

THE INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

Arthur E. Dewey
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
United States Department of State

I am honoured to have a part in the remarkable series on the Challenges of Peace Operations. It is a particular privilege to join Major General Zorlu, who commanded the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, in presenting our perspective on the Afghan success story. General Zorlu would probably agree with me that it is a story still being written. But even today in the middle of the story, I believe that we have adequate confidence in a successful conclusion.

I will discuss what I see as the ingredients of success in Afghanistan. These ingredients include:

1. Leadership arising from the international community and the Afghan people;
2. The proper and vital role of the United Nations;
3. The essential contribution of humanitarian action, including return of refugees and displaced people, to rebuilding a failed state; and,
4. The interrelationship of security, human rights, and the rule of law.

We can draw enormous encouragement from the first three. The jury is still out on the all-important number four.

Leadership

In both the United Nations, and in the Afghan Government, we have witnessed an extraordinary constellation of effective leaders. In the Afghan Government, it is President Karzai with his able Minister of Finance Ashraf Ghani. Included are emerging ministerial leaders in Rural Reconstruction and Development; Urban Development; and Refugees and Repatriation – as well as several others. Then, of course, we have had the wide experience of Ambassador Brahimi as Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The United Nations Relief and Reconstruction effort! was led with special distinction by Nigel Fisher (seconded to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) from UNICEF). And the remarkable return and repatriation of over 2.5 million refugees was led by the seasoned UNHCR field operator – Filippo Grande with his talented backup in both Kabul and Geneva. And I would like to pay special tribute today to the distinguished leadership of Major General Zorlu as Commander of the International Security Assistance Force. Rarely have we witnessed such a combination of host government, multinational, and UN leadership in both civilian and military fields. Nowhere has leadership been more needed. And nowhere has it paid greater dividends than in the case of Afghanistan.

The vital role of the United Nations.

The Afghan government and people are now involved in the reconstruction and, indeed, the reconstitution of their country. But their ability to take such initiative so early in the metamorphosis from a failed state to an emerging civil society has depended in large measure on United Nations agencies playing a vital role. How did this happen? It happened largely through the genius of Nigel Fisher in devising a model called the Programme Secretariat.

What was the Programme Secretariat mechanism?

The Programme Secretariat structure and process provided a way for the United Nations to start transferring planning and programming – and eventually budgeting – of essential public services to indigenous Afghan ministries. The United States, along with some other serious members of the United Nations, recognized early on the genius of using the United Nations in such a halfway house role to transfer responsibility and power to the leadership of the host government authority.

To be fair, the Afghan leadership, good as it was, did not immediately warm to this transitional role for the United Nations. The top leadership initially thought UN overhead was too high, and donor contributions to the UN were competing with resources that Afghan leaders wanted to go directly to their own ministries. They initially balked at international funding of high cost emergency humanitarian assistance – monies they would rather see applied to road construction and high value infrastructure projects. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, however, recognized early on the wisdom of this approach. He sent me to Kabul for an extended period a year ago to help work through this difficult transition period between provision of public services by the United Nations and assumptions of these services by the relevant Afghan ministries. We came to an understanding that significant donor funding would eventually come directly to the Afghan Trust Fund and to Afghan ministries. But while Afghan capacities, and donor confidence were being built up, it was essential to use and support the vital work of such UN agencies as UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the UN Development Programme, plus the World Bank.

The work of the Programme Secretariat, and the follow-on sectoral consultative groups, produced both one of the finest hours of the United Nations, and one of the finest examples of the vital role of the UN in transferring public service responsibilities from the international community to the appropriate ministries of a new host government. I will be so bold to say that this ringing support of multilateralism also represented one of the finest hours of the United States. It is a lesson that could have had applications in other situations. It is a lesson that we can ignore only at our peril in similar nation-building operations both in the present and in the future.

The Relationship of Humanitarian Action and Reconstruction

Now we are witness to one of the largest repatriation operations in history, with over two and a half million Afghan refugees, as well as 450,000 internally displaced persons, who have returned home since the fall of the Taliban. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that it will facilitate the return and reintegration of an additional one million Afghan refugees in 2004.

Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Abdullah reminds us that refugee/IDP returns are not distractions on the way to reconstruction. He tells us: "Refugee returns are reconstruction."

This massive return of refugees and internally displaced persons occurred because the Afghan diaspora saw a new future free of the Taliban and Al Qaeda barbarians, led by an enlightened breed of Afghan statesmen, and supported by the financial and political commitment of the international donor community. The decision of Afghan refugees to vote with their feet and go back home from Pakistan and Iran had much to do with these two realities: Afghan refugees heard and trusted that the international emergency relief and reconstruction effort was being ably administered by UN agencies and other parts of the international humanitarian community; and they trusted that donor states would stay the course, and continue to pay the high costs of both emergency relief and reconstruction.

So far, so good; but it has not been easy. It has required intensive management on an almost daily basis – for the key national and international players to hold in their hands every day what could be a fragile and loosening commitment without such intensive engagement, and given the costly humanitarian requirements in Africa and Iraq.

Even with this extraordinary combination of positive ingredients and sustained support for this vital contribution to rebuilding Afghan society – through the last two hard winters, with fragile safety nets, and dicey security conditions in many parts of the country – making such refugee and IDP returns sustainable has been a near-run thing. It was clear from the beginning of such returns that the returnees needed employment that would provide cash for them to access the local markets. To provide such employment, our Bureau at the U.S. Department of State took a page from former U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt devised an employment solution for a similar perilous time in our own country's history. This scheme put millions of people to work, and on the way to economic recovery during the great American Depression of the 1930s. He set up the Civilian Conservation Corps – an employment-generating scheme that put people to work and contributed substantially to improving the U.S. environment and infrastructure. The United States and the Afghan Government have recently launched a similar initiative in Afghanistan called the Afghan Conservation Corps (ACC).

The ACC employs refugee returnees, IDPs and other vulnerable groups to work on reforestation and soil conservation projects. A significant proportion of participants will be women. This initiative will help restore forests and other aspects of

Afghanistan's ravaged environment. And it will provide jobs for thousands – ultimately hundreds of thousands – of persons who need employment and are eager to help rebuild their country. Demobilized militia members are also ideal candidates for these jobs. Donors and the Afghan Government are working to coordinate the ACC with the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) initiative. President Karzai is personally committed to the success of the ACC. We expect he will plant the first tree for the Kabul Green Belt reforestation project in early December 2003.

The ACC, along with the National Emergency Employment Program (NEEP) are concrete examples of donor countries giving Afghans a “hand-up”, rather than a “hand-out.” And these initiatives will be key to refugee returnees being able to support themselves back in their homes, to pick up their lives again, after decades of exile from their former oppressors in Afghanistan.

The Interrelationship of Security, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law

While progress on relief and reconstruction has been fast, it is threatened by a resurgence of elements in parts of the country that seek to slow and block this forward movement. These elements are trying to plunge Afghanistan once again into violence and oppression. It is now a top priority to devise and implement a comprehensive security strategy. Such a strategy is vital to the continuation of nation-building in Afghanistan.

The overarching formula for success has been the dependence on multinationalism and multilateralism. It has been smart to use the proven UN and other international response mechanisms for as many sectors as possible. Frankly, we have run into some difficulties when we have tried to substitute unilateral donor country responsibility for multilateral competencies, in such key sectors as poppy production, police, justice, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Especially for security-related sectors such as justice, police, and human rights - where close integration of effort is required – the unilateral donor service package approach has predictably been slow to produce results.

The multilateral community has had to be creative in dealing with some of these shortcomings. For example, ethnic persecution, human rights violations and oppressive taxation by warlords and commanders forced Pashtuns from their homes in Northern Afghanistan and made it impossible for Pashtun refugees to return to their homes in the North. There were no human rights monitors, no real capacity in the fledgling Afghan Human Rights Commission. There was, and still is, no reliable police or justice system to help. So the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kabul called on President Karzai to help. Karzai sent a team to investigate, found the charges were true, and began to work with UNHCR to set up a Northern Return Commission that engaged all of the both positive and negative players to deal with this root cause of refugee movements, and threat to refugee returns.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has done its part to deal with the vacuum in the practice of international humanitarian law. The ICRC has conducted seminars and workshops with warlords and commanders that are at the root of these violations.

Other individual security efforts are beginning to show results. The United States strongly supports efforts by Germany as the lead nation in developing a competent Afghan National Police force. Germany has renovated and reopened the police academy in Kabul, and approximately 1,500 students have enrolled in officer and non-commissioned officer programs. About 1,000 police have been trained so far, with a goal of 20,000 by June 2004 (including highway patrol and border police). This effort must be accelerated

A central element of our strategy to meet the security needs of Afghanistan is to develop a nationally-acceptable Afghan National Army (ANA). This force must be multi-ethnic, disciplined, subordinate to civilian authority, adequately armed and equipped, and sustainable. France and the United States are leading the effort to train the ANA, and eleven battalions of 4,400 troops out of a planned eighteen battalions with 10,000 troops by June 2004 have been trained so far.

It is important that the ANA not be perceived by other ethnic groups as an instrument of the Panjshiri Tajiks. The recent appointment of 22 ethnically balanced leaders in the Afghan Ministry of Defense is a positive sign that President Karzai's government is serious on this point. The multilateral commitment to the ANA is demonstrated by the contributions of many donors besides the US. And France, including NCO training by the British and pledges of over \$40 million in equipment from many east European countries.

While it would be very appropriate for the ANA to develop a civil affairs component, the reality now is that the first priority must be to build an effective fighting and security force. Once this is in place, the ANA should give serious thought to the inclusion of a civil affairs component, including an engineering battalion. In this way, the ANA would win hearts and minds for the central government by identifying the government authority with projects that improve people's lives.

Among the most promising of recent security developments are the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). These are civil-military teams that include diplomatic and reconstruction aid persons on the civilian side, together with national military contingents working with ANA units on the military side. PRTs have been established in Gardez, Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamian, and Kunduz. Germany, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom each sponsor one of these teams.

The PRTs have three purposes: first, to assess local needs and facilitate the exchange of information of all players in the field to ensure that aid is well coordinated and reaches the most vulnerable; second, to foster a security environment that makes it

possible for aid to reach the needy beyond Kabul; third, to help align the central authority with local authorities, thereby raising the central government's profile throughout the country.

While the PRTs are in close communication with humanitarian workers, they do not work side by side on projects, nor do the PRTs attempt to direct humanitarian workers on the ground. The military personnel respect the humanitarian workers' need for absolute neutrality. PRT military personnel are in uniform at all times, and do not try to "pass" as humanitarian workers.

It is important for the military and civil components of this joint humanitarian reconstruction effort to be part of a comprehensive campaign plan for rebuilding Afghan society. In Afghanistan today the Afghan Government, UN agencies and the Coalition are already working closely on the PRTs' mission goals and objectives. In fact, it was President Karzai who came up with the name for the teams, because he wanted to emphasize that the focus of the PRTs' mission includes reconstruction, on an equal footing with providing security.

The PRTs are embodying this civil-military coordination in many ways. For example, to ensure that PRTs enhance the influence of the central government and its representatives in the provinces, PRTs approve reconstruction projects only with approval of provincial authorities. To cite another example, if village elders approach a PRT with a request for a small irrigation project, the PRT will consult with the local agricultural official and will conduct a tripartite assessment of the proposed project - PRT expert, provincial official, village representative – before deciding whether or not to nominate the project.

The PRTs have potential to do even more: they can facilitate the sharing of unclassified information with aid organizations. This was one of the roles of the civil affairs teams in the Balkans, and it was effective in keeping aid providers in the loop on security issues. UNAMA would be the proper vehicle for the dissemination of unclassified information from the PRTs to the aid community. This has not been utilized fully in Afghanistan, and it is not too late to correct this missing element in the PRT arsenal.

Another important initiative to increase security is the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme. DDR, with Japan in the lead, took a big step forward on 24 October 2003 with the inauguration of its first initiative in Kunduz, with a pilot project to disarm 1,000 militia members. Other DDR programmes will start soon in Gardez and Mazar-e-Sharif. DDR is an excellent opportunity to showcase civil – military coordination. The demobilized militia is offered opportunities to join cash-for-work programmes in the provinces, such as the National Solidarity Programme, and the National Emergency Employment Programme.

How did so much happen in Afghanistan in so short a time? Let us recall the four essential ingredients:

Leadership; a vital UN role; the essential contribution of humanitarian action to rebuilding a failed state; and operationalizing the synergy among security, human rights and the rule of law.

I do not use the term lessons learned, as our record of learning is not very good. I do see these four elements as vital lessons identified – lessons that we have ignored at times in the past, and will in the future ignore – only at our own peril.