afghanistan: The Folly of Stateless Democracy", *Current History*, April 2004, p. 166.
- <sup>19</sup> For greater detail on the role of Islam and Islamists in the anti-Soviet resistance, see Eden Naby, "The Changing Role of Islam as a Unifying Force in Afghanistan" in *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, ed. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986. Also see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. pp. 30-53, Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1995. pp. 227-303
- <sup>20</sup> Magnus and Naby. n. 16. pp. 18-19.
- <sup>21</sup> See "Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation", *International Crisis Group Asia Report*, Kabul/Brussels, August 5, 2003, at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report\\_archive/A401078\\_05082003.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A401078_05082003.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Killing of Afghan Minister Heightens Government Tensions", at <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/02/15022002103412.asp>. It is said that Afghanistan's national security chief, Gen. Juraat Khan Panjshiri, and the country's top intelligence chief, Abdul Ajan Tawhidi, both Panjshiri Tajiks, were also present among several thousand pilgrims heading for Mecca. See Philip Smucker, "Ethnic Split Grows in Afghanistan's Government", at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/afghan/2002/0219ethnic.htm>
- <sup>23</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Vice President of Transitional Authority Assassinated", at <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/07/08072002165156.asp>

- <sup>24</sup> Chairman Hamid Karzai had clearly stated that the murder of Civil Aviation Minister Abdul Rahman was a premeditated assassination plot. He had accused the members of the Jamiat-e-Islami who were top officials in the defence, interior, intelligence and justice ministries for planning minister's murder. All the aforesaid ministries were then led and manned by the Panjshiri Tajiks. It is to be noted that Abdul Qadir, a Tajik, was a personal advisor of late Tajik commander Ahmed Shah Masoud in the 1990's. He then left Jamiat-e-Islami because of differences with Masoud and joined the pro-Zahir Shah Rome Group. Rahman was among the few Tajik members of the Rome Group. See Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Rift in Government Surfaces over Killing of Minister", at <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/02/21022002083405.asp>
- <sup>25</sup> The Pajshiri Tajik triumvirate controlled what is sometimes referred to as "power ministries" which comprised of defence, interior and foreign ministries. Muhammad Fahim Qasim was the defence minister, Yunus Qanooni the interior minister and Abdullah Abdullah the foreign minister in the interim administration. The triumvirate continued to dominate the transitional administration as well despite some attempts by President Karzai to enhance the Pashtun component in his transitional authority. Though the interior ministry in the transitional authority was held by a Pashtun, Ali Ahmed Jalali, the senior officials of the ministry continued to be largely Tajiks close to Yunus Qanooni.
- <sup>26</sup> List of the members of the Afghan Transitional Authority is available at: <http://www.afghanland.com/history/transitional.html>. The list also includes the ethnic identity of the members.
- <sup>27</sup> Among the ten committees, each comprising about 50 members, into which the total of 502 delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga were divided, to discuss various sets of articles, there were many former *mujahideen* leaders, religious figures and warlords. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, Ahmed Nabi Muhammadi (son of Maulvi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi), Ustad Abdul Farid (former Prime Minister of Afghanistan representing Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in 1992) and Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai (brother of former finance minister, Ashraf Ghani) headed some of the committees.
- <sup>28</sup> Former US ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, and UN's former special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, apparently played key roles in bringing about compromise between the opposing *mujahideen* factions and their delegates in the CLJ. Human Rights Watch reports of US officials having met *mujahideen* factional commanders like Abdul Rashid Dostum and Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf to negotiate their support for the draft Constitution. For details see the report by Human Rights Watch, "Constitutional Process Marred by Abuses", at <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/01/07/afghan6914.htm>
- <sup>29</sup> See "The Constitution of Afghanistan", Unofficial Translation at <http://www.swisspeace.org/uploads/ACSF/GeneralDocuments/final%20new%20constitution.pdf>
- <sup>30</sup> In April 2004, the governor of north-western Faryab Province had to flee when

Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum captured the capital city of Maimana. Similarly, in June 2004, the governor of Ghor Province had to take refuge in neighbouring Herat when militia commander Abdul Salaam Khan stormed the capital city of Chaghcharan. See "Governor Flees Afghanistan Rebels", at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3818141.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3818141.stm). In another such instance in June 2004, the alleged supporters of Dostum restrained the newly appointed governor of the northern province of Sar-e-Pul, Abdul Haq Shafaq, from taking office. He was forced to take refuge in neighbouring Mazar-e-Sharif. See "Stone-Throwing Afghans Stop Governor Taking Office", at <http://paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=67739>

- <sup>31</sup> Pamela Constable, "Karzai Attempts Diplomacy with Afghan Warlords", at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37736-2004May18.html>
- <sup>32</sup> Hamid Karzai secured 55.4 per cent votes, followed by Tajik candidate Yunus Qanooni with 16.3 per cent, Hazara candidate Mohammad Mohaqiq with 11.7 per cent and the Uzbek candidate Abdul Rashid Dostum with 10.3 per cent. The final results of the 2004 Afghan Presidential Election is available at <http://www.elections-afghanistan.org.af/Election%20Results%20Website/english/english.htm>. The final list of the presidential candidates is available at <http://www.elections-afghanistan.org.af/>, <http://institute-for-afghan-studies.org/>
- <sup>33</sup> There were a total of 18 presidential candidates including Hamid Karzai. 14 candidates fought as independents despite having affiliations with one or the other political groupings. The important among such independent candidates were Hamid Karzai (Rome Group), Hazara commander Mohammad Mohaqiq (Hizb-e-Wahdat), Uzbek commander Abdul Rashid Dostum (Jumbish-e-Milli), Ahmed Shah Ahmedzai (Ittehad-e-Islami of Pir Sayid Ahmed Gailani), Abdul Sattar Sirat (Rome Group), Humayun Shah Asefi (Rome Group). Of the 14 independent candidates, seven were Pashtuns, five were Tajiks, and one Uzbek and Hazara each. Of the total of 18 presidential candidates, there were eight Pashtuns, eight Tajiks, and one Hazara and Uzbek each.
- <sup>34</sup> List of the members of President Karzai's cabinet and the various new appointments made by President Hamid Karzai is available at <http://www.azadiradio.org/en/weeklyreport/2004/12/30.asp#241565>. The list includes the ministers' province of origin.
- <sup>35</sup> Vishal Chandra, "Warlords and Karzai's Balancing Act", *Strategic Analysis*, 29 (1), January-March 2005, pp. 155-61.
- <sup>36</sup> Another reason for Dostum's appointment could have been the growing dissatisfaction among the Uzbeks over their lack of representation in the new cabinet. They got only two ministries, both of which are relatively unimportant. One is the Ministry of Refugees and the other one is the Ministry of *Hajj* and Islamic Affairs, with the latter one active only during one month of the year when Afghan pilgrims go for the annual *Hajj*.
- <sup>37</sup> See, "Former Defense Minister Gets Special Privileges" at <http://www.azadiradio.org/en/weeklyreport/2004/12/30.asp#241572>

- <sup>38</sup> Amin Tarzi, "Afghan President Faces Challenges in Forming Cabinet", *RFE/RL Afghanistan Report*, 3 (45) December 23, 2004, at <http://www.rferl.org/reports/afghan-report/2004/12/45-231204.asp>. Tajik leader Yunus Qanooni had instead founded a new political party called *Hizb-e-Afghanistan Naween* or the New Afghanistan Party towards the end of December 2004. See Victoria Burnett, "Karzai's Closest Rival to Launch Political Party in Afghanistan", at <http://news.ft.com/cms/s/c833590e-57ab-11d9-a8db-00000e2511c8.html>
- <sup>39</sup> The author has recently published his commentary on the September 18 Afghan elections and the Bonn process. See Vishal Chandra, "The Afghan Elections and the Bonn Process: Assessing India's Options", *Strategic Analysis*, 29(4), Oct-Dec 2005, pp. 723-26.
- <sup>40</sup> Among the strong contenders for the post of the Chairman of the 249-member lower house (the Wolesi Jirga) were former *mujahideen* leaders and commanders like Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, and Mohammad Mohaqqiq. On December 21, 2005, Tajik leader and Hamid Karzai's former presidential rival, Yunus Qanooni, was elected as the Speaker with Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Karzai supporter, withdrawing his candidacy in favour of Qanooni to defeat Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, another Karzai supporter. Hazara candidate Mohammad Mohaqqiq who too was a presidential rival of Karzai had withdrawn his candidacy in favour of Sayyaf. Both Qanooni and Rabbani are Tajiks and members of the former NA, whereas Sayyaf is a Pashtun. See Amin Tarzi, "Qanooni Brokers His Way to Parliament Speaker", at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/12/052369AE-9CDA-4F11-853A-E0BB33BF6574.html>. Similarly, the election of Sibghatullah Mojadeddi, another Karzai ally, as Chairman of the upper house (the Meshrano Jirga) too was not without controversy. See Carlotta Gall, "Afghan Parliament Opens, and Finds Democracy Is a Bit Untidy", at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/21/international/asia/21afghan.html?th&emc=th>
- <sup>41</sup> See "Afghanistan — A Narcotics Paradise", at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story\\_23-3-2005\\_pg3\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_23-3-2005_pg3_1)
- <sup>42</sup> no.4
- <sup>43</sup> For further details see Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005 released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Counter Narcotics Directorate of the Government of Afghanistan in November 2005, at [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg\\_survey\\_2005.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg_survey_2005.pdf)
- <sup>44</sup> The opium production in Afghanistan grew remarkably after Turkey banned poppy cultivation in 1972. Turkey was previously the main supplier to Europe. Between 1970 and 1982, heroin production in Afghanistan tripled from 100 tonnes to 300 tonnes a year. By the late 1970s, heroin made from Afghan poppy had begun reaching the international market. See Catherine Lamour and Michael R. Lamberti, *The International Connection: Opium From Growers to Pushers*, New York, Pantheon, 1974. p. 177
- <sup>45</sup> The idea of using drugs and disinformation to weaken the Soviets in Afghanistan

was originally given by Count Alexandre de Marenches, chief of France's foreign intelligence agency or the SDECE (later the DGSE). It was part of the Marenches' proposed Operation *Moustique* or Mosquito, a Franco-American venture to counter the Soviet threat. Marenches met US President Reagan soon after the latter's inauguration in January 1981 and told him of his Operation Mosquito. Both Reagan and CIA Director William Casey endorsed Marenches' plan. However, according to Marenches' memoirs, the joint Franco-German operation had to be abandoned as Casey could not guarantee the secrecy of the covert operation. See John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars. Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2001. pp. 128-129

- <sup>46</sup> There are three main routes through which drugs are smuggled out of Afghanistan- from the northeast (mainly through Badakshan) into Tajikistan and on to Russia; into Pakistan and its ports (mainly through Nangarhar); and south-westward across the Margo desert into Iran (mainly from Helmand through Nimroz). It is to be noted that the bulk of poppy cultivation is concentrated in the three provinces of Helmand, Nangarhar and Badakshan.
- <sup>47</sup> The fear of alienating rural Afghanistan from the parliamentary elections or provoking popular resentment and possible rebellion against the government primarily restrained Karzai and the western countries from aerial spraying *ala* Colombia style crop-dusting campaign. In the absence of alternate livelihoods, aerial eradication of crops can leave large number of farmers and itinerant workers without livelihood. They can be potential recruits for the Taliban and numerous private armed factions in the countryside. It also has grave consequences for the Afghan economy, which is largely a narco-economy. In addition to it, mass burning of opium poppy can be detrimental to public health and the environment.
- <sup>48</sup> In June 2005, the counter-narcotics agents seized nearly 9 metric tonnes or 20,000 pounds of opium from the office of the Governor of Helmand, Sher Muhammad Akhundzade. To the embarrassment of President Karzai, former Interior Minister Taj Muhammad Wardak persistently accuses Karzai's Kandahar-based brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, of being involved in exporting drugs. Of particular note is a statement by a ministerial colleague of President Karzai. According to Syed Ikramuddin, Minister of Social and Labour Affairs in the Karzai Government, "Except for the minister of the interior himself, Mr. Ali Jalali, all the lower people from the heads of department down are involved in supporting drug smuggling". See Scott Baldauf and Faye Bowers, "Afghanistan Riddled With Drug Ties", at:<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0513/p01s04-wosc.html?s=hns>. Accessed on May 20, 2005
- <sup>49</sup> Sonni Efron, "An Afghan Quandary for the U.S.", at <http://www.latimes.com/la-fg-afghandrugs2jan02,0,3684775.story?coll=la-home-headlines>
- <sup>50</sup> Declan Walsh, "Karzai Victory Plants Seeds of Hope in Fight to Kick Afghan Opium Habit", at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1381860,00.html>. Accessed on Jan 3, 2005.

- <sup>51</sup> See "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People" by the US President George W. Bush on September 20, 2001, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>
- <sup>52</sup> John Cherian, "War and Resistance", *Frontline*, 19(7), March 30-April 12, 2002. p.47
- <sup>53</sup> See, "Information for Travelers. Warden Message", January 9, 2006, at [http://afghanistan.usembassy.gov/jan.\\_9\\_2006](http://afghanistan.usembassy.gov/jan._9_2006)
- <sup>54</sup> The interim government-in-exile or the Afghan Interim Government elected by the Peshawar-based seven party *mujahideen* alliance, *Ittehad-e-Islami Afghan Mujahideen* or the Islamic Union of Afghan *Mujahideen* in February 1989 at Rawalpindi; the UN peace plan of May 1991; the Peshawar Agreement of 1992 and the Islamabad Accord of 1993, all failed to provide political stability to Afghanistan due to dissensions and power contest among the diverse constituents of the *mujahideen* alliance.
- <sup>55</sup> US was asked by Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov Government to pull out of Karshi-Khanabad (also known as K2) base. US completed the withdrawal of its troops and facilities from K2 by December 2005.
- <sup>56</sup> Tom Regan, "The 'Rebranding' of the War on Terror", at <http://csmonitor.com/2005/0728/dailyUpdate.html>. Also see, Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Washington Recasts Terror War As 'Struggle'", at <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2005/07/26/news/terror.php>
- <sup>57</sup> US is considering to trim its troops this year by roughly 20 per cent or about 4,000 out of the 20,000 currently engaged in Afghanistan. See "US Considers Troop Cut in Afghanistan", at [http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181\\_1491922,00050001.htm](http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181_1491922,00050001.htm).
- <sup>58</sup> NATO is divided on the issue of engaging its troops in counter-terrorism in Afghanistan's volatile south and south-eastern provinces. See "NATO Divided Over Afghan Expansion Plans", at <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/international/international-afghan-nato.html>.

Vishal Chandra is an Associate Fellow at IDSA.