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SPECIAL REPORT 39

The Taliban and Afghanistan
Implications for Regional Security and Options for International Action

Key Points

- A two-decade-long civil war which began as an insurgency against the former communist-led government in Kabul has led to the surprising emergence of the Taliban as the leading power in Afghanistan. The Taliban are championed as the bearers of peace and the saviors of Afghan sovereignty by some; however, the rise of this largely rural, Pashtun-dominated Islamic fundamentalist movement is provoking wider regional fears of conflict and instability. Its version of Islamic law is considered the most draconian in the world, and it has been denounced by avowedly Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Neighboring countries are wary that Taliban rule in Afghanistan could lead to a persistent pattern of armed border clashes, illegal narcotics trafficking, terrorism, and the rekindling of ethnic and sectarian tensions throughout the region. Afghanistan poses an enormous challenge to an international community distracted by other priorities and lacking effective policy options for containing the dangerous spillover of Afghanistan's political, military, and social upheaval into neighboring states.
- Pakistan is experiencing an alarming increase in the incidence of violence from Taliban-aligned extremists seeking to impose Islamic law by force. Yet Pakistan's challenges transcend the Taliban, as Islamabad's problematic engagement of Afghanistan the past two decades has demonstrated. Indirect threats such as those posed by a growing drug trade and terrorism are huge problems because of the fragility of Pakistan's own civil society and internal political situation.
- Developments in Afghanistan are also spilling over into the states of Central Asia, which are still emerging from seventy years of Soviet rule. The five Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan) are threatened by a lucrative opium and heroin trade, financial crisis, refugee migration flows, and the potential rise of Islamic opposition movements. Above all else, these states fear internal economic collapse, which could send them begging to Moscow for economic and security assistance.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran harbors especially deep suspicions of the

Taliban. First, deep doctrinal differences divide the religious leaderships in the two countries. Second, a Taliban-led Afghanistan adds to Iran's sense of encirclement by hostile Sunni states. Finally, the Taliban's treatment of Shi'ite minorities in Afghanistan arouses alarm in Tehran. Divisions exist within Iran about whether to engage the Taliban directly or to continue covert support for Hezb-i-Wahdat (the Unity Party), the largely Shi'ite umbrella party fighting to overthrow the Taliban. Recent border skirmishes between Iran and Afghanistan highlight the real potential for an expansion of tensions to a wider, interstate war.

- Even though Afghanistan is no longer an important Cold War battleground, it continues to engage U.S. interest in such areas as containing terrorism, curbing illegal drug trafficking, and checking human rights violations. In trying to pursue U.S. interests, policymakers face a stark set of policy options, each carrying considerable risks and limited prospects for success. The present tentative and reactive policy being pursued by the United States and other global powers appears unlikely to stem regional problems flowing from Afghanistan. Thus, U.S. policymakers and other international actors face the difficult challenge of balancing the constraints posed by limited political will with the sobering task of managing the myriad tensions sparked by a Taliban-led Afghanistan.

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Introduction

For more than twenty years, war has consumed Afghanistan. In 1979, the Soviet Union launched an invasion of the country in order to prop up a pro-communist regime in Kabul. The United States and Pakistan played leading roles backing various Afghan guerrilla forces, known collectively as "mujahideen" (religious warriors), which gradually wore down the Soviet occupying force. Afghanistan's civil war continued after a Soviet pullout in 1989 as various mujahideen factions fought to fill the power vacuum. In the past four years, a newer group called the Taliban has gained control of most of Afghanistan. The Taliban, whose name means "students," have their roots in the Pakistan-based seminaries established for Afghan refugees during the Soviet occupation. The movement got a significant boost from the Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI, which reportedly provided extensive organizational, logistical, and material support to the Taliban militia. The core of the Taliban are from the Pashtun ethnic group, the largest single group in Afghanistan but still a minority of the population. Pashtuns are also a significant ethnic group in Pakistan, where they are heavily represented in the military.

The Taliban captured the Afghan capital, Kabul, in 1996, and now reportedly control all but the Panjshir Valley and other smaller areas in northern Afghanistan. They have imposed a highly restrictive form of Islamic law throughout Afghanistan which Muslim and non-Muslim observers have described as inhumane. Some see the Taliban's efforts to be not so much Islamic as an attempt to impose rural tribal mores onto the rest of the country.

International concern is mounting about the treatment of Afghan women, who are usually denied schooling, medical care, and freedom to travel except under strict conditions. There have also been widespread reports of extrajudicial killings throughout Afghanistan as well as reports of massacres as the Taliban conquered new territory.

The Taliban reportedly support their regime partly from profits in the opium trade. The Taliban directly tax domestic growers as well as traders who traffic in the narcotics. Sharp increases in Afghan production have left Afghanistan lagging behind only Burma as the world's largest producer of opium products in the world, amounting to 2,800 metric tons in 1997. The two countries combined account for 90 percent of opium production worldwide. The Taliban have further angered the international community by sheltering Saudi-born terrorist Osama bin Laden, who was linked by the U.S. government to the bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa in August 1998. Later in the same month, U.S. cruise missiles attacked training sites in Afghanistan associated with bin Laden. The Taliban insist that bin Laden had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks that killed more than 300 people and wounded another 5,000, but they have only belatedly indicated a willingness to help clarify his possible role.

International observers fear that the Afghan conflict may escalate into a regional one. Currently, more than 200,000 Iranian troops are amassed along the Iranian-Afghan border in response to the killing of a journalist and eight people Iran says were diplomats and the Taliban contend were military advisors. Relations with other international actors are strained or nonexistent. International human rights groups and aid missions have withdrawn from the country because of the harassment and killing of aid workers. Despite the fact that the Taliban control at least 90 percent of the territory of Afghanistan, only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, and those relations are fraying.

At the end of September, Afghanistan's neighboring countries, as well as Russia and the United States, renewed their calls for a peace settlement in Afghanistan. They agreed to send the chief UN negotiator for Afghanistan to visit the region.

Against this backdrop, five panelists convened to consider the situation in Afghanistan and its possible ideological, sectarian, and economic impacts throughout the region. This summary offers the views presented about Taliban policies, how key regional actors are affected by the current situation, and options for international action.

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The Taliban

Laili Helms

Decades of foreign intervention have devastated Afghanistan, laying waste to more than 75 percent of the country. From 1978 until 1996, foreign intervention sharpened internal ethnic and ideological differences, tearing the country apart. During this time, Russia, Iran, the United States, and other countries ignored ethnically motivated massacres, rapes, and human rights abuses. Downplaying persistent and credible reports from nongovernmental organizations of human rights abuses by the Taliban, Helms attributed the recent international focus on the social conditions in Afghanistan to a singular cause: economic interests, and especially access to the potentially vast energy resources in the Caspian Basin region.

Helms painted a sympathetic portrait of life in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Afghans of all ethnicities welcome the Taliban as heroes who have restored peace to Afghanistan. Most of the country is now peaceful and disarmed, trade routes to Central Asia are beginning to prosper, the value of the currency has increased, and agriculture has improved. The Taliban are also effectively governing Afghanistan. They have secured all borders except a small portion of the border with Tajikistan, and control all major points of entry.

Helms claimed that the Taliban's government is accountable to the people and is representative of all ethnic groups. The majority of the government's cabinet members are from ethnic minorities, for example. The Taliban have restored Afghan culture, Afghan-style self-rule is implemented in the provinces, and the civil administration and justice system is based on Islamic and Afghan traditions.

Regarding terrorism, Helms asserts that it was the former president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, who invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan. The Taliban inherited this problem, and would be happy to cooperate with bin Laden's extradition if the U.S. government or other interested parties could show evidence of his terrorist activities.

Efforts to isolate what should be considered the legitimate government of Afghanistan have been deleterious for the country, Helms argued. The Taliban want national unity based on the rule of law and civil society. They are not a fundamentalist group, and they are not anti-Western or anti-American. They do not represent a threat to their neighbors. The Taliban want an enduring peace, national security, and respect for Afghan beliefs and traditions.

From the point of view of the Taliban, there is no "crisis" in Afghanistan to be resolved. The only action needed is for the rest of the international community to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, and to deal with them as such. Clearly they are the de facto rulers, and they would like recognition of their legitimacy. It is the responsibility of the international community to help Afghanistan peacefully rebuild under the Taliban, Helms contended.

Several panel members and audience members disputed Helms' portrayal of Afghanistan under the Taliban. Some cited press accounts, published reports,

or personal experiences to depict a situation in which aid agencies have difficulty gaining access to vulnerable populations, girls are denied schooling, and ethnic minorities have in some instances been massacred . For the most part, women are not allowed to work, and are denied access to health care despite international pressure to force the Taliban to reverse themselves on the issue.

Helms responded that the Taliban are ready to work with donor countries to open universities for women, that conditions in the countryside are much safer than before the Taliban were in power, and that the reports of massacres are allegations that will be found untrue when the United Nations completes its investigations.

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Pakistan

Paula Newberg

(Paula Newberg was speaking in her personal capacity and not as a representative of the United Nations.)

Afghanistan is one of the most important defining issues for Pakistan in terms of security, domestic politics, ideology, and political identity. In fact, engagement in Afghanistan has been problematic for Pakistan for more than twenty years.

In security terms, Pakistan has always seen Afghanistan as an element of its India policy. It has sought to protect its western border in response to insecurity on its eastern border with India. To this end, Pakistan's long-standing objective in Afghanistan has been to have a Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul. The reasoning was that such a government would be friendly to Pakistan, which also has a significant Pashtun population.

In practice, the Taliban have created serious problems for Pakistan. Afghanistan's porous borders allow for a prosperous drug trade, bringing with it corruption and organizations that operate outside the law. In addition, transnational militant Sunni organizations in Kashmir, the Punjab, and Afghanistan have grown over the past 10 to 15 years and pose an increasing security risk to regional states. Tides of refugees have strengthened the cross-border ties of Islamist political organizations, and Pakistan's internal weakness has proven fertile ground for such movements.

Although its security services played a major role in creating the Taliban, Pakistan cannot control them despite leading the world to believe it might be able to. Pakistan offered the Taliban recognition in an attempt to keep its ties strong, but it is discovering that the interests of the Taliban may be very different from its own. Further, Pakistan cannot control the Taliban's

supporters within Pakistan, and it fears that Afghan refugees still in Pakistan may become a fifth column.

Pakistan's political system is very fragile, and economic pressures from decades of mounting debt combined with political and economic corruption have made the country virtually ungovernable. Pakistan's borders are not secure, and the government has only a tenuous grip on the law-and-order situation.

In addition, Pakistan's relationship with the United States is under severe strain. At the height of the relationship during the 1980s, Pakistan believed American interests in Afghanistan to be identical to its own. In the past decade, Pakistan was surprised to discover that America's involvement in Northwest Asia was purely a function of Cold War interests. Pakistan now finds itself at odds with the United States on a range of issues including support for the Taliban, and has found it difficult to extricate itself from its former policies.

Although Pakistan has not been able to adapt its policies to changing circumstances, the Taliban have proven to be highly malleable. They are a coalition built on arms, not ideology, and all the interests of its constituent parts are never clear. Owing to the influences mentioned above, however, Pakistan's foreign policy is too inflexible to respond to the evolution of the situation. Newberg advised that Pakistan should work its way out of its Afghan problem by working its way out of its own domestic political problems. It should address its own governance problems in order to change the way in which it makes and executes its foreign policy. The civil war in Afghanistan poses challenges for Pakistan, but it is not as great a problem as Pakistan's own domestic political turmoil. Internal weaknesses are the greatest threat to Pakistan right now.

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Central Asian States and Russia

Martha Brill Olcott

The five Central Asian states and Russia all strongly believe that their security interests are directly threatened by Afghanistan's civil war. As a region, the Central Asian states are threatened by drug trafficking, the narrowing of financial and security options, and the potential rise of anti-regime Islamic movements. As individual states, they face threats ranging from the migration of refugee populations to direct security threats and ongoing civil war.

These states are affected most directly by the growing drug trade and the corruption of security and other state officials by the drug trade. Not only is Afghanistan a source of drugs and drug traders, but as the drug trade moves through Central Asia, the Central Asians have observed the lucrative nature of

drug trafficking. As a result, indigenous drug trade within Central Asia is on the rise, and there is a growing consensus among Central Asian governments that greater international involvement in drug control is needed in the region.

The civil war in Afghanistan has helped maintain Russian influence in Central Asia. Central Asian states had earlier hoped that trade routes through Afghanistan could be their lifeline to the outside world. Such hopes have proven misplaced. Another possible trade outlet, Iran, remains problematic because of its limited links to other countries and the dampening effects of U. S. sanctions on the regime in Tehran. Continued turmoil in Afghanistan increases the geographic isolation of the Central Asian states and increases their dependence on Russia. Although the Central Asian states are learning to be more independent in terms of security and want to wean themselves from Russia's security net, the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and the threat of Taliban-inspired opposition movements in neighboring states have made it difficult to develop the confidence to do so.

Most Central Asian states consider the threats posed by Afghanistan to be less critical than their own internal threats. With the possible exception of Uzbekistan, they consider internal economic collapse to be the greatest threat because it creates the risk of concurrent political collapse. The Afghan crisis is still less important to them than Russia's financial crisis and their difficulties in attracting foreign investment.

For individual states, the domestic effects of the civil war in Afghanistan vary. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan perceive a direct security threat. Afghanistan served as a home for the Tajik opposition, prolonging the civil war in Tajikistan for several years. Tajikistan now suffers from continued internal instability and an ongoing inability to put its peace agreement into effect. Any risk from outside the country could have a critical influence on the tenuous situation. Uzbekistan is concerned about the stability of the border region it shares with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The migration of displaced Uzbeks and Tajiks may upset the historically fragile ethnic balance in the region.

Turkmenistan also faces a potentially direct security threat from the civil war but has chosen to respond to the economic threat rather than the political one. Out of concern for the need to transport goods through Afghanistan, Turkmenistan has not participated in any Central Asian efforts to isolate the Taliban, although it has also not directly recognized the Taliban government. If Iran takes military action, Turkmenistan will have difficulty balancing its relations with Iran with its relations with Pakistan. Of the remaining states, Kyrgyzstan is affected most by the drug trade and the refugees coming from Tajikistan. Kazakhstan and Russia have been the least affected by the Afghan situation.

How are the Central Asian states responding to these threats? Some have become directly involved in the conflict. Uzbekistan and Russia have tried to influence the military situation in Northern Afghanistan. Both will continue to be involved in a reactive military way if they believe that it is in their national security interest. Turkmenistan served as a supplier and pass-through for

military aid in 1997. These states are not likely to believe that their military actions will be decisive in determining the outcome in Afghanistan in the near future, but they see a need to be vigilant.

In general, the region is increasingly concerned about the prospect of negotiations in Afghanistan and about cutting off contamination from anti-regime influences. The experience of trying to implement a peace process in Tajikistan raises concern among regional actors that a peace process is not going to lead to any regional stability in the very near future. Because of the experience of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the Central Asian states perceive the need to keep tighter control at home, increase centralization, bolster internal security forces, and be more vigilant in cracking down against anti-regime Islamic activists.

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Iran

Geoffrey Kemp

The possibility of a military confrontation between Iran and Afghanistan is evidenced by the fact that they are maneuvering forces along their joint border. The murder of Iranian diplomats by Taliban forces, whether authorized or not, has created outrage in Iran. Throughout the country there is strong nationalism and desire for revenge. Additionally, strong ideological differences exist between Iran and Afghanistan. There are internal divisions about how to respond, however. It is not clear whether Iran will decide to engage the Taliban directly or continue to indirectly support the Taliban's opposition.

The tensions with Afghanistan occur in an environment of increasing challenges to Iran's long-term security. Afghanistan threatens to use its SCUD missiles against Iran. India and Pakistan have recently tested nuclear weapons, and likely will ultimately be able to reach Iran with the missile programs they are developing. This adds to the Iranian sense of encirclement from the U.S. military forces in the Gulf, the Saudi air force, the Turkish air force, and the Israeli air force and nuclear program. The recent security climate bolsters groups within Iran who argue for a strong missile program and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

From an Iranian point of view, serious strategic issues are on the table. Many Iranians believe that, at least until recently, the Taliban were indirectly supported by the United States, with direct support from Pakistan and economic backing from Saudi Arabia. They perceive the support of the Taliban to be part of a strategy of surrounding Iran with aggressive Sunni states. In addition, Iran has the world's second-largest reserves of natural gas but is presently exporting virtually none of it. Iran feels it has been stabbed in the back by an American policy working to ensure that Iran does not become one of the egress routes for the oil and gas resources of the Caspian.

All of this is taking place against the backdrop of a volatile domestic situation in Iran. Conservatives and moderates are involved in an intense political struggle. Further, plummeting oil prices have brought about an economic crisis.

The most likely course of action for Iran is the one they are already engaging in: indirect support for the Taliban's opposition. This will probably continue provided it is logistically feasible; this course of action is becoming increasingly difficult as the Taliban take control of more Afghan territory. Some in Iran favor a direct confrontation, but there is no easy war scenario, given the terrain and capacity of the Taliban to resist foreign intervention. Iran has far superior numbers, so a limited military victory is possible at the outset, but there would be no easy exit strategy. Of additional concern are the more than 1.5 million Afghans in Iran. Fear exists that some of this population could become fifth columnists, waging a terror campaign within Iran itself at the time of a cross-border confrontation.

Iran may find two unlikely partners on the Afghan issue. The first is Saudi Arabia. Since last December, Iran and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed dramatically improved diplomatic relations. Although Saudi Arabia has been a financial backer of the Taliban for many years, they are infuriated that the Taliban continue to provide shelter for Osama bin Laden, who in addition to his anti-American activities seeks to overthrow the Saudi regime. In September, the Saudis expelled the Afghan ambassador in Saudi Arabia and withdrew their ambassador from Afghanistan.

The second surprising partner is the United States. If U.S.-Iranian relations continue to thaw, there are three areas of potential cooperation with the United States in the future: terrorism, drugs, and weapons of mass destruction. Kemp believes that it is in America's long-term strategic interests to repair the relationship with Iran. Cross-border conflict could undermine the positive evolution of this relationship. For this reason, the United States should do what it can to help bring about a settlement before the Afghan conflict evolves into a regional war.

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U.S. Policy and Possibilities for International Action

Zalmay Khalilzad

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has underestimated its interests in Afghanistan and the region. Most Americans probably view Afghanistan as a faraway place of little importance. In reality, it has great strategic, economic, and historic significance for the United States. The cruise missile attacks against Osama bin Laden in August 1998 are a reminder that Afghanistan is now a global problem. Afghanistan has become a haven for some of the most lethal anti-United States terrorist organizations. It is also the second-largest producer of heroin in the world. The conflict in Afghanistan

could threaten stability in the Gulf, Central Asia, or South Asia. Additionally, the United States has strong humanitarian interests in Afghanistan because of the high infant mortality rate, the refugee problem, and the treatment of women and minorities.

Khalilzad believes that the United States has a moral responsibility in Afghanistan stemming from the historic legacy of the Cold War. Many of the current problems can be directly traced to the Cold War, during which the people of Afghanistan suffered greatly. The United States has an obligation to the Afghan people, who were instrumental in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There has been a gap between U.S. objectives and U.S. strategy in dealing with Afghanistan. The United States has stated laudable objectives since 1992. It wants an end to the civil war, establishment of a representative government that respects international norms (especially with regard to terrorism, drug trafficking, and human rights), and an end to foreign interference. The United States has no real strategy to achieve these objectives, however. It has supported UN efforts for a negotiated settlement, but has offered no positive or negative incentives to change the situation. Since 1992, U.S. engagement has been relatively limited despite its considerable interests in the region. Consequently, a vacuum was created by the Soviet departure and U.S. disengagement, which resulted in a civil war with increasingly ethnic divisions, the influx of terrorist groups, and rivalry between regional powers, most notably Iran and Pakistan.

Because of the past neglect, the United States is left with more difficult options to protect its interests in Afghanistan and the region.

Option 1: Limited Involvement
The United States could continue to keep its distance from both the Taliban and the opposition. The United States would let the United Nations do what it can, yet remain prepared to protect U.S. interests with missile strikes or other means. The problem with this approach is that it could result in the establishment of a hostile rogue state closely linked to international terrorism and drug trafficking. It could also mean the continued violations of human rights and continued threats to regional peace and stability.

Option 2: Diplomatic Engagement
Alternatively, the United States could strive to engage the Taliban diplomatically. This could be done by the United States alone or by a U.S.-led coalition. The Taliban would be offered recognition, UN membership, opposition to foreign interference in their affairs, support for building pipelines over Afghanistan, encouragement of the Taliban's opposition to enter into good faith negotiations, and economic assistance in the future. In exchange, the Taliban would agree to cooperate on terrorism and drug trafficking, implement an immediate cease-fire, open a dialogue on more representative government, improve human rights, and cooperate on drug trafficking and terrorism (including the extradition of Osama bin Laden). Also needed would be a regional understanding that no neighboring state would be able to station

troops, bases, or facilities within Afghanistan. The problem with this scenario is the improbability that the Taliban would accept such a proposition, or that the United States could make such an offer.

Option 3: Undermine the Taliban
In this scenario, the United States seeks to transform the Taliban into something that ultimately can accept the sort of conditions presented in the second option. Alternatively, it could seek to overthrow the Taliban, either immediately or over time. There are several ways to approach this. The United States could work with Saudi Arabia to further weaken Saudi Arabian ties to the Taliban. Positive and negative incentives could be used to increase leverage on Pakistan to cooperate on the Afghan issue. Cooperation on Afghanistan could be used to accelerate positive relations with Iran. The United States could encourage the UN to be a greater nuisance to the Taliban than it already is, namely through more investigations. Finally, the most extreme method is a covert program of support for the Taliban's opponents. With all of these courses of action, the United States could remain willing to engage the Taliban when and if they change, and be ready to protect its interests if they do not. The primary risk is that the Taliban will become even more embedded in an anti-Western agenda, cooperating with groups that are hostile to the United States.

These are not easy choices. Khalilzad believes, however, that putting off confronting the situation in Afghanistan would only result in a worse outcome for the United States and the region. The time to face the challenge of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is now.

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Appendix

Biographies of the Panelists

Laili Helms is an Afghan-American who serves as an unofficial advisor to the Taliban in the United States. She has helped the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan establish and maintain contacts with the United Nations and U.S. officials. In the past, Helms worked with humanitarian aid agencies in Peshawar and traveled extensively throughout Afghanistan.

Paula Newberg has served as a special advisor to the United Nations Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator for Afghanistan for the past two years, and is currently senior policy advisor to the Emergency Response Division of the United Nations Development Program in New York. Newberg was previously a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University.

Martha Brill Olcott is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Olcott, who also codirects the Carnegie Moscow Center's

project on "Ethnicity and Politics in the Former Soviet Union," is the author of the book Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security, published by the U.S. Institute of Peace Press.

Geoffrey Kemp is the director of Regional Strategic Programs at the Nixon Center. His current areas of interest focus on the geopolitics of energy in the Caspian Basin and Persian Gulf and U.S. relations in the Middle East, especially with Iran. During the Reagan Administration, Kemp was special assistant to the president for National Security Affairs and senior director for Near East and South Asian Affairs on the National Security Council staff.

Zalmay Khalilzad is the program director for the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND's Project Air Force. In the mid-1980s, he served as a member of the State Department's Policy Planning staff, and then as special advisor to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. In 1991-1992, he was also Assistant Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Planning.

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About the Report

On October 1, 1998, the United States Institute of Peace and the Middle East Institute cosponsored a Current Issues Briefing to explore the regional and security ramifications of the Taliban movement's consolidation of power in Afghanistan. After twenty years of war that has ravaged Afghanistan, peace remains elusive, and leaders in adjacent countries and the international community face a dearth of options. In addition to persistent and credible reports of abysmal human rights violations in Afghanistan, the country bears watching because it may well provide the catalyst for wider regional instability throughout parts of South and Central Asia.

Institute President Richard H. Solomon moderated the briefing, which was attended by approximately eighty policy analysts, media representatives, and academics. This report, prepared by Namahashri Tavana, Patrick Cronin, and Jon Alterman, summarizes the points made by the panelists. The Institute is especially grateful to former U.S. Institute of Peace Senior Fellow Marvin Weinbaum, who helped to conceptualize the panel discussion.

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