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Afghanistan: the culmination of the Bonn process

The Afghan parliamentary elections of 18 September 2005 marked the final step in the political process set out in the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, which sought to establish a stable, democratic government for Afghanistan.

This paper includes an overview of historical developments up to the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. It goes on to examine the main stages of the Bonn process, before looking at the evolving security environment, the narcotics issue and the progress made with disarmament and demobilisation. A map of Afghanistan is included as an appendix.

More detail on the role of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan is provided in Library Standard Note SN/IA/2601, *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan*.

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Summary of main points

Throughout the latter part of the 20th Century, Afghanistan was wracked by political instability, civil conflict and outside intervention. Soviet forces occupied the country in 1979, but failed to defeat a determined insurgency by Mujaheddin fighters and eventually withdrew in 1989. The conflict degenerated into civil war, as rival ethnic, political and economic interests splintered the Mujaheddin coalition into competing factions.

Popular frustration at the lawlessness and corruption and the absence of peace allowed a new militant Islamist movement known as the Taliban to emerge in the south of the country. By 1996 its fighters had captured Kabul and by 2000 it had gained control of around 95 per cent of the country. Only the north-east and certain areas in the centre and west remained in the hands of the opposition Northern Alliance.

A major turning point came with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The US blamed Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network, which had established a significant presence in Afghanistan and had developed close ties to the Taliban leadership. International calls for Mr bin Laden to be handed over were rebuffed by the Taliban, and a US-led Coalition began military operations in early October. By December 2001 the Northern Alliance, backed by Coalition airpower and special forces, had driven the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies from power, although significant elements of both found sanctuary in the eastern and southern border region with Pakistan. From there, they have continued to mount guerrilla and terrorist attacks across the country.

Opposition Afghan parties reached agreement in December 2001 on an interim governing structure for the country, pending the establishment of a permanent broad-based, representative and democratically-elected government. The Bonn Agreement set out the process for drafting a new constitution and holding presidential and parliamentary elections. The constitution was agreed in January 2004 and President Hamid Karzai was elected in October of that year. The holding of parliamentary elections in September 2005 marks the formal end of the Bonn process, although it is anticipated that considerable international assistance will continue to be required to help with reconstruction and maintaining stability.

A UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is tasked with providing security around Kabul until indigenous security forces can command confidence in these tasks. ISAF has also established a presence in several provinces in the north and west of the country through its Provincial Reconstruction Teams or PRTs. More detail on ISAF and the role of British forces can be found in Library Standard Note SN/IA/2601, *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan*.

The process of reconstruction has been hampered by the continuing instability. Taliban and other anti-government elements have assassinated several senior Afghan political figures and President Karzai has survived a number of attempts on his life. Foreign civilian and military personnel have been subjected to attacks and kidnappings and there are signs that guerrilla tactics and terrorist methods from the brutal insurgency in Iraq are now spreading to Afghanistan. Other challenges include demilitarising Afghan society and reintegrating thousands of militia fighters, strengthening the authority of the central government, and combating the growth of the narcotics trade in a country that ranks as the world's largest producer of opiates.

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I Background

1. Geography and Population

The land-locked Central Asian state of Afghanistan has an area of 245,000 square miles, much of which is either sparsely populated desert or remote mountains. It is flanked to the west by Iran and to the north by the former-Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A narrow mountainous corridor to the north-east connects to China, but the longest common border is with Pakistan to the south and east.

Within Afghanistan, physical geography splits the country into two, with the high Hindu Kush mountain range dominating the centre. Communications within the country are sparse. There are two main routes north from the southern city of Kandahar: the first heads north-west to the western oasis town of Herat, and the second heads north-east to the capital, Kabul. There the road splits, continuing east over the Khyber Pass into Pakistan, or north, through the Salang Tunnel, to the border with Tajikistan. A map of the country is included in Appendix 1.

The geographical split in Afghanistan is roughly mirrored in ethnic terms. To the north of the Hindu Kush live a mixture of Persian-speaking and Turkic ethnic groups, while to the south live the majority of various Pashtun (Pathan) groups and some Persian speakers. Tajiks and Hazaras populate the central mountain region.¹ There are also strong linguistic differences: ethnic Tajiks and Hazaras speak Dari (the Afghani Persian dialect), whereas ethnic Uzbeks, Turcomans and Kyrgyz speak the Turkic languages of Central Asia. The Pashtuns speak Pashto, a blend of Indo-Persian languages. Most of the population is Sunni Muslim with the exception of the Shi'a Hazaras.

The most recent census from 1979 placed the population at about 15.5 million, although the United Nations Population Fund estimated in 2000 that it had grown to around 22.7 million. Tajiks are believed to comprise around 25 per cent of the population, with Hazaras forming 19 per cent and Uzbeks around 6 per cent. Pashtuns form the largest contingent with around 38 per cent.² Afghan Pashtuns fall into a number of different groups (for example, Durrani and Ghilzai) but still share a common ethnic identification with the sizeable Pashtun population in Pakistan.

2. History

The diversity of ethnic groups owes much to Afghanistan's history and its strategic position at the crossroads of Central Asia. In past centuries, the country straddled important east-west trade routes and its mountain passes provided transit for the armies of successive empires, including the Macedonian Greeks under Alexander the Great, the Persians and the Mongols. By the nineteenth century the country had become the focus of rivalry between the British Empire in India and the Russian Empire expanding into Central Asia – an episode that became known as the 'Great Game'. The British failed on

¹ For more detail on the ethnic balance and history of Afghanistan, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, London, 2000, pp.7-13

² Source: CIA, cited in the *Financial Times*, 28 September 2001

three occasions to conquer the country before choosing instead to co-opt the Afghans through financial assistance and subsidies. Afghanistan was effectively reduced to the position of a client state. Full formal independence from Britain occurred in 1919, although the diversity of ethnic groups and their long history of tribal autonomy hampered efforts to establish a centralised state structure and the period was punctuated by frequent revolts and assassinations.

In 1973 the royal dynasty that had ruled the country for over two centuries fell when King Zahir Shah was deposed by his brother-in-law, Mohammed Daoud. Afghanistan was declared a republic with Daoud as president and Zahir Shah fled into exile in Rome. Marxist army officers helped consolidate Daoud's position, although this process was hampered by splits between the two main communist factions known as Khalq ('the people') and Parcham ('the banner'). The situation was further complicated by the emergence of an influential Islamist movement led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masud, who were to become key players in the decades that followed.³

a. Soviet Invasion

In 1978 a bloody coup by Khalq army officers resulted in the death of Daoud and his replacement by Nur Mohammed Taraki. Violence between the rival factions – including the murder of Taraki – coincided with wider rural revolts by Islamist opponents of the communist regime.

Concern in Moscow over the deteriorating security situation and fears that Taraki's successor, Hafizullah Amin, could turn to the West for assistance led to the intervention of Soviet forces in December 1979. Amin was killed in the invasion and the Parcham leader, Babrak Karmal, was imposed in his place.

The invasion and subsequent occupation met with strong resistance from a disparate collection of Islamic Mujaheddin guerrilla groups, who were to receive significant financial and military assistance from the United States, China and Arab states. Soviet losses mounted steadily, in spite of repeated efforts to crush the Mujaheddin through the widespread deployment of mines, carpet-bombing of rebel areas and the use of scorched earth tactics. A long war of attrition ensued, with the Soviets and their allies in control of the main towns, but unable to subdue the more remote regions. By the time of the Soviet withdrawal in February 1989 the country had been devastated. An estimated 1.3 million Afghans had been killed and 4.5 million had fled abroad. Soviet losses were estimated at 15,000, with some 50,000 wounded.

³ Hikmatyar emerged as a leading Mujaheddin commander during the 1980s and now heads a small group of fighters opposed to the Karzai government and the international military presence. In the period leading up to 2001 Rabbani was the internationally recognised president of Afghanistan, and Ahmad Shah Masud, who was assassinated in September 2001, served as the military commander of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

b. Civil War

The Soviet withdrawal raised hopes of an imminent end to the conflict. Instead, fighting degenerated into civil war, as rival ethnic and political interests splintered the former anti-Soviet Mujaheddin coalition into competing factions. As a result, the pro-Moscow regime of President Najibullah was able to cling to power for a further three years after the Soviet withdrawal.

Kabul finally fell to elements of the Mujaheddin in April 1992 and a new government of the renamed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was established. An agreement was reached between the Mujaheddin leaders to introduce a rotating presidency, starting with Burhanuddin Rabbani. Disputes broke out, though, over the division of government posts and fighting flared again. There was particular concern among Pashtun leaders, who resented the hand-over of power to other ethnic groups after more than 250 years of uninterrupted Pashtun rule.

By 1994 Afghanistan had disintegrated into a patchwork of competing groups and shifting alliances. The predominantly ethnic Tajik government of President Rabbani held Kabul and the north-east of the country, while the northern provinces were under the control of the Uzbek warlord, General Rashid Dostum. Ismael Khan controlled the western provinces around Herat, and the area to the south and east of Kabul were in the hands of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar. The Hazaras controlled the central province of Bamiyan. The eastern border with Pakistan was held by a council of Mujaheddin, and the south was split between scores of ex-Mujaheddin and bandits who used their control of the roads to extort money from the cross-border trade with Pakistan.

c. Rise of the Taliban

In late 1994 a new force, the Taliban movement, emerged rapidly onto the scene in the south, first seizing control of Kandahar and then the surrounding provinces. The movement took its name (the plural of *talib*, from the Arabic for an Islamic student) from its members, many of whom were drawn from the Islamic theology schools (*madrassahs*) that had been established in Afghan refugee camps in north-eastern Pakistan during the 1980s.

The Islamist Taliban leadership presented itself as a cleansing force which would be able to rid the country of the factionalism, corruption and violence that had predominated after the Soviet withdrawal. Frustration and war-weariness among the population in the south meant the Taliban was initially well received, and its forces were able to advance rapidly, capturing nine provinces out of 30 by February 1995.

The movement received strong backing from Pakistan and its influential Inter-Service Intelligence agency (ISI), which assisted in the recruitment of members and provided weaponry, training and technical assistance.⁴ Islamabad was apparently motivated by a

⁴ For more information on the depth of Pakistani involvement in the conflict, see Sections V.C and VII.C of Library Research Paper 01/72, 11 September 2001 - *The Response*, 3 October 2005, <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2001/rp01-072.pdf>

desire for stability in Afghanistan, which was seen as a potential bridge between Pakistan and the oil and gas-rich republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The first major military test for the Taliban came around Kabul where it was confronted with the combined forces of Mr Masud, the Hazaras and Mr Dostum. The latter had previously been an ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance to his northern neighbour, Mr Masud, to help preserve his own power base. A series of setbacks around Kabul led the Taliban to refocus its efforts on the western city of Herat, which duly fell in September 1995. A year later a Taliban assault to the east of Kabul outflanked Mr Masud's forces, allowing Taliban fighters to capture the capital and forcing the government of President Rabbani to flee.

The anticipated international recognition of the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan was not forthcoming, perhaps due in part to the Taliban's brutal execution of former president Najibullah, who had been sheltering in the UN compound in Kabul, and broader concerns about its human rights record and its strict interpretation of Islam. Those caught violating its decrees by the religious police were often subject to 'punishment' in the form of lashings, bodily mutilation or execution.⁵ Women were particularly affected by a prohibition on working outside the home,⁶ a ban on girls attending school, and the enforcement of a stringent dress code that called for them to wear the *burqa*, an all-enveloping robe, when in public.

On the military front the Taliban suffered further setbacks during 1996-97, most notably around the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. The defection of a large part of General Dostum's forces allowed the Taliban to seize control of the city, forcing the General to flee to Turkey. Observers anticipated the imminent demise of the Northern Alliance, but as the Taliban sought to impose control and disarm the defecting troops, fierce fighting broke out and it was forced to retreat in disarray, losing many men in the process.

The frontline stabilised over the following twelve months, despite further Taliban offensives and reports of internal disputes on both sides. The return of General Dostum from exile led to fighting between rival Uzbek and Shi'a factions around Mazar-e-Sharif, and there was a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation in central Afghanistan as the Taliban mounted a blockade of the Hazaras.

The spring of 1998 saw renewed advances by the Taliban, as Mazar, Kunduz and Taloqan fell, leaving the movement in control of 95 per cent of the country. Observers noted an increase in the number of highly trained and motivated foreign fighters in the Taliban's ranks, rising to between a fifth and a quarter of its 45,000 troops by 2000. Fighters were drawn from across the Middle East, Uzbekistan and the Russian Caucasus. Much of the Arab contingent was reported to be affiliated to Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network, which had established a number of training camps in

⁵ See for example: 'Flagrant Abuse of the Right to Life and Dignity', *ASA 11/3/98*, April 1998, *AI Report 1997: Afghanistan*, and 'Women in Afghanistan: the violations continue', *Amnesty International Report ASA 11/05/97*, June 1997

⁶ With the exception of certain health care jobs, where females were required to ensure separation of the sexes.

the country, primarily for normal front-line combat, but some dedicated to teaching terrorist techniques.

The presence of Mr bin Laden and his growing influence within the Taliban leadership attracted international interest, particularly following the al-Qaeda bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. The United States responded to the bombings by launching cruise missile strikes against suspected al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. In 1999 and 2000 the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on the Taliban for refusing to hand over Mr bin Laden for trial abroad.

d. *The overthrow of the Taliban*

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington of 11 September 2001, there was a dramatic increase in the international pressure on the Taliban to sever its ties with Mr bin Laden. Its refusal to comply led the US and a Coalition of other states to initiate military action, which began on 7 October. By early November US special forces, operating alongside the Northern Alliance, were coordinating intensive airstrikes against Taliban positions, allowing the Alliance to make major advances around Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul. The capital fell on 13 November and Kandahar surrendered on 7 December.

The coalition's focus then switched to the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces that had retreated to the eastern border with Pakistan around the Tora Bora cave complex. Heavy bombing and advances by Afghan forces secured the area, but only after significant al-Qaeda elements had slipped away into Pakistan. Osama bin Laden, who was believed to have been present at Tora Bora, also eluded capture.

II Bonn Process

1. Bonn Agreement (December 2001)

As the Taliban's powerbase collapsed, attention turned to politics and the task of creating a representative and democratically-elected government to govern the country. The key phrase that emerged in this context was the need for a 'broad-based government' that reflected the various ethnic, political and religious factors within Afghan society and the extensive exile community.

A meeting of Afghan political leaders was organised by the UN in Bonn in late November 2001, culminating on 5 December in the signing of an agreement that set out the step-by-step transition towards increasingly legitimate power structures, culminating in the establishment of a fully representative and freely elected government. The UN Security Council endorsed the outcome the following day in Resolution 1383 (2001).

Under the Bonn Agreement,⁷ the parties agreed to establish an Interim Authority comprising three main bodies: a 30-member Interim Administration headed by Chairman Hamid Karzai, a moderate Pashtun, which took power on 22 December; an independent Supreme Court; and a Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga (a traditional meeting of Afghan tribal, political and religious leaders). The timetable for the political transition was then set out as follows:

- An Emergency Loya Jirga was to be convened within six months to decide on a broad-based Transitional Authority and to elect a Head of State for the Transitional Administration. The Authority was to govern until a "fully representative government" could be elected through "free and fair elections,"⁸ no later than two years from the date of convening the Emergency Loya Jirga.
- A Constitutional Loya Jirga was to be convened within 18 months of the establishment of the Transitional Authority, with the task of drafting a new constitution.

The Agreement also committed the Interim Authority to cooperate with the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs and organised crime. The Interim Authority and the Emergency Loya Jirga were also required to act in accordance with Afghanistan's obligations on human rights and humanitarian law, to ensure the participation of women and to ensure the equitable representation of all ethnic and religious groups.

At an International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance for Afghanistan, held in Tokyo in January 2002, over \$4.5 billion was pledged by the international community. Support for the political process and for reconstruction was provided by the United

⁷ Full title: *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*, 5 December 2001, annexed to letter from UN Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council, S/2001/1154, 5 December 2001. The text of the agreement is reproduced in Appendix 1 of Library Research Paper RP01/112, *The Campaign against International Terrorism: prospects after the fall of the Taliban*, 11 December 2001.

⁸ Bonn Agreement, section I, 4

Nations through its Assistance Mission (UNAMA) and by various countries, some of which pledged to take the lead on particular issues. The UK was designated lead nation for counter-narcotics, while the Germans and Italians took responsibility for overseeing police and judicial reform respectively.

2. Emergency Loya Jirga (June 2002)

The Emergency Loya Jirga, which was attended by around 2,000 people, took place between 12 and 19 June 2002, following extensive preparations and country-wide consultations. At the conclusion, Hamid Karzai was confirmed as President of the Transitional Administration, to serve as the transitional Head of State. His nominees for key posts in the administration were also approved by the Jirga, with the defence and foreign affairs portfolios staying with the mainly Tajik Northern Alliance, while the Interior Ministry went to an ethnic Pashtun regional governor. Defence minister, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, was also given one of three vice-presidential posts, prompting warnings from some delegates about the risks of creating a government dominated by the leaders of the main armed factions.

3. New Constitution (January 2004)

By November 2002 a nine-member Constitutional Drafting Commission had been established to start work on a new constitution. Drafting and review work continued during 2003 ahead of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, which concluded on 4 January 2004 with near unanimous agreement among the 502 delegates.⁹

The resulting constitution envisages a strongly presidential system, with a degree of parliamentary oversight from the bicameral national assembly comprised of a lower house (Wolesi Jirga or "house of people") and upper house (Meshrano Jirga or "house of elders"). The president and the lower house are directly elected, whereas the upper house will be a mix of indirectly elected and appointed members.¹⁰ The Wolesi Jirga has to approve the President's appointment of attorney general, central bank governor and ministers, and has the power to impeach the latter.

The constitution defines Afghanistan as an Islamic republic with Islam as its "sacred religion" and provides a framework for the establishment of the rule of law, consistent with the "beliefs and prescriptions" of Islam. For the first time in the country's constitutional history, the definition of the nation explicitly includes all minority groups. It also enshrines equality of men and women and promotes women's political participation by guaranteeing that at least 25 per cent of the representatives of the lower house will be female.

⁹ The full text of the constitution can be accessed online at:

http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_Loya-Jirga/CLJ/Translation%20of%20the%20Constitution%20May%2030.doc

¹⁰ Details of the relationship between the Meshrano Jirga and the Provincial Councils in Afghanistan's 34 provinces can be found in the UNAMA factsheet online at: http://www.unama-afg.org/news/_parelection/_factsheets/_english/JEMBS%20PO%20FS%20The%20Meshrano%20Jirga%20final%202005-4-1%20eng.pdf

4. Presidential elections (9 October 2004)

The original timetable set out in the Bonn Agreement called for elections to be held by June 2004, two years after the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga. In the event, legal and technical difficulties and security considerations resulted in a delay of a few months for the presidential vote, which took place on 9 October 2004. The parliamentary election was delayed further until 18 September 2005.

The UN reported that 8.1 million ballots had been cast, representing 70 per cent of registered voters. 40 per cent of voters were women. Around three quarters of a million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran also participated. Hamid Karzai won the election with 55.4 per cent of the vote, significantly ahead of his closest challengers, the ethnic Tajik Yunus Qanuni (16.3 per cent), the ethnic Hazara Mohammed Mohaqiq (11.6 per cent), and the ethnic Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostum (10 per cent). The remaining 14 candidates each received less than two per cent of the vote.

No major security incidents occurred during the presidential campaign or on the day of the poll itself, despite fears that anti-government elements would use violence to disrupt proceedings.

Concerns were expressed, though, about the integrity of the vote, prompting some of the candidates to call for a boycott. The alleged irregularities related to the use of indelible ink to mark voters' thumbs, which proved to be less permanent than envisaged, and assertions that voters had been subjected to undue pressure from polling staff and candidates' representatives. An independent panel of international electoral experts was nominated by the UN to investigate the complaints. It concluded in early November that the irregularities had not had a material impact on the outcome of the overall election.

According to UNAMA, ethnic identity remained an important consideration for voters:

Electoral support for the four main contenders, President Karzai, Mr. Qanooni, Mr. Dostum and Mr. Mohaqeq, strongly correlated with the rural areas where Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras are, respectively, the majority groups. Ethnic considerations, however, appeared to have had less impact in major cities. This may be attributable to the fact that, since ethnic identity was not exploited aggressively during the campaign, candidates were able to operate widely in capitals outside their core constituencies.¹¹

5. Parliamentary and provincial council elections (18 September 2005)

Logistical challenges, security concerns and bureaucratic changes led to the postponement of the parliamentary and provincial council elections from June 2004 to the spring of 2005 and then again to September.¹² The delays caused some concern, not least because President Karzai had been governing by decree for almost a year

¹¹ UNAMA website: http://www.unama-afg.org/about/_pa/political_affairs.htm

¹² For an examination of the delays, see *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?*, International Crisis Group Asia Report N°101, 21 July 2005, p.4, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

without any multi-ethnic institutional balance to executive rule. The International Crisis Group commented in July 2005 that:

The National Assembly will provide a much-needed constitutional check on the executive headed by President Hamid Karzai that has held power for three and a half years under interim and transitional arrangements. It should also offer a national forum to a wide range of decisionmakers. While Karzai won a clear majority in the 2004 October presidential poll, a truly representative body is vital in a country still emerging from years of turmoil caused and exacerbated by ethnic, sectarian and regional divides. Speeding up the country's lagging legislative program should be a further objective, one neglected by previous, nominal assemblies.¹³

The London-based think-tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), warned in May 2005 that the postponements had increased the sense of exclusion among ethnic groups who felt they had lost power and influence after the fall of the Taliban, particular among those who had played a dominant role within the Northern Alliance.¹⁴

Under the revised timetable agreed in March, the parliamentary and provincial council elections took place on 18 September 2005, although planned district council elections were postponed further due to problems with district numbers, boundaries and population figures.

Security for the election was provided by Afghan national army and police, backed by a reinforced contingent of international troops assisting with security in Kabul and around the country. Pakistan also bolstered its troop presence along the joint border to prevent infiltration by anti-government forces.

Seven candidates and a number of election workers were killed during the campaign and several others survived assassination attempts. Scattered violence occurred on the day of the election, resulting in the death of at least 12 people. There were attacks on 19 polling stations and a rocket attack on a UN compound in Kabul, although observers noted a sense of relief that worse had not occurred.

A number of candidates were attacked or killed after the election, leading some observers to suspect foul play on the part of other candidates lower down the list who would move up the list if those above them were unable to take their place in parliament.¹⁵ *The Times* commented shortly before the election that this so-called assassination clause "was blamed for a rash of assassinations in Cambodia after elections there in 1991, the last time such a rule was used."¹⁶

¹³ *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?*, International Crisis Group Asia Report N°101, 21 July 2005, p.1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

¹⁴ 'Afghanistan and the New Central Asian Security Complex', *IISS Strategic Survey 2004/05*, p.337

¹⁵ See for example, 'Woman activist headed for Afghan parliament', *Agence France Presse*, 6 October 2005

¹⁶ 'Officials fear sore election losers will resort to violence', *The Times*, 17 September 2005

For the parliamentary election, the first in more than 30 years, the electorate voted by secret ballot to choose the membership of the 249-seat lower house, the Wolesi Jirga (House of the People) for a five-year term. Around 12 million people registered to vote and 5,800 candidates stood for election, including 580 women.

Under the single non-transferable vote system, voters received two separate ballot papers – for parliament and the provincial councils – to choose a single preferred candidate in both. Each of the country's 34 provinces forms an electoral constituency. The number of members each province returns depends on the size of its population. Therefore, the populous Kabul province has 33 seats, so the 33 candidates with the most votes in that constituency will get into parliament. The three smallest provinces - Nuristan, Nimroz and Panjsher - have two each. There were complaints from some, notably the Hazaras, about the allocation of seats, the absence of accurate census information and the perceived dominance of Kabul.¹⁷

The Provincial Councils have between nine and 29 members, depending on population. Women are guaranteed at least 68 seats in the lower house and at least two seats on each provincial council.

The 102 members of the upper house, the Meshrano Jirga, are indirectly elected. One third – one member per province – will be elected from amongst the provincial council members by an absolute majority. Another 34 members will be elected by the district councils and the remaining third will be appointed by the president. The upper house will initially be convened with fewer members, pending the outcome of the postponed district elections.¹⁸

A preliminary assessment by a European Union Election Observation Mission characterised the elections as largely peaceful and generally well administered. It highlighted a number of positive elements, including the wide choice of candidates from a variety of ethnic, social and political backgrounds, the high number of women who registered as candidates and participated as voters, and the role of civil society in providing domestic observers. It also flagged a series of concerns, such as the poor security situation and the numerous reports of intimidation and violence against candidates and election workers, the unwieldy length of some of the ballot papers, and the lack of election coverage in the mass media.¹⁹

Instances of ballot box stuffing led to the exclusion of around 300 polling stations (representing one per cent of the total), although officials said there had been no systematic fraud.²⁰ Voter turnout was just over 50 per cent, a drop of more than 20 per

¹⁷ For further details, see *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?*, International Crisis Group Asia Report N°101, 21 July 2005, pp.7-8, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

¹⁸ *Afghanistan: Guide to parliamentary and provincial elections 18 Sep 05*, BBC Monitoring Election Guide, 22 August 2005

¹⁹ Afghanistan: EU Election Observation Mission Preliminary Statement, 19 September 2005, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/afghanistan/prelim_s_tatement.pdf

²⁰ For details of the preliminary results, see 'Afghan initial poll winners named', BBC News Online, 6 October 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4310864.stm. Full results can be found on the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) website at <http://www.results.jemb.org/home.asp>.

cent from the presidential election the year before. Provisional results suggested that female candidates had performed well in the parliamentary elections, and that many would have still won seats without the constitutional guarantee that reserves 68 lower house seats for women.

Seventeen candidates were excluded during the pre-election vetting process, which sought to ensure that those accused of involvement in war crimes, gang activities and the drug trade could not stand. Nonetheless, concerns were expressed in the Afghan media that several prominent commanders and party leaders with links to armed groups had still been able to stand. Press reports on 24 October claimed the provisional results showed that “former mujahideen fighters, ex-Taliban and others with a conservative agenda” had won more than half the seats,²¹ although the processing of complaints and challenges meant the final results were not expected until the end of the month.

6. After Bonn

As the Bonn process draws to a close, attention has turned to how the new institutions will work together to address the many challenges facing the country. The UN Secretary-General commented in his report of 12 August 2005 that:

Although significant gains have been made in meeting the objectives of the political agenda, the implementation of the institutional agenda of the Bonn Agreement has been uneven across sectors. Institution-building continues to be a challenge. Many critical State institutions at both the national and provincial levels remain weak and susceptible to corruption.²²

Some observers argue that too much power has been placed in the hands of the president and that the limited role for political parties could prove problematic in the future. President Karzai has declined to join or endorse a party and party symbols were not permitted on the ballot papers for the September parliamentary elections. The International Crisis Group commented in July 2005 that:

Little in the way of physical infrastructure or political space has been prepared for the new representative institutions. The government has built a hostile environment for political parties, including electoral laws and decrees that render such groupings all but obsolete.²³

The use of the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system has come under particular scrutiny, with some fearing it will either allow a few well organised regional or ethnic parties to exercise disproportionate influence, or will lead to a fragmented National Assembly unable to provide a balance the power of the president.

²¹ ‘Women fare unexpectedly well in Afghan polls’, *Financial Times*, 24 October 2005

²² *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, S/2005/525, 12 August 2005

²³ *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?*, International Crisis Group Asia Report N°101, 21 July 2005, p.3, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

The International Crisis Group argued in June that:

SNTV is ill suited for a country like Afghanistan that lacks well-organised political parties. Under it, party leaders must be able to educate their supporters in each contested region on how to allocate votes among candidates in the most effective manner or the party risks obtaining more votes than needed for some candidates and too few for others. A party could easily gain a very different number of parliamentary seats than its percentage of the vote might suggest it deserved. The Karzai administration has justified its support for SNTV on a number of grounds. It argues that it will prevent large regional or ethnic parties or parties associated with violence, illegal militias or the drug trade from entering and controlling the parliament through bribery and coercion, that votes can be counted more easily, and that it would also be easier to convey election results to a largely rural and uneducated population. Yet, President Karzai's support for a system that disadvantages parties probably cannot be separated from his attitude toward parties, which, despite his rhetoric, sources close to him say, he views as a cause of Afghanistan's wars and instability.

Some party activists and officials, however, believe Karzai's stance can be attributed more to rising domestic dissatisfaction with his performance, particularly in his home base, Kandahar. A member of an opposition political party there argued, "Karzai is playing politics with the election system to prevent signs of discontent with his presidency, especially in his traditional areas of support". According to an official, "Karzai does not want to see the creation of Pashtun protest parties in his home province". An observer added that if Karzai were to "form his own party, and it does not perform well here [Kandahar], meaning it does not win an outright majority", it would be evidence of "his weakness and lack of support" and thus strengthen his political opposition.²⁴

The ICG concluded that:

A sustainable democratic transition in Afghanistan needs more than elections. An elected parliament will certainly help but ultimate success depends just as much on expanding and sustaining an institutional framework for democratic functioning. For this, strong, vibrant political parties are an essential precondition. Healthy political parties can make parliament more democratic and government more responsive, thus preventing a return to autocracy.

Political parties were not the cause of Afghanistan's instability. The country suffered decades of civil war because ruling elites refused to share power and to accept political opposition as legitimate. The failure to legitimise political party functioning only served to distort political development but the country now has the chance -- with donor support -- to break decisively with its past. [...]²⁵

²⁴ *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, International Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°39, 2 June 2005, p.6, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.12-13

The Economist commented in late September 2005 that:

Quite what [the election] will produce is unclear. Though shorn of parties, the parliament is likely to coalesce into three blocks: supporters of Mr Karzai; supporters of his main opponent at last year's election, Yunus Qanuni; and a large and shifting rabble open to persuasion by either side. Whether it succeeds in ruling on the 200-odd decrees Mr Karzai has issued since his election, within 30 days of meeting, as the constitution seems to say it must, should reveal much about its loyalties.²⁶

Several observers have expressed concern about the potential for further violence in the aftermath of the election. The International Crisis Group warned in July 2005 that:

With multiple provincial contests, these elections may well see an increase in factional violence as local power structures are challenged and, in some cases, long-term rivals put in direct competition. Much of this could take place after the announcement of results as the new political landscape creates winners and losers.²⁷

These concerns were echoed in a report from *The Times* shortly before the election:

The failure of former and current Taleban allies at the polls could [...] encourage a return to the insurgency by those who had given up the fight. "Right now, almost everyone has some stake in these elections, so they are all waiting to see who wins," a Western diplomat said. "If they don't get what they want, that's when you'll see them go back to their guns."²⁸

There has been much discussion of the need for continued international involvement to safeguard the progress made. At a meeting of G8 foreign ministers in June 2005 four commitments were made with respect to Afghanistan:

2005-1: We are committed to supporting the Government and people of Afghanistan as they work to build on their achievements, to underpin their freedom and enhance their security, to complete the transition to the rule of law, to accelerate the pace and scope of human and economic development, and to eliminate dependence on the illicit drugs economy.

2005-2: We will work closely with the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations to help diminish the threat these groups pose to the political process, including to the forthcoming elections, to security sector reform and to our efforts to eliminate the production, processing and trade of narcotics.

2005-3: As G8 members, we will work to reinforce efforts to enhance the rule of law and human rights, with particular regard to judicial and police capacity and public administration, especially at provincial level.

2005-4: We will continue our support to Afghanistan's development effort, to achieve pro-poor growth through rebuilding infrastructure, developing human and institutional capacity and community based development.²⁹

²⁶ 'Democracy, sort of', *The Economist*, 24 September 2005

²⁷ Executive Summary from *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?*, International Crisis Group Asia Report N°101, 21 July 2005, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3579&l=1>

²⁸ 'Officials fear sore election losers will resort to violence', *The Times*, 17 September 2005

²⁹ G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting Statement on Afghanistan, London, 23 June 2005

III Security Challenges

1. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

In addition to the various political elements, the Bonn Agreement called for the deployment of an international force to help stabilise the country and to assist with the establishment of indigenous security forces.³⁰

Under UN Security Council Resolution 1386 of 20 December 2001 a 5,000-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was mandated to deploy to Kabul and its environs, to work closely with the United Nations and the Afghan interim administration in achieving three principal tasks:

- aiding the interim government in developing national security structures;
- assisting the country's reconstruction; and
- assisting in the development and training of future Afghan security forces.

The role of lead nation in ISAF initially fell to the United Kingdom, followed by Turkey. Since August 2003 the force has come under the command of NATO and has been bolstered by a renewed and expanded UN mandate. In October 2003 the UN Security Council approved the expansion of the mission's area of operations beyond Kabul,³¹ which NATO has sought to achieve through the deployment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to key cities around the country. The Alliance has also undertaken periodic reinforcements of up to 3,500 extra troops in support of the presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2004 and September 2005.³² The ISAF mandate was renewed by the Security Council for a further year on 13 September 2005.³³

2. Provincial Reconstruction Teams

PRTs were initially set up under national control as a means of expanding the international community's presence outside Kabul. The teams comprise both military and civilian personnel and are tasked with assisting the local Afghan authorities with reconstruction and regeneration projects as well as assisting in the maintenance of security. As the IISS reported in May 2005, PRTs have become increasingly multifunctional since their inception,

providing basic security, directing civil reconstruction projects, brokering ceasefires between rival factions, assisting with the organisation of election security and overseeing aspects of the [Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration] process.³⁴

³⁰ More detail on ISAF and the British military contribution can be found in Library Standard Note SN/IA/2601, *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan*, by Claire Taylor.

³¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1510, 13 October 2003

³² 2,000 extra troops were deployed as part of ISAF for the parliamentary elections, bringing the total force to 10,000.

³³ UN Security Council Resolution 1623, 13 September 2005

³⁴ 'Afghanistan and the New Central Asian Security Complex', *IISS Strategic Survey 2004/05*, p.336

As a pilot project for the first stage of expansion, NATO assumed command of the military component of a German-run PRT at Kunduz in the north.³⁵ This was followed in mid-2004 with an undertaking to take command of four other northern PRTs at Mazar-e-Sharif and Meymana (both run by the UK), Feyzabad (by Germany) and Baghlan (run by the Netherlands). Three temporary satellite presences were established at Sar-e-Pol, Samangan and Sherberghan.

The second phase of expansion into western Afghanistan was agreed in February 2005, leading NATO to take control of two existing US-run PRTs at Herat and Farah, and to establish two further teams at Chaghcharan in Ghor province and Qal'eh-Naw in Baghdis province. All four were declared fully operational in mid-September 2005.³⁶ NATO also runs two logistics hubs, or Forward Support Bases, at Mazar and Herat, and officials claim the expansion has doubled the territory covered by ISAF to approximately 50 per cent of the country. Critics contend, though, that the nine existing PRTs can offer only a limited presence in a country the size of Afghanistan.

NATO confirmed during the first half of 2005 that planning would begin for a third phase of expansion into the south of the country, where Coalition forces have been conducting combat operations against Taliban forces seeking to disrupt the political process and hinder reconstruction. As part of that expansion, NATO has said the number of troops would rise to 15,000 personnel.

3. Operations in the South

As the main Coalition combat phase drew to a close in late 2001, the Taliban and al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan became increasingly isolated in the eastern and southern border provinces. The Taliban leadership called on its fighters to switch to guerrilla tactics to expel the foreign troop presence, disrupt the reconstruction process, and bring down the fledgling Afghan interim administration. When in power the movement was a somewhat fragmented coalition and some elements have since turned away from violence in favour of joining the political process, while other more committed members have continued to resist.

The Coalition forces operating in the southern and eastern areas, known as Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan (CFCA), have mounted several operations against significant concentrations of insurgent fighters, most notably during Operation Anaconda in March 2002. These have hampered efforts by the Taliban to regroup as a large-scale coherent force, although kidnappings of foreign nationals and guerrilla-style attacks against foreign troops and aid workers have continued.

President Karzai narrowly escaped assassination in 2002 and 2004, but other leading figures have been less fortunate: Civil Aviation Minister Abdul Rahman died in February 2002 and later that year Vice-President Haji Abdul Qadir was shot dead by unknown gunmen. Several other plots to kill ministers have reportedly been foiled.

³⁵ Only the military elements of PRTs are integrated in the ISAF chain of command.

³⁶ NATO Press Release, 15 September 2005

The IISS concluded in its *Strategic Survey* for 2004-2005 that:

The Taliban proved incapable of mounting a sustained offensive in summer 2004 and was confined to conducting 'pinprick' attacks on soft targets such as schools, foreign aid workers and local election officials. The attempted assassination on 20 January 2005 of General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek militia commander from Mazar-e Sharif, indicates that isolated, and potentially damaging, operations can still be organised, but the disregard shown by ordinary Afghans to Taliban threats to kill voters participating in the October 2004 presidential election also signifies that the movement is a force of diminishing political salience in Afghanistan. [...]

The remaining active Taliban fighters in the field appear to be boxed in remote mountainous areas, detached from their natural constituency of support, and thus unable either to exercise ideological leverage or to compete with the material incentives offered by the Afghan government and international donors.³⁷

The Afghan Government and its international allies have sought to isolate the more militant Taliban leadership by offering amnesties to all but the 100 or so most senior figures. Small groups of fighters have reportedly given themselves up, but no mass defections have taken place thus far. Commentators place the number of active Taliban fighters at around 2,000, along with several hundred fighters allied to the militant leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin faction, which has declared similar aims to the Taliban.³⁸

More than 1,200 people are believed to have died in violence during the first nine months of 2005 and there are signs that some of the sophisticated techniques and methods used to devastating effect by insurgent forces in Iraq are now being transferred to Afghanistan. In June 2005 a suicide bomb attack on a mosque in Kandahar left 20 people dead and further suicide attacks took place during early October. On 11 October suspected Taliban fighters ambushed an Afghan police convoy, killing at least 19 officers. ISAF has also reported an increase in the number and sophistication of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which are often set beside roads and detonated as patrols and resupply convoys pass.

4. An expanded role for NATO?

As the Bonn process reaches its conclusion, the challenges facing Afghanistan continue to evolve. A senior US official told the *Financial Times* in June 2005 that:

Last year (2004), I would have told the order of concern for security in Afghanistan was: Taliban, al-Qaeda, warlords, drugs. This year I'd say, in 2006 it's going to be: drugs, warlords, al-Qaeda, Taliban.³⁹

³⁷ 'Afghanistan and the New Central Asian Security Complex', *IISS Strategic Survey 2004/05*, p.333

³⁸ According to the British Government, which designated HIG as a proscribed terrorist organisation in mid-October 2005, the group desires the creation of a fundamentalist Islamic State in Afghanistan and is anti-Western." Source: Draft SI, *Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism, The Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2005*

³⁹ 'UK warned of 'mission creep' in drugs war', *Financial Times*, 6 June 2005

The view that the relative significance of al-Qaeda and the Taliban is declining is shared by President Karzai, who believes that “the nature of the war on terror in Afghanistan” had changed. He said in September 2005 that:

Afghanistan now has a constitution, a president, a parliament and a nation fully participating in its destiny. We do not think there is a serious terrorism challenge emanating in Afghanistan.⁴⁰

He concluded, therefore: “I don't think there is a big need for military activity in Afghanistan any more”, adding that the use of air power “may not be very effective now” and that the unpopular practice of house searches by US-led troops should be permitted only with the authorisation of the Afghan government.⁴¹ He expressed similar concerns in May 2005 following reports of abuse of Afghan detainees by US forces, saying he feared popular resentment was building against the international military presence, and the US in particular.

The US has indicated a desire to withdraw some of its 20,000 troops based in Afghanistan, as NATO expands its PRT operations in the south. In the longer term, Washington has suggested that ISAF and the counter-insurgency operations be integrated under a single NATO command, although the mechanics for achieving that are proving contentious.

Several NATO members, including France, Germany and Spain, have expressed concerns over the potential use of ISAF troops in combat situations rather than peacekeeping. Indeed, France has indicated that it would consider vetoing any integration of US-led forces and NATO-led forces under one command. Discussions on integration are expected to continue during the latter part of 2005. One option would be to maintain both operations in parallel within a single overarching command structure. This would allow ISAF's mandate to remain unchanged, although revisions to the Rules of Engagement would still have to be addressed.⁴²

5. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process (DDR), which forms part of the UN's Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme, is designed to reduce the militarisation of Afghan society after decades of conflict, and to build the capacity and competence of the Afghan security apparatus.

In August 2005 the UN Secretary-General reported that the Afghan National Army had increased in strength to around 24,000 and was expected to reach its target strength of 43,000 by September 2007, three years ahead of schedule.⁴³ 62,000 police officers are

⁴⁰ BBC News Online, 20 September 2005

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Updates on the expansion of ISAF can be found in Section E of Library Standard Note SN/IA/2601, *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan*, by Claire Taylor.

⁴³ *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan*, S/2005/525, 12 August 2005, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5692831.html>

due to be trained by the end of 2005 and funding for major police reform has been proposed.

During 2004 and 2005 heavy weaponry (i.e. tanks and artillery) from the various armed factions has been moved to special government-controlled sites, and some of the weaponry will eventually be used to equip the army. As a result of this cantonment, NATO reported in September 2005 that:

the regions of Jalalabad, Kandahar, Gardez, Herat, Parwan, Konduz, Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamyan and Kabul are now free of all working or repairable heavy weapons.

In total, 7,360 heavy weapons (operational and repairable) have been cantoned in sites that are under the control of the Afghan National Army. They remain the property of the [Afghan] Ministry of Defence.⁴⁴

The proliferation of small arms has posed a greater challenge, partly due to the reluctance of local commanders and political leaders with private armed groups to relinquish one of their main sources of power. Nonetheless, the presidential and parliamentary elections have proved significant in this regard, encouraging some potential candidates to cooperate with the disarmament process so as to ensure their participation in the ballot.⁴⁵

The focus of DDR has been on disarming the various recognised armed groups that had previously been on the government's payroll. A UN press release from early October 2005 declared that:

With the disarmament and demobilisation phases completed, the [...] Programme is now focussing on the reintegration of ex-combatants. Since the inception of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme in October 2003, 63,000 ex-combatants have disarmed and over 60,000 (60,646) of them have entered or completed the reintegration phase.⁴⁶

An additional programme, known as DIAG or the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups, was introduced in mid-2005 to tackle the other militias that fall outside the remit of DDR. ISAF is assisting the Afghan government with the programme, under which an estimated 120,000 illegal armed men are to be disarmed and returned to civilian life.⁴⁷ The UN reported that by early October 2005 around 11,000 weapons had been handed in, along with 19,000 boxed and 36,000 unboxed rounds of ammunition.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ NATO in Afghanistan – Press Factsheet, last updated 13 September 2005, <http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/050816-factsheet.htm>

⁴⁵ The Afghan Disarmament and Reintegration Commission reported in mid-October that 4,857 weapons had been handed over by 124 candidates. D&R Commission Joint Secretariat press release, 22 October 2005

⁴⁶ Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme Press Statement, 4 October 2005

⁴⁷ NATO in Afghanistan – Press Factsheet, last updated 13 September 2005, <http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/050816-factsheet.htm>

⁴⁸ UNDP/ANBP press release, 10 October 2005

The programme will continue through until July/August 2006, with the aim of collecting arms from known commanders and government officials, as well as collecting weaponry at a district level. According to the vice-chairman of the government's disarmament and reintegration commission:

- a. First priority will go to districts where there are armed conflicts related to Osher [land taxation] as well as other illegal taxes, leaving innocent people killed and wounded.
- b. Second priority will go to districts and areas, where there is narcotic smuggling and other related activities, and where illegal armed groups and narcotic smugglers cooperate and support each other. A lot of complaints have arisen from these areas (...)
- c. Finally, districts where there is low governance, weak rule of law and where the local district governor, the chief of police or the judges are less powerful than the illegal armed groups. Addressing the issue of weapons collection in these districts will help building capacity.⁴⁹

6. Narcotics

a. *Scale of the problem*

Afghanistan is the main producer of opium and its derivatives, accounting for 87 per cent of the world's supply in 2005 (up from 76 per cent in 2003). The country is believed to be the source of around 90 per cent of heroin trafficked into Europe and 95 per cent of heroin entering the UK.

Between 1994 and 2003 the area under opium poppy cultivation generally fluctuated between 54,000 hectares and 91,000 hectares. 2001 saw a dramatic decline to 8,000 hectares after the Taliban imposed a prohibition on opium cultivation, although the figures returned to their previous levels over the following years with 74,000 and 80,000 hectares brought under cultivation in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

For 2004 the area under cultivation increased by 64 per cent, to a record level of 131,000 hectares. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported in its *Opium Survey 2004* that opium production was increasingly encroaching on previously unaffected areas and had spread from 18 provinces in 1999 to all 32 provinces during 2004.⁵⁰ The number of families involved in opium production rose by 35 per cent from 2003 and was estimated at 356,000 families (around 2.3 million persons or 10 per cent of the total population).

The bulk of production during 2004 remained concentrated in six provinces, which alone accounted for around 72 per cent of total cultivation.⁵¹ Furthermore, the increase in cultivation area was not matched by a comparable rise in the total production, which was

⁴⁹ Press Conference on DIAG main phase launching, UNDP/ANBP, 13 October 2005

⁵⁰ The number of provinces was increased in mid-2004 from 32 to 34.

⁵¹ The three provinces most affected being Hilmand (29,400 ha), Nangarhar (28,200 ha), and Badakhshan (15,600 ha), followed by Uruzgan, Ghor and Kandahar.

estimated at around 4,200 metric tons, an increase of around 17 per cent over 2003. The reason for the relatively low opium yield per hectare could be attributed to unfavourable weather, higher incidents of disease and parasites, and the fact that some farmers new to opium had tried to grow the crop in unsuitable conditions.

The gross income from poppy cultivation per hectare for 2004 amounted to US\$4,600, down 64 per cent from the year before, but still almost 12 times higher than the gross income a farmer could expect from one hectare of wheat (US\$390). Estimates of net income were not available, although the expense involved with poppy cultivation is generally high due to the costs of labour, fertiliser and seed and the taxes and bribes imposed by those further up the chain of command.

The various political and security challenges facing the country during the first two years after the fall of the Taliban ensured that narcotics and other issues received less attention than might otherwise have been the case. In several instances the central government's need to bolster its authority in the provinces and the US-led coalition's campaign against the Taliban has led to a reliance on regional commanders and militias believed to be closely involved in the drugs trade.⁵²

The UNODC argued in its 2004 report that:

With the Afghan nation struggling to ensure a democratic election and coalition forces working to establish a secure situation on the ground, the narcotic question was not given the priority it should have.⁵³

It went on to warn that:

The drug problem in Afghanistan has been allowed to become ever more serious. If it persists, the political and military successes of the last three years will be lost.⁵⁴

Others agree, arguing there is a risk that Afghanistan could evolve into a "profoundly dysfunctional narco-state",⁵⁵ unless urgent remedial action is taken.⁵⁶ The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) said in its report for 2004 that the cultivation, processing and trafficking of opiates

have transformed Afghanistan into a country in which the economy, the culture and the political life are dominated by the illicit drug trade, which is threatening

⁵² One such example was the central government's reliance on forces loyal to Abdul Salam during the ousting of the governor of Herat, Ismail Khan. IISS reported that Salam's status was apparently derived from taxing opium trafficking routes through the areas under his control. 'Afghanistan and the drugs trade', *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol 10, Issue 7, September 2004

⁵³ Preface to *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2004

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy defines a narco-state as a state ruled mainly through, and in favour of, the development of a drug economy. 'Afghan opium production predicted to reach new high', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2004

⁵⁶ See for example, 'Afghanistan and the drugs trade', *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol 10, Issue 7, September 2004.

reconstruction efforts and undermining legitimate economic activities and the establishment of the rule of law.⁵⁷

The INCB called upon the Afghan government and the international community to “accord drug control the highest priority”, adding that the development of alternative livelihoods in opium-producing areas continued to lack “long-term and sustainable solutions”.⁵⁸

Others acknowledge the destabilising impact that narcotics have on the country, but believe the warnings about Afghanistan becoming a narco-state are overstated. In particular, they point to statistics suggesting that only a small percentage of the country’s total arable land (2.9 per cent in 2004 according to UNODP, compared to 39 per cent for wheat⁵⁹) is actually covered by opium poppy cultivation.⁶⁰

Consequently, one observer of the Afghan narcotics trade, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, wrote in October 2004 that:

Afghanistan [...] seems to be a country that is not taking full advantage of its potential for opium production, rather than one on its way to become a ‘narco-state’. Nation- and state-building is only beginning in Afghanistan and its economy is only just starting to recover from over two decades of war and internal feuding. Thus, a growing legal economy will most likely drive up the price of hired labour, something that will in turn make opium harvests increasingly expensive and opium farming economically less attractive. There is hardly any doubt that the country’s legal economy will grow considerably and that will make the share of the opium economy smaller, thus removing the danger of Afghanistan turning into a ‘narco-state’.⁶¹

He warned the process was complex and would take time, particularly given the dependence of many rural communities on income from opium cultivation:

Under the salaam loan system, Afghan peasants without capital traditionally borrow important sums or benefit from advances against takings: their opium crops are thus sold one or two years in advance at half the price of their value. This credit system [...] keeps many farmers in debt at the same time as it makes their survival possible.⁶²

The prohibition in 2000-2001 left farmers unable to pay their debts, and after the Taliban fell, many immediately resumed cultivating poppy at increased levels in order to repay the accumulated debt. Consequently, Mr Chouvy and others believe that the opium trade should not be wiped out precipitately or without compensation. Frank Kenefick and Larry Morgan argued in their book *Opium in Afghanistan* that the growing of opium

⁵⁷ *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2004*, E/INCB/2004/1, 2 March 2005, para 425, http://www.incb.org/pdf/e/ar/2004/incb_report_2004_full.pdf

⁵⁸ *ibid.* para 446

⁵⁹ Figures from *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2004

⁶⁰ Although the proportion of opium was considerably higher in some provinces.

⁶¹ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, ‘Afghan opium production predicted to reach new high’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2004

⁶² *Ibid.*

poppies could be viewed, as an interim measure, as “beneficial in many respects”, because it helps create paying jobs for rural workers, brings money into the rural economy, reduces the rural debt burden and provides resources for rebuilding homes and rural asset bases that would not be forthcoming from international donors.⁶³

Leo Bradenberg of the German development agency GTZ has cited the example of Thailand where counter-narcotics initiatives took 20 years to deliver convincing results. Rather than focusing on short-term eradication programmes, the Thai authorities gave farmers a “grace period” of four years to find alternatives, after which they were penalised for continued opium production. In tandem with that approach, the Thai government focused on breaking up heroin processing and trafficking networks, where the major profits were made.⁶⁴ Mr Bradenberg acknowledged that the scale of the challenge in Afghanistan was significantly greater, given the poor security situation and comparative lack of money, but said lessons could be drawn from the Thai example.

b. Counter-narcotics strategies

A number of steps have been taken by the Afghan government and the international community to counter the resurgence of the opium trade since 2001. The United Kingdom, in its role as lead nation on counter-narcotics, has helped establish new Afghan counter-narcotics institutions, and provided equipment, training and mentoring. Overall spending by the British Government on counter-narcotics work in Afghanistan increased from £1.6 million in 2002-03 to around £20 million in 2004-05. In June 2005 that figure was more than doubled to around £50 million for 2005-06, which included £30 million for the development of alternative livelihoods for farmers and rural labourers.⁶⁵ A further increase was announced in September 2005, with a revised budget for 2005-06 of £50 million for alternative livelihoods and £6 million for eradication activity. Over the following three years, the UK plans to spend more than £270 million. £130 million will be provided by the Department for International Development, with the remainder coming from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and other departments.⁶⁶

A 10-year national drug control strategy was approved by the Afghan Government in 2003, with three main elements: improving living standards for farmers, implementing determined law enforcement against traffickers, and strong efforts to reduce demand in consuming countries.

In its 2004 report the UNODC said “the building blocks” to tackle the narcotics problem had been developed and that “important positive signs” were emerging.⁶⁷ Measures included various judicial reforms, and the formation of a Central Eradication Planning

⁶³ Frank Kenefick and Larry Morgan, *Opium in Afghanistan: People and Poppies, the Good Evil*, 2004

⁶⁴ Example cited by Andrew North in ‘Quandary of Afghan opium industry’, BBC News Online, 2 March 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4312557.stm

⁶⁵ HC Deb 15 June 2005, c467-8w

⁶⁶ HC Deb 24 October 2005, c73w, and FCO press release, 5 September 2005, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1125559465083>

⁶⁷ Preface to *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2004

Cell and a Central Poppy Eradication Force within the Ministry of the Interior to plan and launch eradication campaigns. These operate alongside a Counter Narcotics police force and a Special Narcotics Force, which have responsibility for interdiction operations.

Following his election in October 2004 President Karzai declared a *Jihad* or holy war against narcotics. A first Counter Narcotics National Conference was held in Afghanistan in December of that year, and was followed by the adoption of a new Counter Narcotics Implementation Plan with eight pillars:

- Building institutions, including a new Counter Narcotics Department supported by the UK, US and UNODC, and new provincial structures to ensure implementation at a local level;
- Launching information campaigns to stress that all elements of the drugs trade are contrary to the teachings of Islam and damaging to the country's development;
- Developing alternative livelihoods, supported by a new Counter Narcotics Trust Fund, to help develop skills among the rural workforce and provide micro-finance. The initial emphasis is on seven of the main opium-producing provinces;
- Improving interdiction and law enforcement, by bolstering the Afghan Special Narcotics Force, the Counter Narcotics Police and other police forces, and through the pooling of intelligence;
- Creating a more effective criminal justice system (with Italian assistance), through the formation of a new task force, the construction of secure prison and court facilities, and the adoption of new laws on money laundering and the freezing and confiscation of assets;
- Mounting a credible, targeted and verified campaign of eradication by the central and provincial governments. Aerial spraying would not be used. Furthermore, no compensation would be provided for farmers who plant poppy, although eradication programmes would begin early in the season to allow time for the planting of licit crops;
- Reducing the demand for drugs and improving treatment for addicts;
- Enhancing regional cooperation.⁶⁸

One of the central challenges has been calibrating the pressure on farmers involved in cultivating opium. IISS commented in September 2004 that:

The risks of detection and crop destruction are presently insufficient to deter most farmers, and a number enjoy the protection of provincial officials up to governor level.⁶⁹

The UNODC agreed, arguing in its 2004 report that “since in Afghanistan opium is still more profitable than legitimate crops, more robust forms of persuasion to farmers must come into play”, such as a “centrally-conducted eradication *cum* persuasion campaign,

⁶⁸ The text of the 1384 (2005) Counter Narcotics Implementation Plan can be found on the Embassy of Afghanistan in Canada website, http://www.afghanistanembassy.ca/en/counter_narcotics/index.php

⁶⁹ ‘Afghanistan and the drugs trade’, *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol 10, Issue 7, September 2004

prosecution of those involved in production and trafficking, and action against corrupt officials.⁷⁰

Reports during 2004 and 2005 suggested that setting the balance between coercion and persuasion had become a point of friction between the Bush administration and the British and Afghan governments. A leaked cable from the US embassy in Kabul criticised what it claimed was a lack of “strong leadership” from President Karzai and poor target selection on the part of the British counter-narcotics effort.⁷¹ Some officials in Washington were reportedly in favour of a faster eradication campaign, so as to “rebalance the risk calculation of farmers contemplating poppy cultivation, by increasing the likelihood they will lose all revenue if an eradication team visits”.⁷² This view stemmed from a belief that there was only a relatively small window of opportunity in which to construct an Afghan state based on the rule of law. IISS commented in September 2004 that:

The experience of Columbia has convinced US officials that undue delays in eradication would allow criminal networks to mature and embed themselves into political institutions.⁷³

The UK has adopted a more cautious strategy, believing the most sustainable approach is to pursue eradication only where there is access to alternative livelihoods.⁷⁴ An earlier scheme run the UK offered compensation for crops destroyed, although that was reportedly abandoned in 2003 “when it became clear that the payments were an incentive to re-plant poppy for the following harvest.”⁷⁵

IISS argued in May 2005 that the principal task in the year ahead was to establish, and then advise farmers of, comprehensive alternative livelihood arrangements, while making clear that immediate eradication would take place if further poppy harvest were grown. It concluded that: “The fusion and close sequencing of both the robust and discreet approaches offers the best opportunity for reducing the yield at source.”⁷⁶ It also argued that the strategy had to be perceived to be even handed by the wider population to avoid the impression that certain regions or ethnic groups were being unfairly targeted by the counter-narcotics effort.

Several observers believe Washington has effectively taken control of the overall counter narcotics strategy, through its eradication initiatives during 2004 and the sharp increase

⁷⁰ Preface to *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2004

⁷¹ ‘US Memo faults Afghan Leader on Heroin Fight’, *The New York Times*, 22 May 2005

⁷² ‘Afghanistan and the drugs trade’, *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol 10, Issue 7, September 2004

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ See for example FCO web page on Afghanistan Counter-Narcotics, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1050510446431>

⁷⁵ ‘Afghanistan and the drugs trade’, *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol 10, Issue 7, September 2004

⁷⁶ ‘Afghanistan and the New Central Asian Security Complex’, *IISS Strategic Survey 2004/05*, p.339

in its Afghan counter-narcotics budget for 2005-06, which amounts to around US\$780 million (£408 million, compared with around £100 million from the UK).⁷⁷

Aid agencies warn that the US risks repeating the mistakes made in Columbia, where the conflict has become highly militarised and widespread use has been made of aerial spraying to eradicate crops. The US and UK deny claims that they have conducted aerial spraying operations in the east of the country, suggesting instead that unmarked aircraft may have been used by those involved in the drugs trade in a bid to discredit the Afghan government and its international partners. In spite of opposition from the US embassy in Kabul, officials in Washington reportedly believe spraying could become an option in future years, despite concerns from some that it would increase local resentment against the international presence.⁷⁸

c. Progress during 2005

There are indications that some progress has been made in countering the opium trade during 2005. In August the Executive Director of the UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, released estimates for 2005 showing that opium cultivation had decreased to 103,000 hectares, a fall of 21 per cent from the 131,000 hectares cultivated in 2004. Production of opium, on the other hand, decreased only slightly from 4,200 to 4,100 tonnes, showing there had been an increase in productivity due to favourable weather conditions. Consequently, Afghanistan remains the largest supplier of opium to the world, accounting for 87 per cent of the world supplies.⁷⁹

Various reasons were cited for the decrease in the area under cultivation, including the Afghan government's success in persuading farmers to desist from growing poppy, and fears among farmers that the official ban would be enforced via eradication, leaving them with no income. Another factor was the low farm-gate prices for raw opium, meaning farmers had less incentive to plant poppy over other crops.

The decline in cultivation was uneven across the 34 provinces, with cultivation in Nangarhar dropping by 93 per cent, leading Mr Costa to conclude that the opium economy could be contained and that concurrent use of eradication and alternative livelihood programmes could bring about permanent change.⁸⁰

About 4,000 hectares were eradicated by Provincial Governors in early 2005 and two separate eradication campaigns by the central government destroyed crops in a further 1,000 hectares, meaning that, in total, around 5 per cent of that year's opium cultivation had been eradicated.

⁷⁷ See for example Andrew North, 'Quandary of Afghan opium industry', BBC News Online, 2 March 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4312557.stm. Source for UK funding, HC Deb 24 October 2005, cc73-4w

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ 'United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) announces major reduction in 2005 opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan', UNODP press release, 29 August 2005, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/pressrelease_2005-08-29.doc. Final figures for 2005 will be given in the UNODC annual survey on Afghan opium, which is to be published in late October 2005.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

Mr Costa concluded that:

The threat of eradication reinforced President Karzai's persuasion efforts and we all learned that crop destruction must be supported by assistance to farmers so as to develop licit economic activities in the countryside. [...] 500 million dollars have been committed to the Afghan countryside for 2005/06. The international community must have the wisdom to fight drugs and poverty simultaneously.⁸¹

The UN Secretary-General commented in August 2005 that:

In spite of the efforts of Afghanistan's counter-narcotic forces, the cultivation of and trade in narcotics remain one of the greatest threats to the establishment of the rule of law and effective governance in Afghanistan. If left unchecked, the fragile democratization and State-building achievements attained so far will be undermined.⁸²

Similar warnings were given by Mr Costa, who said further progress was required to consolidate the recent gains:

Democracy may never come of age in Afghanistan as long as violence remains the tool in dispute resolution, resource allocation depends on corrupt officials, and half of the national income is generated by opium.⁸³

He made a series of recommendations for the coming year, suggesting the priorities should include: countering corruption by sacking officials and removing corrupt governors in provinces where opium cultivation is not declining; securing a commitment from the members of the new parliament to abstain from the narcotics industry or resign; implementing a zero-tolerance policy towards warlords' involvement in refining and trafficking drugs; and securing a commitment from farmers to refrain from poppy cultivation as a condition for development assistance.⁸⁴

⁸¹ UNODP press release, 29 August 2005

⁸² *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, S/2005/525, 12 August 2005

⁸³ UNODP press release, 29 August 2005

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

