

Afghanistan
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Afghanistan has a long way to go

Adriana Lins & Michael O'Hanlon

Three years after the Bush administration led a remarkably quick and bold military operation to overthrow the Taliban, and only days after the country's presidential election, many challenges face Afghanistan's newly elected leader in the years ahead. The big question is how much the United States will continue to help.

There has been considerable progress in Afghanistan since the Taliban govt was overthrown in 2001. But that's largely because things were so bad under the Taliban, not because they are good now. And unfortunately, the current "security-lite" strategy being followed by the United States and its NATO partners does not inspire confidence that Afghanistan will soon do better.

President Hamid Karzai or his successor will need more help from the international community to have a decent chance of avoiding future instability in his country and improving the lives of Afghans.

In early November 2001, President Bush promised at the United Nations that "when that regime (the Taliban) is gone ... America will join the world in helping the people of

country." In October 2002, he pledged a "full commitment to a future of progress and stability for the Afghan people." But the United States and its allies have fallen short of the president's promises.

To be sure, some real achievements have been made. A horribly oppressive regime is gone. Two successful loya jirga meetings have resulted in the creation of an interim government and the ratification of a new constitution. Last week-

30 percent a year, and school enrolment is now 300 percent greater than before the war.

That said, Afghanistan remains a medieval-like fiefdom of warlords. Some are more benign than others, but most are oppressive. None is conducive to the creation of a healthy economy, and none has produced a safe environment for citizens. Militia forces total close to 90,000,

were 15,000 troops in the Afghan Army and 28,000 in the police forces. Some of these successfully resolved a looming crisis in the western region near Herat this summer. But most rural parts of the country, where 80 percent of Afghans live, remain beyond Karzai's control.

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tions remain in Afghanistan. According to the most recent data, 70 percent of the Afghan people continue to be malnourished, only 13 percent have access to clean water and sanitation and a mere 6 percent have electricity.

About 20,000 US troops have been valiantly fighting a bloody war against the Taliban in Afghanistan's south. Thirty-two Americans have died in Afghanistan this year, after 12 were killed in 2003 - bringing the overall total of the past three years to more than 100. Unfortunately, again, the Taliban appears to be reconstituting in places, as evidenced by the spike in the US death toll this year. Indeed, according to a New York Times interview with an Afghan intelligence chief Aug. 1, the Taliban's strength in Afghanistan may have grown by 50 percent since 2003.

It's been a year since the United Nations gave NATO the mandate to expand its presence beyond Kabul, the capital. But troops making up the mission of the International Security Assistance Force remain concentrated in Kabul; only a few dozen are located in each of five additional provinces.

Largely because of the poor security situation, the Afghan

economy is not good. It has improved since 2001, but remains weak, with a per capita income of about \$250 a year - comparable to the poorest countries in Africa. International assistance has been flowing in, about \$1 billion a year. But that is only half of what donors promised and hardly enough for a country ravaged by war for three decades.

Much of the economic growth that has occurred in Afghanistan has resulted directly or indirectly from the resumption of the drug trade. Only four years after the Taliban had largely eliminated the cultivation of opium, the country is believed to produce 75 percent of the world's supply. In 2003, revenues from the Afghan drug trade equaled half of Afghanistan's non-GDP.

In addition, heroin trafficking is believed to be the principal source of funding for remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda still in the country. The Bush administration's NATO allies and, most of all, the Afghan people have to be proud of in Afghanistan. But the glass is at most half full. Afghanistan is a young country in name and only; it remains factional, unsafe and poor.

Dr. F. R. ...

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