

HPCR Central Asia is produced on a regular basis by the  
[Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University](#)

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR RECOVERY IN AFGHANISTAN

While international efforts to reach a political agreement on a provisional government in Afghanistan continue, the situation on the ground presents a series of challenges to the aid community. The most immediate of these is to ensure that assistance reaches those most in need, even as the military campaign continues. Opportunities exist in some areas to restore confidence at the local level, through modest support for the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure. Investing in communities who prove their commitment to peace could help to build trust in the wider political process.



Photo: Jolyon Leslie

Those Afghans who have survived the past three decades of instability have good reason to view their immediate future with apprehension. While some Afghans might be heartened by the US military intervention, and the apparent willingness of certain leaders to discuss ways of promoting reconciliation, the “space” for a dialogue about the future of the country is still being marked out. Recent experience suggests that this space will need to be protected, and that Afghans who are committed to peace will need international support at critical stages of the process.

For the latest analyses, regional news sources and links on Central Asia, please visit the CPI Central Asia Portal at [www.preventconflict.org/portal/centralasia/](http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/centralasia/)

### Inside this Issue

- P. 1: Key Challenges**
- P. 2: The changing role of aid in Afghanistan**
- P. 4: Opportunities for recovery**
- P. 6: The next steps**
- P. 7: Links**

For more information on HPCR, please contact:

The Program on  
Humanitarian Policy and  
Conflict Research  
Harvard University  
1033 Massachusetts Ave.  
4<sup>th</sup> floor  
Cambridge, MA 02138 USA  
Tel: 617 384-5901  
Fax: 617 384-5908

[hpcr@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:hpcr@hsph.harvard.edu)  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/hpcr](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hpcr)

At present, there appear to be few incentives for most Afghan warlords to pursue peace. The rewards of maintaining instability in the region under their control outweigh the benefits of an uncertain peace. As a result, the destiny of many civilians will, for the time being at least, remain in the hands of those who seek to control by force of arms, rather than govern in response to the popular will. The remit of any transitional administration will, as in the past, not run to most rural areas. There is a risk in such circumstances that in some cases local leaders might continue to hold the civilian population hostage to their own political or military goals.

In this context, the huge increase in the scale of the humanitarian operation since September 2001 risks undermining local structures that have proved beneficial to communities through the conflict if relief supplies end up in the wrong hands. This makes it all the more important to match short-term relief with selective support for rehabilitation. Experience in the Afghan context suggests that aid cannot in itself “bring peace”. If assistance is provided in the right place at the right time, however, it can contribute to local environments in which communities can embark with some degree of confidence on a process of recovery.

The stakes are high, given the extent of humanitarian needs and the fragility of the political situation in many parts of the country. If it is to rise to this challenge, the international community needs to:

- *Identify areas of relative stability, where the local leadership has a proven ability to uphold the rule of law;*
- *Define clear terms of engagement with local authorities or leaders, as the basis for more sustained external support for these areas;*
- *Actively strengthen coordination between both donors and agencies in the field, to mitigate against the risks of aid fuelling the conflict.*

## The changing role of aid in Afghanistan

Aid has been an important part of international engagement in Afghanistan. At different times in the recent past, it has either had to conform to a range of foreign policy agendas, or has represented the primary form of engagement of the international community in response of the critical needs of the Afghan population. As efforts to negotiate the political future of the country continue, it is likely that the provision of humanitarian and development assistance will play a significant role in enabling Afghans to embark on the re-building their war-shattered country.

## Related Links

**For more information on war lords in Afghanistan, see:**

[Key Afghan warlords reject Bonn deal](#) (BBC News, 6 Dec. 2001)

[Warlord Nation](#) (Newsweek, 3 Dec. 2001)

[“Warlordism” and the War on Terrorism](#) (FPIF, 26 Dec. 2001)

[Warlord Competition](#) (Stergios Skaperdas, University of California, October 2000)

**For more information on the role of aid, see:**

[Afghanistan, the Taliban and the United States: The Role of Human Rights in Western Foreign Policy](#) (Media Monitor, 12 Jan. 2001)

[Afghanistan: The politicisation of humanitarian aid and its consequences for Afghans](#) (Humanitarian Practices Network, September 2001)

[Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan: Report of the Secretary-General](#) (Reliefweb, 7 Dec. 2001)

[Lack of Security in Afghanistan Sparks Recrimination Over Humanitarian Aid Distribution](#) (Antoine Blua, Eurasianet, 30 Nov. 2001)

Joining the United Nations in 1946 as one of the earliest members, Afghanistan benefited from a range of bilateral and international development initiatives between the 1950s and 1970s, which was an era of modernization for the country. Most of the aid community's investments focused on the creation of a modern road and urban infrastructure, often at the expense of a more communal approach to development. In response to the Soviet occupation, however, the focus shifted drastically during the 1980s to meeting humanitarian needs of the growing refugee populations in Iran and Pakistan, with assistance also provided by NGOs, cross-border to the eastern provinces. Rather than building on diplomatic efforts to end the conflict, much of the humanitarian assistance provided at this time represented a component of support to the Afghan resistance. Despite the expectations raised by the signature of the Geneva Accords in 1988, continued fighting between the government and the various mujahadeen factions deepened the humanitarian crisis in the country, keeping the pressure on the aid community to maintain its assistance to the refugee populations in neighboring countries.

When the resistance parties took over Kabul in 1992, and subsequently fell out over the formation of an "interim government", the internal conflict retained many of the characteristics of a proxy war. Political efforts by the UN to broker peace between the factions continued, and the prime response of the international community remained for the most part in the form of humanitarian assistance. The focus of the humanitarian response was now on urban populations caught up in the fighting. Many of the surviving educated urban class, including essential civil servants, fled into exile joining the millions of Afghans who left the country during the 1980s. As a result, aid agencies became involved in supporting basic services that a weakened administration was unable to provide, particularly in the health sector.

From 1997, with growing concern being expressed at the policies of the Taliban, the nature and impact of humanitarian or development activities were subject to increased scrutiny. At this time, the objectives of the donor community were articulated as progress towards a negotiated peace, respect for human rights, security, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism and refugee return. The pursuit of these goals resulted in the introduction of selective conditionality by some donors and agencies. The critical needs for rehabilitation were for the most part left unaddressed as the conditionality of development assistance to the respect of basic human rights prevented the deployment of much needed resources in key sectors such as health and education. In the case of education and health-care activities, the aim was to deny direct support to institutions of the Taliban administration that were perceived to be pursuing discriminatory practices.

## Related Links

### UN Assistance – Refugees:

[Real-Time Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the Afghan Emergency – Bulletin No. 2](#), (UNHCR, 6 Dec. 2001)

[Peace Politics at the Heart: The Architecture of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan](#) (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)

[Refugees in Afghanistan](#) (UNHCR, 29 Nov. 2001)

[Post-conflict Rehabilitation: Social and Civil Dimensions](#) (The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance)

### The Geneva Accords see:

[Geneva Accords of 1988 text of treaty](#)

[U.N. Resolution 622, 1988](#)

[Peacemaking Diplomacy: United Nations Good Offices in Afghanistan](#) (Conflict Research Consortium)

[Afghanistan: The Promise and Failure of Global Perestroika & The Geneva Accords](#) (Coalition for Global Solidarity)

### Afghanistan and the UN:

[In Focus: Humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan](#) (United Nations)

[Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan](#) (UN OCHA)

[Lessons Learned Unit: Afghanistan Report Coordination in a Fragmented State](#) (UN OCHA)

[Afghanistan: Persistent Crisis Challenges the U.N. System](#) (CSF, Barnett R. Rubin)

[Security Council Resolution 1386](#) (UN, 20 Dec. 2001)

[The Role of the UN in the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan](#) (UK mission to the UN, 22 Nov. 2001)



Islam has historically played an important role in unifying the Afghan people, and is likely to be a significant factor in promoting reconciliation between rival groups, and in the process of social and political legitimation, at all levels. The distinct Islamic identity that characterized the resistance to Soviet occupation, and which more recently contributed to internationalizing the Afghan conflict, will need to be reconciled with the interests of the Afghan diaspora, whose participation in rehabilitation will be crucial, but who might have a more modernist vision of the future Afghanistan.

Attempts to govern in Afghanistan have been characterized by tensions between the center and the regions, as attempts to impose central authority or introduce reforms were resisted by the tribal or customary leadership. During the resistance, the power of traditional leaders has in many cases been usurped by the new armed elite, who will need clear incentives if they are to cede aspects of their authority to any central administration that might emerge. Where necessary, these groups might need to be replaced in order to ensure that recovery is possible.

Despite the tolerance that has traditionally prevailed in the country, it will be important to take account of the territorial dimension of ethnicity, whereby the boundaries of provinces (as well as their resources and voting rights associated with them) have been the source of ethnic tensions in some areas in the past. More recently, competing interests between ethnic groups have been exploited by the leadership of some factions, which will make a diversity of representation in any future administration all the more important.

The survival of many Afghan communities through the years of conflict has depended on the vigorous informal economy, which has replaced more formal processes. This is part of a more extensive trans-regional shadow economy that has emerged during the war, and which dwarfs the scale of humanitarian assistance that has been available during this period. Efforts to address the criminalized aspects of this wider economic network, and the restoration of key financial institutions and functions at the centre, should take into account the contribution that informal economic processes will make to the livelihoods of Afghan communities during the immediate process of recovery.

As an environment emerges that facilitates the return of refugees, these groups are likely to significantly contribute to the rehabilitation of areas to which they return. On the other hand, unless investments are made in rehabilitation, the return of refugees or displacees on any significant scale is likely to put additional pressure on war-damaged services, particularly in the urban centers.

## Related Links

See HPCR policy brief for information on:

[The Role of Islam in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan](#) (HPCR)



Click [here](#) to see larger ethnic map

For more information on the Afghan economy, see:

[Peace Building: The Private Sector's Role](#) (The American Journal of International Law, 2001)

[The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan](#) (Barnett Rubin, Eurasianet, 21 June 1999)

[Brief Overview of Afghanistan's Economy](#) (World Bank, 5 Oct. 2001)

## NEXT STEPS

The immediate challenge is to put to effective use the significant resources that are now available, using the experience of the aid community to identify vulnerable groups. Opportunities also exist to respond to the hopes of ordinary Afghans for peace, through support for recovery at the local level, which may build confidence in international efforts to reach a lasting political settlement for the country. If it is to rise to this challenge, the international community needs to:

- *Actively strengthen coordination between both donors and agencies in the field, to ensure that humanitarian assistance is properly targeted to groups in need, and does not in fact fuel the conflict;*
- *Consult with Afghan aid workers on the ground to identify potential areas for more sustained external support, based on assessments of the stated commitment and actual performance of the local leadership in encouraging stability and promoting recovery;*
- *Consider the creation of a expert group of Afghans policy makers and NGO leaders from various regions to advise UN agencies on various opportunities for rehabilitation programs;*
- *Ensure that effective negotiation with local leadership occurs which might obviate the need for widespread international military protection for humanitarian initiatives, which will increasingly be seen by Afghans as intrusive. It will be vital for humanitarian actors to define clear terms of engagement with international military contingents, where necessary, and ensure that these are communicated to local interlocutors and the population at large;*
- *Consider appointing senior negotiators with significant experience in Afghanistan to assist UN agencies as a whole to gain access in the various regions and develop UN programs in a dialogue with the communities concerned;*
- *Define clear Terms of Engagement with local authorities or leaders in areas under their control. These Terms of Engagement should become the basis for more sustained external support to communities, beyond essential emergency relief programs. Among other things, the negotiation of the Terms of Engagement should factor in security issues, access to vulnerable groups for assessment and distribution, guarantees of safe passage for convoys in transit, and active support for local consultative mechanisms and should guide the process of recovery and rehabilitation;*
- *Make use of both local and international media to disseminate information related to the provision of non-emergency assistance in selected areas, as a means of strengthening the hand of those committed to peace and avoiding inter-ethnic rivalries;*
- *Promote the creation of a central database of information on rehabilitation and development projects to encourage the sharing of information on the status and orientation of development programs in Afghanistan.*

## Complete list of links used in this brief:

### War lords taking over cities:

Key Afghan warlords reject Bonn deal (BBC News, 6 Dec. 2001)

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south\\_asia/newsid\\_1694000/1694867.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1694000/1694867.stm)

Warlord Nation (Newsweek, 3 Dec. 2001)

<http://stacks.msnbc.com/news/662674.asp?cp1=1>

“Warlordism” and the War on Terrorism, (FPIF, 26 Dec. 2001)

[http://www.fpif.org/commentary/0112quidproquo\\_body.html](http://www.fpif.org/commentary/0112quidproquo_body.html)

Warlord Competition, (Stergios Skaperdas, University of California, October 2000)

<http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/dps/dp2001-54-text.pdf>

### Role of aid:

Afghanistan, the Taliban and the United States: The Role of Human Rights in Western Foreign Policy (Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, Media Monitor, 2 May 2001)

<http://www.mediamonitors.net/mosaddeq2.html>

Afghanistan: The politicisation of humanitarian aid and its consequences for Afghans (Humanitarian Practice Network, September 2001)

<http://www.odihpn.org/pdfbin/newsletter019.pdf>

Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan: Report of the Secretary-General (Reliefweb, 7 Dec. 2001)

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/24C826A8D00FC112C1256B35004B2ECB?OpenDocument>

Lack of Security in Afghanistan Sparks Recrimination Over Humanitarian Aid Distribution (Antoine Blua, Eurasianet, 30 Nov. 2001)

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav113001a.shtml>

### Afghanistan and the UN:

In Focus: Humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan (United Nations)

<http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan2.htm>

Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan

<http://www.pcpafg.org/Organizations/unoc/>

Lessons Learned Unit: Afghanistan Report Coordination in a Fragmented State (UN OCHA, December 1996)

[http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha\\_ol/programs/unocha/afgrpt/afghan.html#toc](http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/programs/unocha/afgrpt/afghan.html#toc)

Afghanistan: Persistent Crisis Challenges the U.N. System (Barnett R. Rubin, CSF, August 1998)

<http://csf.colorado.edu/pen-l/2001III/msg02758.html>

Security Council Resolution 1386 (UN, 20 Dec. 2001)

<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2001/res1386e.pdf>

The Role of the UN in the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan (UK mission to the UN, 22 Nov. 2001)

[http://www.ukun.org/xq/asp/SarticleType.17/Article\\_ID.353/qx/articles\\_show.htm](http://www.ukun.org/xq/asp/SarticleType.17/Article_ID.353/qx/articles_show.htm)

## LINKS

### **UN Assistance – Refugee**

Real-Time Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the Afghan Emergency – Bulletin No. 2, (UNHCR, 6 Dec. 2001)  
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&page=RESEARCH&id=3c0f84084>

Peace Politics at the Heart: The Architecture of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (Paula R. Newberg, Carnegie Endowment for International, March 1999)  
<http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/wp2.asp?from=pubtype>

Refugees in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 29 Nov. 2001)  
<http://www.modelun.org/naimun/bgguides/bg-eco-hcr1.pdf>

, - Post-conflict Rehabilitation: Social and Civil Dimensions (Michael Pugh, The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, December 11, 1998)  
<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a034.htm>

### **Geneva Accords:**

Geneva Accords of 1988 text of treaty:  
[http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/dev\\_xyz/accords\\_treaties/geneva\\_accords\\_1988\\_pakistan\\_afghanistan.htm](http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/dev_xyz/accords_treaties/geneva_accords_1988_pakistan_afghanistan.htm)

U.N. Resolution 622, 1988:  
<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1988/622e.pdf>

Peacemaking Diplomacy: United Nations Good Offices in Afghanistan (William Maley - summary by Tanya Glaser, Conflict Research Consortium, 1998)  
<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/male7314.htm>

Afghanistan: The Promise and Failure of Global Perestroika & The Geneva Accords (Coalition for Global Solidarity)  
<http://www.globalsolidarity.org/articles/afgan.html>

### **Opportunities for recovery**

Briefing to the Security Council, Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Tuesday, November 13, 2001 (United Nations)  
<http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/brahimi-sc-briefing.htm>

Afghanistan World Bank Approach Paper (World Bank, November 2001)  
[http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/SAR/sa.nsf/Attachments/az/\\$File/afgApproach.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/SAR/sa.nsf/Attachments/az/$File/afgApproach.pdf)

### **Islam's role:**

The Role of Islam in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan (Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, October 15, 2001)  
[http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/centralasia/brief2\\_final1106.pdf](http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/centralasia/brief2_final1106.pdf)

### **Economy:**

Peace Building: The Private Sector's Role (Allan Gerson, The American Journal of International Law, January 2001)  
<http://www.asil.org/ajil/recon8.pdf>

Afghanistan Online-Economy  
[http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/rubin\\_on\\_afgistan.html](http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/rubin_on_afgistan.html)

Brief Overview of Afghanistan's Economy (World Bank, 5 Oct. 2001)  
[http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/SAR/sa.nsf/Attachments/96/\\$File/afOvervw.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/SAR/sa.nsf/Attachments/96/$File/afOvervw.pdf)

## LINKS

### **Maps:**

Map of Afghanistan 2001

[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia01/afghanistan\\_sm01.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia01/afghanistan_sm01.jpg)

Afghanistan: Ethnic Map (Defense and the National Interest)

[http://www.d-n-i.net/charts/afghanistan\\_ethnic\\_mix.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/charts/afghanistan_ethnic_mix.htm)