

Afghanistan in 2009: Trying to Pull Back from the Brink

ABSTRACT

The state-building endeavor in Afghanistan became more tenuous in 2009. Charges of increased corruption against Afghan government officials were highlighted in a presidential election marred by fraud. Taliban and other insurgent activities escalated to spread to most parts of the country. Relations between the Afghan government and the major international donor countries also deteriorated. However, member countries of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan decided to increase international troop strength and tried to elicit greater commitment from the Afghan government to address problems of governance.

KEYWORDS: Afghanistan, Taliban, elections, corruption, security, narcotics

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THE YEAR 2009 WAS A DAUNTING one for Afghanistan. On the one hand, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and economic growth rates increased, some social indicators in health and education showed signs of improvement, and there was increased provision of basic infrastructure including roads and electricity. On the other hand, insecurity worsened and the corruption-plagued presidential elections exposed the fragility of both Afghan state institutions and the relationship between the Afghan government and some international donor countries.

The upswing in Taliban-related incidents¹ and the corresponding deterioration in security, along with the exposed weakness of democratic institutions, led the international community to refocus on Afghanistan.²

Concerns about Afghan governance and aid effectiveness prompted the international community to plan a conference to be held in London in January 2010 to discuss its political strategy for Afghanistan, including the creation of a framework to increase Afghan involvement in providing security in the country. In addition, toward the end of 2009, the U.S. committed 30,000 more troops, and NATO countries and other allies committed 7,000 additional forces to the NATO-led ISAF. The U.S. also pledged a surge of American civilians to help with reconstruction and development. Yet, media reports cited a Taliban commander in Pakistan as claiming that “thousands” of Pakistani Taliban had been sent to Afghanistan to counter the surge in international troops at the end of 2009.³ The U.S. military dismissed this claim, and it might

¹ The term “Taliban” is used in this article to include the self-proclaimed Taliban and other loosely affiliated insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan.

² The term “international community” is broadly used in the article to encompass the countries and international organizations involved in reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. It includes the 43 countries that provide the approximately 70,000 troops to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan; the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is mandated with helping the government of Afghanistan to rebuild; international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank; multilateral and bilateral aid organizations; and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It also includes the U.S., which has 40,000 troops in Afghanistan under a separate command from the ISAF.

³ Ishtiaq Mahsud, “Pakistan Taliban: Our Fighters Head to Afghan War,” *ABC News*, December 23, 2009, available at <<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=9406692>>, accessed on December 26, 2009.

have been an attempt to worsen relations between the U.S. and Pakistan. Nonetheless, such statements will likely augur an escalation of insecurity for 2010.

HEIGHTENED INSECURITY FOR AFGHANS AND COALITION FORCES

The year 2009 was the deadliest yet for both Afghans and coalition forces in the country since the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001. Insecurity increased for Afghans with about 1,000 Afghan security forces being killed in 2009.⁴ More than 500 international troops also were killed, including 300 Americans—a more than 50% increase over the previous year. International civilians were also increasingly under threat, with numerous fatal incidents around the country. Moreover, insecurity spread geographically from the formerly insecure areas in the southeast to the west and north, including the capital Kabul. This heightened insecurity highlighted the precariousness of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and the inability of the Afghan state to provide security to its citizens without significant international assistance. While the urgent need to address these concerns was the prime focus of the international community and Afghans alike, the fractious August 2009 presidential elections demonstrated that relegating governance concerns to the back burner only strengthened the appeal of the Taliban and contributed to a deterioration of the overall security environment.

Afghan civilian casualties continued to be a source of tension and distrust between the Afghan government and international forces. In order to counter civilian casualties, the U.S. military announced new combat engagement measures, including a decreased use of air strikes in heavily populated areas. This brought a 28% decrease in Afghan civilian casualties caused by

⁴ Michael O'Hanlon, "A Year of War—and Progress," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 2009, available at <<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-ohanlon27-2009dec27,0,849823.story>>, accessed on December 27, 2009.

pro-government forces in 2009.⁵ However, the overall number of civilian deaths rose by 14% over the previous year, according to UNAMA, with a 41% increase in civilian deaths caused by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups—a fact little noted by the Afghan government's official media.⁶

Afghan perceptions of security in 2009 were mixed. Annual survey data collected prior to the presidential elections showed that 44% of Afghans were optimistic about their future because of perceived good security, while 42% were pessimistic because of insecurity.⁷ Insecurity was the most important concern of one-third of Afghans, and half of those surveyed stated that they remain concerned for their personal safety. Of those interviewed, 17% had experienced crime or violence, ranging from physical attack to extortion either against themselves or a family member in 2009.⁸ Fears for personal safety varied regionally and were highest in the southeastern parts of the country. The survey indicated that an equal number of Afghans were the victims of violence committed by the Taliban and by international forces.⁹ While Afghan perceptions about who is responsible for their insecurity remained mixed, a

⁵ *UNAMA Calls for Safety First, as Civilian Casualties Rise by 14% in 2009*, UNAMA, January 13, 2010, available at <<http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1741&ctl=Details&mid=1882&ItemID=7260>>, accessed January 13, 2010.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ruth Rennie, Sudhindra Sharma, Pawan Sen, *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2009), available at <<http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2009.pdf>>, accessed on December 10, 2009.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

majority continued to support international and domestic security forces, while support for the Taliban remained low.¹⁰

The deteriorating security situation in large measure stemmed from the increase in Taliban activities in Afghanistan, particularly around the presidential elections in August and the months immediately thereafter. Election day itself saw the worst single-day violence in Afghanistan, with 57 people killed.¹¹ While fatalities overall remained concentrated in the southern and southeastern regions, the areas with the greatest presence of international troops, the Taliban expanded their presence to almost every province during 2009. Despite a heavy presence of foreign troops, Kabul also saw numerous security incidents claimed by the Taliban, including the explosion of a car bomb next to the Indian Embassy that left 17 civilians dead and the storming of a guesthouse that left 11 dead, including U.N. employees.

The rising inability of Afghan and international security forces to prevent the spread of the Taliban highlighted the precarious security and political situation in Afghanistan. There was a growing recognition in 2009 among U.S. security forces and policy analysts that the war against the insurgency had long been underfunded and was in danger of being lost, although some policy makers argued that increasing troops without an Afghan government commitment to address the corruption that fueled the insurgency would mean giving away leverage.¹² After

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *AIHRC-UNAMA Joint Monitoring of Political Rights, Presidential and Provincial Council Elections, Third Report, 1 August-21 October 2009* (Kabul: UNAMA, October 2009), p. i, available at <[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-7X3PBQ-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-7X3PBQ-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)>, accessed November 2, 2009.

¹² James Dao, "Army History Finds Early Missteps," *New York Times*, December 30, 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/world/asia/31history.html?_r=1&ref=world>, accessed December 30, 2009.

several months of review, U.S. President Barack Obama announced an increase of 30,000 U.S. troops to ISAF in November 2009. NATO allies committed an additional 7,000 troops, which will bring the total number of international troops in Afghanistan to about 150,000 by the summer of 2010.

However, there was widespread recognition that increased numbers of international troops would be insufficient on their own to counter the Taliban insurgency and that the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan police are essential to current and longer-term security provision.¹³ The Afghan commitment to increasing the size of the ANA by 40,000 from its 2009 levels raised unresolved issues of supplying the required additional infrastructure and how to finance this troop increase.¹⁴ Plans to increase the Afghan police force similarly continued to be plagued by problems of corruption, training, and financing. These issues remained unresolved at the end of 2009.

TENUOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT

The year 2009 was also characterized by a change in the relationship between the international community and the Afghan government. When President Obama entered the White House at the beginning of 2009, international support for Afghan President Hamid Karzai was already waning amid increased reports of government corruption and weak leadership.¹⁵ The U.S.

¹³ Obaid Younossi, Peter Dahl Thruelsen, Jonathan Vaccaro, Jerry M. Sollinger, and Brian Grady, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009), pp. xi–xiv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The ANA's troop strength at the end of 2009 was approximately 100,000.

¹⁵ Jerome Starkey and Kim Sengupta, "Obama Ready to Cut Karzai Adrift," *The Independent* (London), January 23, 2009, available at <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/obama-ready-to-cut-karzai-adrift-1513407.html>>, accessed December 20, 2009.

announcement of an increase in American troops and its renewed commitment to both Afghanistan and Pakistan notwithstanding, political relations between Kabul and Washington remained more distant than in years past. President Karzai struck an increasingly independent tone when criticizing the international community for issues ranging from civilian casualties to meeting with opposing presidential candidates in the months prior to the presidential and provincial elections.

In the lead-up to the August 20 presidential and provincial elections, there was increasing recognition, supported by several polls in Afghanistan, that none of the other candidates was likely to unseat Karzai.¹⁶ The international community thus tried to repair its strained relations with him. The elections, however, actually eroded trust between Karzai's government and its international backers. For example, only one-third of registered voters cast their ballots on election day—about half the turnout rate of the previous presidential election.¹⁷ More significantly, about one-third of the ballots were alleged to be tainted by fraud, and some actions taken during the election by the Independent Election Commission—whose members had been appointed by President Karzai—tainted its independence and credibility. After two months of ballot review, the final tally necessitated a runoff election to which Karzai agreed only after repeated appeals from the international community, particularly from American diplomats and politicians. Furthermore, when his opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, averted the runoff by

¹⁶ Pre-election opinion polls were funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and conducted by the International Republican Institute, available at <http://www.iri.org/mena/afghanistan/pdfs/2009%20August%2014%20Survey%20of%20Afghan%20Public%20Opinion%20July%2016-26,%202009.pdf>; and Glevum Associates, available at <http://www.levumassociates.com/files/AfghanistanElectionSurveyDosVersion5.pdf>.

¹⁷ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *AIHRC-UNAMA Joint Monitoring*.

conceding, Karzai took no concrete steps to address election fraud or to reconcile with the opposition.

Although evidence of likely fraud was known to the international community months before the presidential elections, both the scale of ballot tampering and the minimal adherence to legal procedures for dealing with the fraud posed a dilemma for Obama and other international leaders. These problems led to eroding domestic support for international efforts in Afghanistan, while forcing donor countries to partner with a de-legitimized government.¹⁸ Toward the end of the year, international donors, particularly the U.S. and Great Britain, said there would be no more blank checks for the Afghan government¹⁹ and called for the Karzai government to tackle government corruption and the drug trade, which were said to fuel the Taliban insurgency.²⁰ However, 2009 ended with little evidence of any concrete steps in this direction.

FUELING THE INSURGENCY: GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION, NARCOTICS INDUSTRY, AND LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Corruption in Afghanistan worsened compared to 2008 in an environment of continued impunity for people with access to power and weak law enforcement. In 2009, Afghanistan fell three

¹⁸ William Maley, Marvin G. Weinbaum, and Rani D. Mullen, "The Nightmare Scenario in Afghanistan," AfPak Channel, *Foreign Policy* (on-line posting), September 18, 2009, available at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/18/the_nightmare_scenario_in_afghanistan>, accessed December 10, 2009.

¹⁹ Simon Tidall, "Karzai Opens Anti-Corruption Conference," *Guardian*, December 15, 2009, available at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/15/hamid-karzai-afghanistan-corruption-conference>>, accessed December 15, 2009.

²⁰ Helene Cooper and Jeff Zeleny, "Obama Warns Karzai to Focus on Tackling Corruption," *New York Times*, November 2, 2009, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/03/world/asia/03afghan.html>>, accessed November 2, 2009.

places from the previous year in the Corruption Perception Index ranking of Transparency International, making it the second-most corrupt out of the 180 countries listed.²¹ According to Transparency International, this ranking was driven by actions ranging from the selling of public offices to illegalities linked to the opium trade.²² Corruption charges against high-ranking government officials and many of Karzai's own family members continued to surface with little indication that the government was willing to address this issue.

This vicious cycle of corruption was, in fact, reminiscent of the type of corruption and impunity that existed during the early-1990s, which had led directly to the rise of the Taliban. For example, there continued to be reports of Interior Ministry officials taking a cut of the salaries of senior police officers, who take a cut of the salaries of ordinary policemen, who in turn exact bribes from the local population.²³ Corruption among local Afghan police, the judiciary, and government officials continued to undermine public confidence in the enforcement of the law, leading to more support for the Taliban—who offer a draconian but functioning legal system. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer labeled corruption as the main cause of instability in Afghanistan: “The basic problem in Afghanistan is not too much Taliban; it's too little good governance. Afghans need a government that deserves their loyalty and trust; when

²¹ Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for 2009 and its ranking of countries are available at <http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table>, accessed December 15, 2009.

²² “Afghanistan Corruption Worsening,” *AlJazeera.net*, November 17, 2009, available at <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/11/20091117104858836370.html>>, accessed December 15, 2009.

²³ Jon Hemming, “Interview: Corruption Holds Back Afghan Army Expansion,” Reuters AlertNet, December 11, 2008, available at <<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LB211278.htm>>, accessed December 15, 2009.

they have it, the oxygen will be sucked away from the insurgency.”²⁴ Thus, governmental corruption continued to undermine the legal foundations of the nascent democracy and fostered a chain reaction of corruption down to the individual Afghan citizen.

This cycle was exacerbated by the opium industry, even though 2009 saw a decrease in the opium market. The potential gross export value of Afghanistan's opiates decreased nearly 20% from the previous year.²⁵ Opium cultivation decreased by 22%, and the number of poppy-free provinces increased from last year's 18 to 20 (out of 34) in 2009, with the entire northern region becoming poppy-free for the first time in nearly a decade.²⁶ Oversupply of opium, lower market penetration in Europe, and higher prices of alternative legal crops such as wheat led to a 40% collapse in the total value of opium production.²⁷ Despite this progress, Afghanistan continued to supply 90% of the world's opium. Moreover, corrupt Afghans and insurgents moved up the “value chain” in the drug industry by forming narco-cartels, which both produced and exported opium. The U.N. and other international development agencies continued to point out that the solution is to push rural development and alternative livelihoods as ways to enable poor opium cultivators to break free from narco-cartels. The key is to press officials to finally comply with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1735, which aims at publicizing the names of

²⁴ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Afghanistan: We Can Do Better,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/16/AR2009011603717_pf.html>, accessed December 15, 2009.

²⁵ *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009* (Kabul: U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, December 2009), available at <http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afgh-opiumsSurvey2009_web.pdf>, accessed December 27, 2009.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

major druglords, banning their travel, and seizing their assets.²⁸ By the end of 2009, the Afghan government had still not complied with this resolution.

The lack of economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, also contributed to corruption and insecurity. The economy continued to grow in 2009, with real GDP projected to increase by over 15%. Because of recovery in the licit agricultural sector and higher donor inflows, Afghans were generally more optimistic about the economy.²⁹ However, Afghanistan remained one of the world's poorest countries, and the increased prosperity was concentrated in urban areas and in the north.³⁰ Unemployment continued to be a main concern, with survey results showing the least improvement in employment opportunities since 2004.³¹ The paucity of licit economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, drove the narco-industry, with almost two-thirds of farmers citing the continued relatively high prices for poppy crops (and the need to provide basic food and shelter for their families) as why they were being grown.³²

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan-Country Note* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, December 16, 2009), available at <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/country/notes/pdf/afghanistan.pdf>>, accessed December 19, 2009.

³⁰ Rennie, Sharma, Sen, *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People*, pp. 8–9.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

³² *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009*, p. 9, available at <http://www.unodc.org/documents/cropmonitoring/Afghanistan/Afgh-opiumsurvey2009_web.pdf>, accessed December 27, 2009.

Charges of waste and corruption were leveled by Afghan government officials against the deliverers of international aid.³³ There was, in fact, also a perception among ordinary Afghans that corruption within international agencies was as endemic as within the Afghan government.³⁴ These perceptions were driven by the fact that a large portion of aid specified for Afghanistan apparently did not reach the Afghan people. High overhead costs, high salaries for Western consultants, the huge percentage of aid money spent on security arrangement for aid agencies, and the multiple layers of subcontracting arrangements meant that the amount of aid actually reaching Afghans civilians remained very low. In fact, the majority of aid monies were suspected of having been retained by international, particularly American, contractors before the aid projects were even subcontracted to their Afghan counterparts, let alone reaching Afghan civilians. This perception of corruption fed conspiracy theories, emboldened the growing Taliban insurgency, and further exacerbated the vicious cycle of corruption in Afghanistan.³⁵

CHANGES IN SOCIAL INDICATORS

High corruption and growing insecurity also hampered social indicator improvements in Afghanistan. The average life expectancy of Afghans remained low at 43 years, compared to 64

³³ Sardar Ahmad, "Karzai Man Hits Back at West over Corruption," Agence France-Presse (AFP), November 12, 2009, available at <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jD5OJBTK7IT11TpOpfzjcttT1gnw>>, accessed December 20, 2009.

³⁴ Karin von Hippel, "Combating Corruption in Afghanistan," AfPak Channel, *Foreign Policy* (on-line posting), September 30, 2009, posting, available at <http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/09/30/combating_corruption_in_afghanistan>, accessed January 20, 2010.

³⁵ Ibid.

years for other South Asian countries.³⁶ Only 13% of Afghans had access to safe drinking water and 12% to adequate sanitation,³⁷ while more than half of children under five years of age were malnourished.³⁸ The human development indicator ranking for Afghanistan remained the second worst in the world.³⁹ Food insecurity also continued to plague Afghanistan, with nearly one-third of the population not being able to access sufficient food. The World Food Program continued to run one of its largest operations in Afghanistan. Environmental degradation also remained a severe problem, reducing agricultural productivity.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, there were some positive indicators as well. While health and literacy indicators continued to rank among the worst in the world, independent survey results indicated a 38% decrease in child mortality figures since 2002 and similar improvements in maternal

³⁶ *Afghanistan at a Glance* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2009), available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/223546-1189611264671/afg_aag.pdf, accessed December 28, 2009.

³⁷ *Afghanistan Country Overview 2009* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2009), available at <http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANEXTN/0,contentMDK:20154015~menuPK:305992~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:305985,00.html>, accessed December 18, 2009.

³⁸ *Afghanistan Country Overview*, World Food Program, 2009, available at <http://www.wfp.org/countries/afghanistan>, accessed December 30, 2009.

³⁹ *Statistics of the Human Development Report* (New York, N. Y.: Human Development Report 2009, 2009), available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>, accessed December 20, 2009.

⁴⁰ *Afghanistan Country Overview*.

mortality rates.⁴¹ This improvement almost certainly derives from the fact that almost 85% of the population now has access to primary health care.⁴² Illiteracy remained among the highest in the world with only about 30% of heads of household being literate, while attacks on girls' schools in particular highlighted the barriers to improving education access. However, K-12 enrollment rates were projected to be the highest ever in Afghanistan.⁴³ Still, these improvements continued to be hampered by insecurity, corruption, and sheer poverty.

AFGHANISTAN AND ITS NEIGHBORS

In order to address insurgent safe havens in Pakistan, the U.S. announced an “Af-Pak” strategy at the beginning of 2009, and other international actors quickly followed suit.⁴⁴ This Af-Pak strategy is built on the recognition that the Taliban and its al-Qaida affiliates are increasingly finding safe haven in western Pakistan, and that addressing the insurgency problem necessitates a single policy encompassing both countries. The strategy represents a greater regional approach to addressing security concerns within Afghanistan by also focusing on Pakistan. It also seeks to calm Pakistani government and military fears of an exit by American and other international forces from Afghanistan. From a Pakistani perspective, this would leave a pro-Indian Afghan

⁴¹ *38% Reduction in Child Mortality, 40% Reduction in Maternal Mortality Achieved during 2002 to 2008*, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Public Health, December 18, 2009, available at <http://www.moph.gov.af/en/news.php?id=199>, accessed December 18, 2009.

⁴² *Afghanistan Country Overview 2009*.

⁴³ *IDA at Work: Afghanistan—Expanding Access to Quality Education*, World Bank External Affairs website, September 2009, available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/IDA/0,,contentMDK:21289161~menuPK:3266877~pagePK:51236175~piPK:437394~theSitePK:73154,00.html>, accessed December 18, 2009.

⁴⁴ This section builds on a draft, unpublished report written by the author for the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination in December 2009. It also contains information from various anonymous sources.

government in power, thereby sandwiching Pakistan between two unfriendly countries. It is the fear of such a future scenario that allegedly motivates the Pakistani military to remain “soft” on rooting out the Afghan Taliban in its borders. It also purportedly motivates the Pakistani military to maintain links with the Afghan Taliban as a hedging strategy.

While other countries in the region including Iran, India, China, and the various Central Asian states also have a stake in a politically stable Afghanistan (not to mention an ideological preference for the current democratic government in Kabul), this has not prevented some of them from also hedging their political bets by concurrently maintaining links with the Afghan Taliban, much like Pakistan. Some of these neighboring countries have sought alliances with the Taliban in Afghanistan because they remain deeply suspicious of American motives in the region, whereas others simply want to ensure their access to Afghanistan’s largely unexplored energy sources and minerals. For example, in addition to the purported links between the Pakistani military and the Afghan Taliban, there have been reports of Iran (a Shia-majority country) providing military hardware to the extremist Sunni Afghan Taliban,⁴⁵ and Chinese-made military equipment has reportedly also been found on Taliban fighters.⁴⁶

Overall, however, the survival of the current democratically elected regime in Afghanistan, and preventing a Taliban takeover, remains in the long-term interests of most of Afghanistan’s neighbors. These neighboring countries have used different methods to support

⁴⁵ Bill Roggio, “U.S. Strike Kills Iranian-backed Taliban Commander in Western Afghanistan,” *The Long War Journal*, June 10, 2009, available at <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/06/us_strike_kills_iran.php>, accessed December 20, 2009.

⁴⁶ “U.S. Warns China over Weapon Links in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan,” Agence France Presse, May 16, 2008, available at <<http://www.defencetalk.com/us-warns-china-over-weapon-links-in-iran-iraq-afghanistan-15769/>>, accessed December 20, 2009.

the current government in Kabul and to ensure their continued influence in Afghanistan. For example, some countries like India and Iran have sought to accomplish this long-term objective by providing significant developmental assistance to Afghanistan throughout 2009; whereas others, like China, have focused on significant foreign investments in areas like mining. The key to Afghanistan's political future will be in harnessing these differing motivations for contributing to the securing and rebuilding of Afghanistan, and channeling them into relationships that will benefit its political and economic future. Considering the multiplicity of motivations of Afghanistan's neighbors, this remains a challenging, but certainly not impossible, task.