



[\[Back \]](#)

[USIPeace Briefing](#)

Afghans, International Community Chart A Joint Path Forward

By [Beth DeGrasse](#) and Emily Hsu
February 2006

The Afghan government and international community have charted out a joint strategy to tackle the country's most pressing challenge: building state institutions. Approved earlier this month at a conference in London, the Afghanistan Compact maps out the country's way ahead and reaffirms the shared commitment of the international community.

USIP held a [Current Issues Briefing](#) in early February 2006 to review the Afghanistan Compact. The speakers at the briefing were Barnett Rubin, director of studies at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University, and [Alex Thier](#), senior advisor in USIP's [Rule of Law](#) program. [Beth DeGrasse](#), coordinator of USIP's Afghanistan Working Group, moderated the discussion.

With a new constitution and an elected leadership in place today, the 2001 Bonn Agreement has been successfully fulfilled, said Barnett Rubin, who participated in the London conference as an advisor to the Afghan government. "The challenge now is to significantly strengthen state capacity and enable the country to become a full member of the global community," he said.

From Bonn to London: The Afghanistan Compact

While it lacks the binding obligations of a treaty, the Afghanistan Compact represents a strong political agreement between the Afghan government and the international community. The involvement of high-level leaders—including U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the elected government of Afghanistan—reflects a solid mutual commitment to the document, Rubin said. The Compact creates new mechanisms by which to ensure the continued support of the parties involved, including a Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board to oversee implementation of the agreement. The document also establishes more than sixty benchmarks based on three strategic pillars: security, governance, and development. Cross-cutting all of these pillars is the counternarcotics strategy.

Kabul Still Trumped By Local Governance

The need to strengthen the central government in Kabul is reflected powerfully on the ground in Afghanistan today. For one, the vast bulk of decision-making is still done at the local levels in Afghanistan, according to Thier, who just returned from three weeks in Afghanistan where he met with leaders of the official state justice system and the unofficial, locally-based system. Moreover, the last four years of assistance and state building has hardly had any impact at the local levels. Many Afghans are still skeptical about the central government and perceive it to be a client of the international community. In the country's eastern provinces, for example, many local leaders balked at seeing Kabul appointees distributing community land to their cronies. Situations like these, said Thier, create opportunities for unrest and, ultimately, for violence.

Beyond governance woes, Afghanistan today is still consumed by extreme poverty induced by decades of

conflict. Life for the average Afghan has not significantly improved. Statistics from the latest UN Human Development Report are dismal, with soaring infant mortality rates and low literacy levels. The high expectations that ensued after the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 have resulted in strong disappointment.

Recurring Themes in London: Security, Drugs, and Aid Effectiveness

Three prominent themes emerged during the London conference. The first is to make Afghanistan's security forces fiscally sustainable. Salaries for the Afghan National Army will soon be integrated into the government budget, not paid for directly by donors. While the Compact calls for up to 70,000 troops, the actual plan is for 45,000. No army in Afghanistan will be able to defend the state against an invasion, said Rubin, and so the United States is to guarantee Afghanistan's external security. But Afghans harbor resentment that the United States has not eliminated the Taliban's sanctuary in Pakistan, and tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan remains high.

A second major issue involved a new counternarcotics strategy, which emphasizes the interdiction of traffickers, generation of alternative livelihoods, reduction of demand, and creation of institutions in provincial areas. The Compact also calls for a buildup of eradication capabilities, at the insistence of the United States. This represents a divergence between the counternarcotics policies of the U.S. Congress and the Afghan government. Rubin emphasized that the narcotics problem is primarily a governance issue that should be addressed through institution-building.

A third theme involved "aid effectiveness." Though the \$10.5 billion five-year pledges were more than expected, the Afghan government lacks effective oversight of its public expenditures, which inhibits its capacity to accept and spend aid money effectively. To build this capability, trust funds will be held and released in exchange for documentation to ensure full transparency and accountability. Ultimately, this will encourage donors to provide aid through the Afghan government, rather than through their own contractors. Afghanistan's debt figured prominently in the discussions in London and an agreement was forged to take the issue to the Paris Club. A request that Afghanistan be relieved of 100% of its war time international debt would be put before the decision-making body.

Programs to Watch

The government now faces several serious problems, Thier said. First, justice sector reform has been one of the glaring failures of the international intervention, primarily as a result of the "lead nation" process. This failure has entrenched divisive forces that will be difficult to disengage. Second, during the next few weeks, the Supreme Court is to be reappointed. Although the establishment of legal institutions is usually a positive step, Afghanistan's Supreme Court has been so corrupt, personalized, and erratic that it could emerge as one of the gravest threats to the rule of law. Another issue that needs further analysis is the role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). While PRTs were initially designed to respond to security issues, much of their effort has included serving as a conduit between local and state governments. This, however, only reinforces the idea that the central government is controlled by the international community. On the other hand, the National Solidarity Program, which represents the "best of the best" of international interventions in Afghanistan, has been a tremendous success, Thier said. It has helped to build local shuras and implemented development projects through the local communities. Yet its sustainability and funding are not assured.

Key Factors in Afghanistan's Future

The precarious state of Afghanistan's security needs to be addressed. This includes everything from the insurgency and border problems to the non-existent judicial system. While the temptation for donors is to do the work themselves, Afghans must be given the chance to strengthen their own fledgling institutions of governance. While more costly in the short run, it is necessary in the long run if the state is to extend its legitimacy beyond Kabul. The "mutual interdependence" between security, governance, and development

is one of the central principles underlying the new Afghanistan Compact. Addressing this interdependence is the key to Afghanistan's future.

Of Related Interest

- [The International Community and Afghanistan: Can Support Be Sustained?](#)
Event, February 2006 (Audio)
- [Rule of Law: Projects](#)
- [Establishing the Rule of Law in Afghanistan](#)
- [The Road Ahead: Lessons in Nation Building from Japan, Germany, and Afghanistan for Postwar Iraq](#)
- [Unfinished Business in Afghanistan: Warlordism, Reconstruction, and Ethnic Harmony](#)
- [Oral Histories: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams](#)

About the Authors

This USIPeace Briefing was written by [Beth DeGrasse](#) and Emily Hsu. The views expressed are not those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent international conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and democratic transformations, and increase peacebuilding capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in peacebuilding efforts around the globe.

[See our complete list of USIPeace Briefings.](#)

United States Institute of Peace - 1200 17th Street NW - Washington, DC 20036
(202) 457-1700 (phone) - (202) 429-6063 (fax)