

Afghanistan: Operation Freedom to Operation Forgotten

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As war and humanitarian disaster looms in Iraq, the Afghanistan has once again been selectively forgotten. Here is a reminder: Afghanistan is again under the control of warlords and religious fanatics, the civil service is bankrupt, and attritions rates are rising among national army and police recruits.

The Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and United Nations reveal women and girls are no closer to liberation than in the months after the interim government was formed. For that matter, the UN's Lakdhar Brahimi said a few months ago that still *"warlords kill at will."*ⁱ Not to mention, Afghanistan's neighbors are back to their old tricks even after signing a non-interference treaty.ⁱⁱ

While it is obvious that the charming and cooperating President Karzai is dedicated to combating terrorism, fanaticism, and warlordism, the international coalition has still to carry out its pledges. In Fall 2001, Afghans supported the international coalition in dismantling terrorist cells and their safe haven in Afghanistan. 'Operation Enduring Freedom' was only half over when attention and resources moved on to Iraq while it was called quits in Afghanistan. This shift in policy priorities resulted in the former draconian regime being replaced with a loose federation of warlords and religious fanatics. In the meantime, Al-Qaida and their allies on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border are regrouping and declaring renewed calls for 'Holy War on America.'

All the while, all kinds of aloofness relating to Afghanistan are clumsily exhibited. This aloofness moves certain members of the international coalition to resist expansion of ISAF troops to other cities in Afghanistan. This aloofness was again most visible when the White House failed to request any money in its latest budget proposal to the Congress. Finally, the Congress stepped in to find nearly \$300 million in humanitarian and reconstruction aid.ⁱⁱⁱ If the US can afford to calculate a 80 billion war on Iraq, could it not afford to be a bit more alert to its pledged commitment to Afghanistan especially since President Bush even proposed a "Marshall Plan" for Afghanistan not only to ensure recovery but prosperity.

Recent statements by the Afghan government assess that Afghanistan needs an additional \$20 billion in aid over the next 5 years to become a prospering nation becoming sustainable in 10 years.^{iv} *"Afghan officials say that 60 to 70 percent of the financial aid provided by donor nations goes to cover the expenses of the UN and NGOs. The UN has more than 4000 employees in Afghanistan, some of whom are paid up to USD 9000 a month. These UN personnel live in the best apartments and drive around in shiny new Japanese SUVs ...Because of the deteriorating economic situation many Afghans have gone back to poppy farming."*^v *"In addition, currently it pays more to be a driver (\$327-\$634) for the UN or USAID, then to be a government official such as a Minister (\$40)."*^{vi} The government institutions weaken as employees resign for other positions out of the government. This situation is expected to worsen as refugees are repatriating at a rate

faster than the internationals predict and can cope with. Unfortunately, there are now early signs that many are leaving the country as the economic situation is in shambles.

There is huge gap between the perception of the countries and organizations giving money for reconstruction and Afghans who are supposed to received it. About \$1.8 billion for 2002 in reconstruction aid has come into Afghanistan and another \$1.24 billion was approved for 2003. Of the \$1.8 billion, \$600 million was transferred to the UN, another \$600 to NGOs and about \$90 million to the Afghan government.^{vii} Still, most Afghans say they haven't seen anything tangible too change their lives.

"Afghans hear the promises. Now they're waiting for the money. In anticipation, Kabul landlords have jacked their rents sky high – a decent four-bedroom villa that rented for \$1,000 a month only year ago now commands as much as \$10,000."^{viii} These high costs and limited resources (i.e., capital and infrastructure) are creating a market inefficiency and crowding out any room for sustainable growth. It seems that most of the money is being spent on overhead expenditures.

Although post-911 Afghanistan is portrayed as a success story, tensions are mounting on the ground over the slow pace of reconstruction, which in many cases has scarcely begun. This issue even prompted the chief of the US forces in Afghanistan, General McNeill, to criticize the slow pace of Western aid flow and efforts to rebuilding Afghanistan.^{ix}

In a recent Washington Post article, President Karzai's brother, Mahmood Karzai and former Congressman Jack Kemp wrote: *"The United States is closely identified with the current situation in Afghanistan. We are afraid that by appeasing the warlords and pursuing a gradualist approach for reform, the United States is losing the support of the Afghan people ... The U.S. government should aggressively align itself with Karzai ... America's failure to give its unambiguous support to Hamid Karzai at this critical time in Afghan history could result in the question: "Who lost Afghanistan?"*^x There is no doubt America is the world's richest country. However, America also has the most to lose should Afghanistan collapse or fall back to the days preceding 911. Without a viable central government coupled with ISAF expansion and economic aid, the country will persist to be at the mercy of warlords, fanatics, drug cartels and renegade rivals turned terrorists.

ⁱ Rashid, Ahmed. (2003, January 31). Afghan warlords kill at will, says UN envoy. *The Daily Telegraph*

ⁱⁱ Rashid, Ahmed. (2003, February 10). Afghanistan torn as its neighbours resume their battle for influence. *The Daily Telegraph*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Buchanan, Michael. (2003, February 13). Afghanistan Omitted From US Aid Budget." *BBC*. 23:32 GMT

^{iv} Kaufman, Marc. (2003, April 13). U.S. Role Shifts as Afghanistan Founders. *The Washington Post*.

^v Houeidi, Fahmi. (October 23, 2002). "Chicken and egg in Afghanistan." *Al-Ahram Weekly* appeared in the *Mideast Mirror*.

^{vi} Price, N. (May 14, 2002). "U.N. Walks fine line in Afghanistan." *The Associated Press*.

^{vii} Jalali, Ali. (2003, January/February). Afghanistan in 2002. *Asian Survey*.

^{viii} Ignatieff, Michael. (July 28, 2002). "Nation-Building Lite." *The New York Times*.

^{ix} Reeves, Phil. (2003, March 23). US General: 'West is Failing Afghans.' *The Independent*.

^x Karzai, Mahmood; Wardak, Hamed; Kemp, Jack. (2003, April 7). Winning The Other War. *The Washington Post*.