



Afghan Recovery Coalition (ARC)

2011

The Afghan Recovery Coalition (ARC) seeks to unite DoD-friendly NGO efforts in Afghanistan. Long-term sustainable growth that produces self-sustaining institutions is the mission of ARC, an assembly of NGOs tasked to help rebuild Afghanistan and is the creation of Heidi Kuhn, CEO of Roots of Peace (www.rootsofpeace.org) and Debbie Smith, Executive Director of PATHS (www.paths2choice.com). ARC is sharply focused on agricultural development, water infrastructure development, access to education and medical care, and local business development through micro-finance. A coalition of efficient, well-run NGOs can undoubtedly do more with less - less money, fewer personnel, and resources – making more proficient use of donor funds. In rebuilding Afghanistan and in helping Afghans to become more independent - strong and free - with the ability to build sustainable lives, ARC directly contributes to a vital, more prosperous and ultimately more peaceful Afghan future.

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“Our policy is directed...against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy...so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.”

--General George C. Marshall

The Marshall Plan

delivered 5 June 1947 at Harvard University

For decades, Afghanistan has experienced significant devastation and remains a weakened state with a largely ineffective central government that suffers from tribalism, ethnic divisions, and corruption. To date, the ongoing military and humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan remains challenged due to the lack of a common diagnosis of what ails Afghanistan, and as a 2008 report issued by the International Crisis Group contends, long term improvements will not be recognized unless a more comprehensive approach is developed.



The Need for a Grand Strategy

In search of a grand plan, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) has put forth a myriad of goals including governance, rule of law, security, human rights, and economic and social development to be achieved by 2020.¹ The goals outlined in ANDS build upon the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG) that were adopted at a United Nations conference by world leaders in 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015. The UNMDG call for an eradication of global poverty, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, improved access to health care, and environmental sustainability.² Critics of both ANDS and UNMDG claim that these plans suffer substantially from the lack of overall accountability including the ineffectiveness of aid and its distribution, with the most common criticism being that both plans try to accomplish too much at once and are therefore so impractical as to be useless.³

Geostrategic and Economic Interests

While some argue that reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan are doomed from the start due to government corruption and because of the nature of Afghanistan’s tribal culture, others maintain that indeed Afghanistan is not a lost cause and that in truth its development is critical to US national security

¹ “Afghanistan National Development Strategy.” http://www.embassyofafghanistan.org/documents/resume_ANDS.pdf

² “United Nations Millennium Development Goals.” <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>

³ Michael Clemens and Todd Moss, “What’s Wrong with the Millennium Development Goals?” Center for Global Development, September 2005. <http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/3940>

interests.⁴ And as the World Bank concluded in a July 2010 report, “Afghanistan’s single greatest comparative advantage is its geostrategic location,” straddling historic East-West trade routes of Eurasia that make their way through India, South East Asia, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and China.⁵ In fact, trade along the so-called ‘Silk Road’ has historically produced great wealth and the potential for future riches is not lost on countries along these trade routes. For example, Uzbekistan is already extending its rail system to Mazar-e-Sharif, and Afghanistan’s Mines Minister, Wahidullah Shahrani, said that his country has plans to build an extensive rail system to attract mining financiers.⁶

Furthermore, proponents of building Afghanistan into a strong, stable nation reason that Afghanistan’s economic infrastructure can be built upon more than just international assistance and the manufacturing of opium.⁷ Some scholars contend that gaining greater access to a reliable supply of rare earth minerals is of paramount importance both economically and geostrategically to US interests as global reserve options continue to be limited.⁸ With true economic wealth lying just below the surface of Afghanistan in substantial deposits of lithium, copper, and even gold, China has already moved major mining operations into Afghanistan and other Western investors are also jumping into the race for Afghan mineral wealth, “building a culture of business” that will lead to greater economic sustainability long into the future.⁹

Infrastructure-Building as a Means to Sustainable Development

Building up the economic infrastructure of Afghanistan is crucial to its sustainable development and is necessary to maintain the military gains achieved thus far – delivering Afghanistan to a more prosperous and secure future. Dr. Carl Schramm of the Kauffman Foundation argues that aid does little to assist struggling economies and moreover, he maintains that strengthening a distressed country’s economic base requires expansion. According to Schramm, Afghanistan’s economy is part of the problem due to its instability and has thus resulted in the growth of illicit activities. He urges expansion beyond the public sector because as he explains, spurring future economic growth will require a thriving private sector, creating better job opportunities that are “more attractive than trading on the black market or making bombs” and will lead to greater economic stability which remains key to sustainable development.¹⁰

Frances Fukuyama makes a case for this kind of sustainable development as well as he contends, “the key word is ‘self-sustaining’: unless outside powers are able to leave behind stable, legitimate,

⁴ “*Afghanistan is not a lost cause.*” Intelligence Squared U.S., November 2010. <http://intelligencesquaredus.org/wp-content/uploads/Afghanistan-111010.pdf>

⁵ “*Afghanistan: Will Regional Cooperation Accelerate Peace and Development?*” The World Bank, July 2010, pp. 1–2.

⁶ S. Frederick Starr, “*Afghanistan beyond the Fog of Nation Building: Giving Economic Strategy a Chance.*” Silk Road Studies Program, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, January 2011. <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1101Afghanistan-Starr.pdf>.

“*Afghanistan to build vast rail network to attract mining investors.*” MineWeb, July 2011. <http://www.mineweb.com/mineweb/view/mineweb/en/page72068?oid=130731&sn=Detail&pid=92730>

⁷ Peter Bergen, “*Why Afghanistan is Far from Hopeless.*” New America Foundation, March 2011. http://newamerica.net/publications/articles/2011/why_afghanistan_is_far_from_hopeless_46737

⁸ Christine Parthemore, “*Elements of Security: Mitigating the Risks of US Dependence on Critical Minerals.*” Center for a New American Security, June 2011.

⁹ Department of Defense Task Force for Business and Stability Operations. <http://tfbso.defense.gov/www/index.aspx>

¹⁰ Dr. Carl Schramm, “*Expeditionary Economics.*” Foreign Affairs, May/June 2010, pp. 90-99.

relatively uncorrupt indigenous state institutions, they have no hope of a graceful exit.” Fukuyama further asserts that it is weakened states, such as Afghanistan, that will pose the greatest threat to US interests in the 21st century and as 9/11 has shown, countries in chaos on the periphery are now of core concern.¹¹ The baseline for sustainable development in turbulent places such as Afghanistan as put forth by Fukuyama, Schramm and others is in developing an economic infrastructure that is capable of producing self-sustaining institutions that will allow for greater competence in governance and economic growth.

The Afghan Recovery Coalition – A Grand Strategy

Long-term economic growth that produces self-sustaining institutions is the mission of the Afghan Recovery Coalition (ARC), an assembly of NGOs tasked to help rebuild Afghanistan and is the creation of Heidi Kuhn, CEO of Roots of Peace and Debbie Smith, Executive Director of PATHS. ARC will focus on:

- Agricultural development
- Water infrastructure development
- Access to education
- Medical care
- Micro-Finance

These are the main areas of development that ARC will direct its initial efforts in building a coalition of NGOs that will help to redevelop Afghanistan allowing for Afghans to stand on their own.

In the most recent World Bank report regarding agricultural and water infrastructure development the link between ongoing poverty and the lack of overall development was noted. Here again, it is worth emphasizing the importance that greater economic development and growth will play in the future of a stable Afghanistan. In particular, the report indicates that agricultural and water infrastructure development is essential for economic growth, rural development, and poverty alleviation in low-income developing countries, like Afghanistan. So too, the link between education and poverty cannot be underestimated; the mission of ARC will be to establish teacher training programs and a systematic and sustainable construction program for primary and secondary schools. Likewise, ARC recognizes the principles of health as central to sustainable development and as a basic human right founded on the dignity and worth of every human, and the obligations of communities in attaining the highest possible level of health will be an emphasis of ARC.

Finally, for ARC the key to developing self-sustaining institutions that will result in greater economic stability in Afghanistan lies in promoting local business development through the implementation of micro-financing which provides for small loans to local entrepreneurs that are paid back quickly; this approach will ultimately lead to villages becoming self-sufficient. It is our belief that a strong, well-coordinated redevelopment plan put forth by a coalition of NGOs can achieve tremendous things in rebuilding Afghanistan and in helping Afghans to become more independent - strong and free - with the ability to build sustainable lives, vital to a more prosperous and ultimately more peaceful Afghan future.

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, “*Nation Building 101.*” The Atlantic Monthly, January/February 2004.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2004/01/fukuyama.htm>