

Long-Term Planning for A Post-War Afghanistan

by Ramtanu Maitra

Aug. 5—Unless President Obama just cannot hear or face reality, he should realize by now that it is Summer of 2010, and whatever inspired the nine years of blood-spilling in Afghanistan, that the war is over. What remains is more killing of Afghan civilians, and American soldiers who were led to this vast killing field, to kill in order not to be killed. Throughout these nine years of war, the pretext presented to the American people, and others, was that it is a “war of necessity” to rid Afghanistan of terrorism and stabilize that country. We knew at the beginning, as we know now, that nothing could be further from the truth.

And yet, after all these years, nothing is coming out of the staffed- (or stuffed-) to-the-gills White House which could provide a clue to what the United States must do now to bring hope to the next generation of Afghans, and thus, relate itself to the region, no longer as a force committed to destruction, but as an active collaborator in achieving stability and building a future. It is evident that, this would require comprehensive cooperation among the major nations, such as Russia, China, India, and the United States.

As far as Washington’s Af-Pak policy goes, it is urgent to set the ball rolling immediately in this direction, and not to remain in a paralyzed state, pondering for years to come, how to “save face” in the retreat from Afghanistan, while the killing goes on and opium traffickers continue to destroy youth people around the world. What has been floated so far, however, through

former Bush colleague and neocon Robert Blackwill, and the British colonial ideology-imbued former UN deputy special representative for Afghanistan, Peter Galbraith, is nothing but the old colonial “solution,” which is to break up Afghanistan, this time along the Pushtun and non-Pushtun ethnic divide.

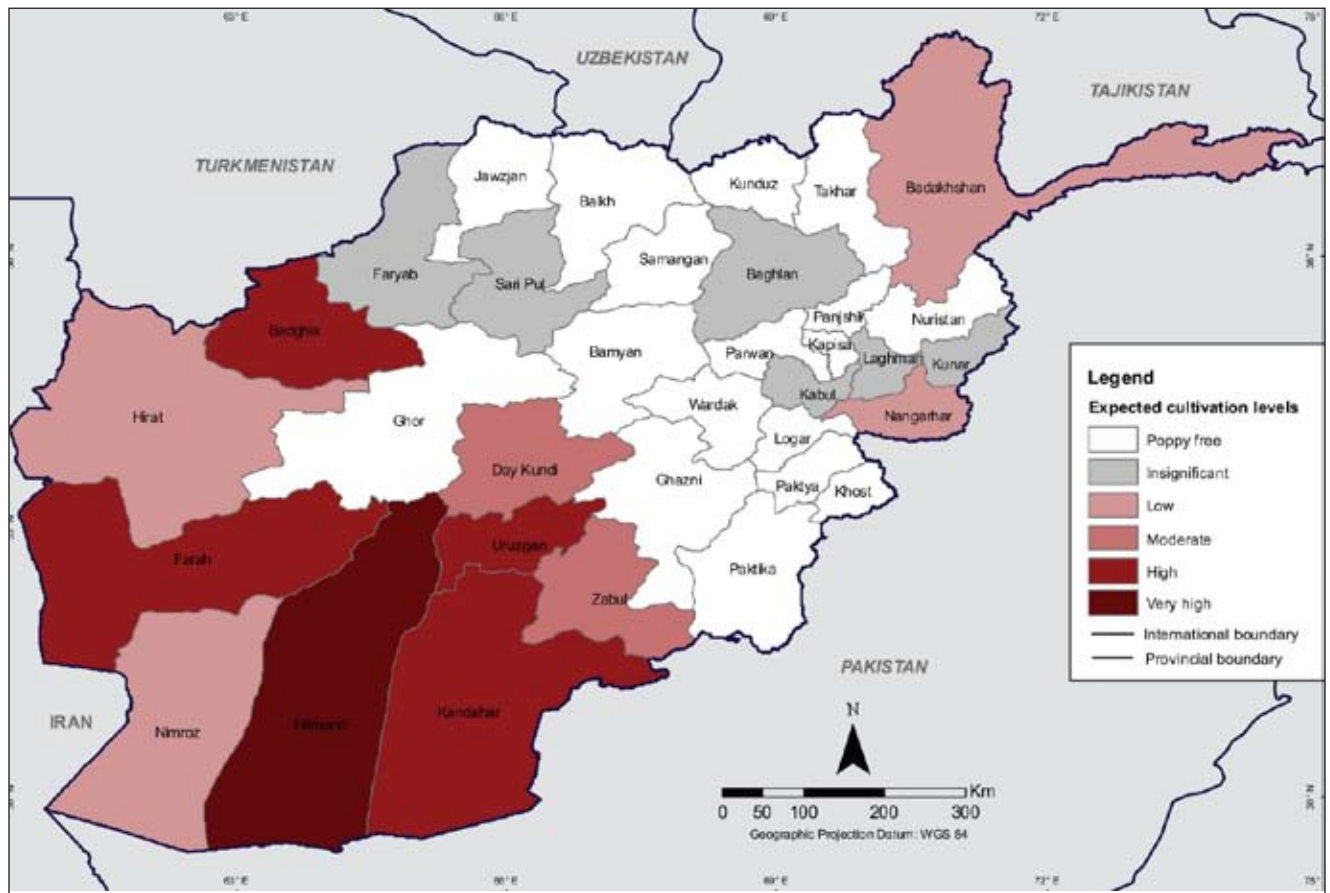
However, the good news is that the Afghans do not approve of that “solution,” and a senior Pakistani journalist pointed out recently that Uzbek-Afghan warlord Abdur Rashid Dostum has threatened to “slit the throat” of anyone promoting such an idea.

If the White House could focus on the realities, Washington would commit itself to two objectives, with cooperation of regional powers, which must include Russia, China, India, Iran, the Central Asian nations, and Pakistan. These objectives are: driving the international opium traffickers and their patrons out of Afghanistan, and building the foundation for Afghanistan’s almost non-existent mining and manufacturing sectors, in tandem with its once alive, but now dilapidated, agricultural sector.

Lies About Opium, on Whose Behalf?

Many, if not most, people in the United States who claim to know about such things, boldly declare that opium growing was always a major activity of Afghan farmers. Such statements are downright lies. Opium production in Afghanistan never, even in the most chaotic days that prevailed in that country, never exceeded

FIGURE 1
Expected Opium Poppy Cultivation Levels (by Province), 2010



Source: UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Rapid Assessment Survey, 2010*.

a few hundred tons a year, until the Soviet Army invaded in 1979. In fact, in 1957, Afghanistan issued an opium ban. In 1958, the UN General Assembly praised Afghani efforts at eradicating the opium crop, and urged UN members to provide assistance to the country. The aim was to provide foreign support in lieu of opium sales, and Afghanistan received a great deal.

According to historian Alfred McCoy,¹ “since the sixteenth century, when recreational opium eating was first developed, Central Asia had been a self-sufficient drug market. In fact, up until the late 1870s, tribal farmers in the highlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan grew limited quantities of opium and sold it to merchant caravans bound west for Iran and east to India.” In 1870,

along the North West Frontier Province (NWFP—now renamed by Islamabad as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) border of Afghanistan, 1,130 acres were cultivated for opium. During the colonial era, Britain encouraged opium cultivation throughout its provinces in India. However, the U.K. government later reversed its approval of opium cultivation in the NWFP because the opium economy became divisive and contributed to the Pushtun warriors’ resistance to British rule.

To fund the Afghan mujahideen groups resisting the Soviet Army, the United States covertly provided \$2 billion for military aid through the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency, on top of a formal \$3 billion aid package for Afghanistan. The ISI was responsible for distributing weapons to Afghan resistance groups. One of the mujahideen leaders, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, received over 50% of the arms transported to the region.

1. Alfred W. McCoy, *Interplay of CIA Covert Warfare & the Global Narcotics Traffic*, 2002; and McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003).

According to Lt. Col. Hubert E. Bagley, Jr.²: “In addition to U.S. support, Hekmatyar trafficked illicit opium to finance his resistance against the Soviets and as a way of increasing his power over other Afghan commanders. Hekmatyar’s dominance in the region led other mujahideen commanders to participate in the trade of illicit opium to finance their fight as well, and contributed to Afghanistan’s socioeconomic and political dependence on opium. Afghan commanders controlled the agricultural regions of the country and forced farmers to grow opium poppies, which doubled the country’s opium harvest to 575 tons between 1982 and 1983. Pakistan’s complicity in the opium trade was apparent even in 1980, since sixty percent of the heroin market in the U.S. was from Afghan opium refined in Pakistan. By the time the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, Afghan warlords were well established in the production and trade of illicit opium. That same year the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recorded Afghanistan’s opium production at 1,570 tons, more than double 1983’s harvest.”

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to “smoke out Osama bin Laden,” a phrase used by former President G.W. Bush to explain the invasion to the American people, took place in 2001. That year, Afghanistan’s opium production was only about 500 tons, which was a sharp plunge from the 4,200 tons the year before. The drop occurred because the Taliban leaders in power cracked the whip.

Once the foreign troops got inside Afghanistan in 2001, and started battling the Taliban and al-Qaeda, opium production zoomed. For instance, in 2005, after the British troops took over southern Afghanistan, the most “fertile” ground for growing poppy, opium production exploded. The annual figures released by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime show that production of opium in Helmand and Kandahar provinces alone soared to almost 4,500 tons in 2007, the year that Afghanistan, breaking the previous record set in 2006, produced 8,200 tons. Now, one may ask: Were Afghan farmers traditionally dependent on opium production, or was it the foreign warriors, who came to exorcise the Devil from Afghanistan’s body and soul, who were responsible for the opium explosion?

If we accept the fact that the Afghan farmers were

not previously dependent on growing poppy, and had a pretty decent agricultural sector that was destroyed by war and the historical promoters of opium, it will not be that difficult to eradicate opium and work towards developing a decent agro-industrial sector in Afghanistan. Simply put, if Britain is kept out of any form of participation in Afghanistan, the scourge of opium will eventually vanish.

On June 9-10, 2010, an international forum entitled “Afghan Drug Production: A Challenge to the International Community,” convened in Moscow and addressed the devastation caused by the Afghan opium explosion in the post-2001 years. At that forum, Viktor Ivanov, the director of Russia’s Federal Service for the Control of Narcotics, articulated the Kremlin’s case for why Afghan drug production is an international, rather than a local or regional, threat. “The time has come to qualify the status of Afghan drug production as a threat to world peace and security,” Ivanov said.

Afghan Agriculture

At the same time, it should be evident that Afghanistan cannot remain simply an agricultural nation, although it must use all its land and skill to become food secure. It must also exploit its vast mineral resources to establish small and medium-sized industrial enterprises, to manufacture immediately the tools and equipment that are associated with high-productivity modern agriculture. For Afghanistan, which sits on an East-West crossroads, it is imperative that it have an agricultural sector that will sustain its growing population. Anything else will keep it as a cockpit, where wars will be fought and Afghans will die.

The most fundamental benefit of a successful modern agricultural sector lies in what it builds into the nation. To begin with, such an agricultural sector requires power, water, sufficient manpower, development of agro-industries, and a transportation network throughout the country. A successful agricultural sector needs concerted efforts, and if the importance of the agricultural sector is fully understood, and developed in-depth, it acts as a shield against external manipulation. The process itself develops skilled manpower.

Basic agricultural institutions include research and extension services that create agronomists who live in the country, and work to develop high-yield varieties of seeds and to improve undernourished land. Development of water resources, which includes irrigation and water supply to the agro-industries and the population in

2. Lt. Col. Hubert E. Bagley, Jr., U.S. Army, “Afghanistan: Opium Cultivation and Its Impact on Reconstruction” (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, May 2004).



UN/Jawad Jalali

Construction workers in Kabul, September 2008. Building up the country's agricultural sector and developing the mining industry will require construction of basic infrastructure, from electric power plants, to rail and water transportation, to water management.

general, produces engineers and technicians who build dams, canals, and flood plains. These acts themselves protect soil, the land, and the environment in general.

Afghanistan's agricultural sector needs development of bulk transportation, preferably a railroad network. However, the rough Afghan terrain means that the initial transportation network will have to be based on roads. However, in the southern part of the country, in the highly fertile lands of Dasht-e-Khas, Dasht-e-Margow, and the Rigestan plains butting against Iran, an extensive railroad network can be developed, to facilitate interaction between agricultural lands and urban centers. The agricultural sector will also require agro-machinery, such as tractors, harvesters, and hoeing machines. The manufacturing and maintenance of such machinery will introduce industries that will help train skilled workers and technicians. In addition, a well-fed population will be more productive and healthy, and, over the years, more diverse in its pursuit of future options.

During the last nine years, and another twenty years of wars that engulfed Afghanistan just prior to the U.S. invasion in 2001, one area in which foreign investment could have benefitted the Afghan people enormously, if it had been plentiful and efficiently managed, is agriculture. Spean Jan Lalahand, lecturer and member of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Kabul, says that in the last eight years, agriculture has not been a development priority for the Afghan government. This,

he says, explains why no agricultural project has been successfully implemented in the country.

According to Mohammad Ramin Atiqzad, secretary general of the Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan, 80% of Afghans depend on farming as their main source of livelihood. And Deputy Minister of Agriculture Saleem Khan Kunduzi reports that much of the arable land in Afghanistan is now unused. Of this fallow land, 2.1 million hectares are irrigable and 1.5 million are rain-fed.

Industrial Potential

M. Ashraf Haidari, the deputy chief of mission and political counselor at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Washington, wrote that the recent discovery of nearly \$1 trillion in minerals in Afghanistan by the U.S. Defense Department was neither "recent" nor a "discovery." His June 30 article, "Help Afghanistan help itself to mine mineral resources," was published in the U.A.E.-based *The National* news magazine.

According to Paul A. Brinkley, U.S. deputy under-secretary of defense and director of Task Force Business and Stability Operations, Afghanistan has significant deposits of copper, iron ore, niobium, cobalt, gold, molybdenum, silver, and aluminum, as well as sources of fluorspar, beryllium, lithium, and other resources.

Brinkley's team was tasked to evaluate the state of Afghanistan's economy. "When I first visited Afghanistan," he said, "I did not anticipate there being wealth opportunity there that would enable this kind of development to take place in any term" (quoted by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden, "Mineral Resources Could Give Afghans New Hope," American Forces Press Service, June 15, 2010).

Also quoted by Carden was Jack Medlin, a geological specialist on the region with the U.S. Geological Survey International Program, has been working with Afghan mine ministry officials to help them deal with their mineral resources. Afghanistan has about 60 deposits, he said, noting that around 20 have great potential to boost the country's economy. Also, at least 70% of the country's mineral resources have yet to be identified, he explained, pointing out that his organization

only provides the scientific data, not development of the mines.

“The mineral resources of Afghanistan are basically scattered all over the country,” Medlin said. “Once we work with them to identify the places, and we gather the scientific and technical data necessary for development, then that work is handed off to the Afghan government and the Afghan people basically, to develop those resources in an environmentally sound way.

“Artisanal (small scale) mining in that country has gone back centuries, mostly focused on things like gold in various places,” he said. “But the country—what it faces going forward—is developing a mining culture basically at a very large mine scale. And I guess I fully believe that the Afghans are fully capable of handling that, given some time to develop the expertise.”

What should be key in developing Afghanistan’s mining industry is to build the basic infrastructure—power, bulk transportation, water for industrial, commercial, and domestic use, and communication—to make it a success. Since these mineral reserves are spread all around, that also provides an opportunity to set up institutions to train people throughout the country, cutting across ethnic backgrounds. A large population of Pushtuns have settled over the centuries in northern and western Afghanistan, where other ethnic groups such as Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras, among others, are the dominant ethnic groups.

By setting up the institutions, which include technical schools, engineering facilities, and R&D facilities, a large number of Afghans could be trained to utilize these mineral reserves for developing a viable manufacturing sector. The prime objective of that manufacturing sector, to begin with, will be to supplement the agriculture sector. In this context, both China and India, which have developed strong manufacturing sectors, will be of immense help. The involvement of regional nations in Afghanistan, engaged in its mining and industrial sectors, will also bring in foreign investors, who can play a significant role in helping Afghanistan meet this objective.

Regional Initiatives

Heads of state of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, meeting on Aug. 5 in Tehran, issued a declaration stating that “the three countries urged for the implementation of the previously agreed documents on transit cooperation and trade and energy developments.” Tajik President Emomali Rahmon recommended establishing a railway

that will link the three countries, and thence, to China’s railway as well. The suggestion was welcomed by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In July, M. Ibrahim Adel, Afghanistan’s minister of mining, met with Abdul Rahim Ashur, minister of transport and communication of Tajikistan. Adel briefed the Tajikistan delegation on the Aynak copper project, which has contracted with China to extract copper ores in northern Afghanistan. He said that “a part of the Aynak project would be to extend the railway from the Amo Darya [the river that separates Afghanistan from Tajikistan] to Torkham [bordering Pakistan]; the other parts of the railway would be in Pakistan and China, that connect middle Asia to the Indian Ocean in Karachi in Pakistan and Bandar Abbas in Iran.”

But the crux of the problem lies with the Obama Administration’s “self-obsessions” about Afghanistan, as pointed out by Sun Zhuangzhi, a research scholar with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in his March 24 article in *China Daily*. Sun, expressing his concern over the Obama Administration’s Af-Pak policies, said, “It is clear that the U.S. would like to maintain its influence over Afghanistan even after withdrawing its troops, no matter when that happens. Which means it would not allow regional powers such as China to play a greater role in Afghan affairs.”

At a July 20 conference in Kabul, attended by senior officials of 70 countries, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted the importance of recognizing Afghanistan’s future “neutral status,” which would preclude any sort of permanent foreign military presence in the country. “The restoration of the neutral status of Afghanistan is designed to become one of the key factors of creating an atmosphere of good-neighborly relations and cooperation in the region,” the minister said. “We expect that this idea will be supported by the Afghan people. The Presidents of Russia and the U.S. have already come out in favor of it.” Meanwhile, Russia will continue working with its international partners to equip Afghan security forces with the necessary military equipment, Lavrov told the delegates.

Lavrov also said that a scheduled August meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan in the Russian city of Sochi will help develop cooperation in the region. “The development of efficient regional cooperation in order to settle Afghanistan’s problems is a priority,” the Russian foreign minister said.

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Helga Zepp-LaRouche known as "the Silk Road Lady," has played a major role in organizing worldwide support for the Eurasian Land-Bridge. She is shown here at Lianyungang Port in China, October 1998.



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