

Testimony of Barnett R. Rubin
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House Armed Services Committee
Hearing on “Assessment of U.S. Strategy and Operations in Afghanistan and the Way Ahead”
Wednesday, January 23rd from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in Rayburn 2118.

I welcome this hearing on U.S. Strategy and Operations in Afghanistan. The effort in Afghanistan has some important successes to its credit, but strategically it is not succeeding. The center of gravity of this struggle is the people of Afghanistan, while in Washington the focus remains unfortunately on the Taliban and al-Qaida. In Washington the most common questions asked about Afghanistan are whether we have enough troops there and if the NATO allies are doing enough. These are issues, but they are not the main issue. The struggle in Afghanistan involves warfare, but it is not primarily a military struggle. It is primarily political and economic. The administration has never given adequate attention to these aspects of the operation. Indeed, as Admiral Mullen stated before this committee, the administration has always treated Afghanistan as an “economy of force” operation, that is, a second priority after Iraq. This mistaken priority began on September 12, 2001.

In addition, the conflict in Afghanistan remains a regional conflict. Today it is in fact a two-nation war and civil conflict, equally affecting Pakistan and Afghanistan. Terrorism and insurgency are rising in both countries. If anything, Taliban and al-Qaida have been more active and successful in Pakistan than in Afghanistan these past few months. The US, NATO, and the UN need a coherent regional strategy for the stabilization of Afghanistan which takes into account the ongoing warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the interests and activities of Iran, India, Russia, China, and other major powers.

The single most important immediate objective for the stability of both Pakistan and Afghanistan is the holding of parliamentary elections in Pakistan on February 18 that are fair and that the people of Pakistan believe to be fair. In addition, those who win the elections must exercise the power to govern, which has not been the case with past civilian governments in Pakistan, which remained under the veto power of the military. Military rule in Pakistan is the problem, not the solution.

Pakistan cannot be an effective US ally while its government lacks basic credibility with its own people. The vast majority of Pakistanis do not regard Pervez Musharraf as a legitimate president, and they want him to leave. Nearly 50% of Pakistanis believe that the government or its political allies were complicit in the murder of Benazir Bhutto. I am not endorsing this view, but it illustrates the vast gulf between Pakistan’s military regime and its people. U.S. unstinting support for Pakistan’s military rulers has made Pakistan one of the most anti-American countries on earth. It is not possible to carry out a protracted and complex struggle with the Taliban and al-Qaida, including its core leadership, in partnership with a government that is opposed by its own people.

The first condition for progress in either Pakistan or Afghanistan is a legitimate government in Pakistan that can articulate a view of national security that will win wide support. President Musharraf cannot do that. I append some thoughts on Pakistan I recently posted on my blog.

The international effort (not just a US effort) in Afghanistan is in trouble not just because of lack of coordination, but because it is not treated as a priority in practice. The appointment of Paddy Ashdown or

¹ Affiliation for identification only. All views are those of the author, not of CIC, NYU, or any other organization.

another individual as a high-level coordinator may help, but only if it is clear that this office's main mandate is to discipline the international community behind a common strategy, not to act as a more powerful international custodian of Afghanistan, which jealously guards its independence. I append a comment on this subject that I wrote after Admiral Mullen's and secretary Gates' testimony before this committee.

Finally, the production of narcotics in Afghanistan has broken all records. The U.S. is actively engaged in an effort to make the situation deteriorate still further by pressuring the government of Afghanistan to engage in an effort of crop eradication that will harm the poorest people in the most insecure areas. I append a brief analysis of that situation as well.

I. Comment on Admiral Mullen's testimony and the High-Level Coordinator (December 15, 2007)

II.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, at a NATO meeting in Edinburgh, has decided to [change tactics](#) in dealing with NATO allies in Afghanistan:

"We're going to try to look at this more creatively than perhaps we have done in the past when we basically have just been hammering on (allied governments) to provide more," Gates said in a post-meeting interview with a small group of reporters traveling with him from Washington.

Why the change? Maybe Gates was embarrassed when Europeans pointed out what happened just last Tuesday when [he testified at the House Armed Services Committee with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen](#):

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged Tuesday that the U.S. military's primary focus remained the war in Iraq, not Afghanistan, prompting criticism from Democratic lawmakers who want the Pentagon to devote more attention and resources to the Afghan conflict.

Adm. Michael G. Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the war in Afghanistan was an "economy of force" operation, a military label for a mission of secondary importance.

"Our main focus, militarily, in the region and in the world right now is rightly and firmly in Iraq," Mullen said before the House Armed Services Committee. "It is simply a matter of resources, of capacity. In Afghanistan, we do what we can. In Iraq, we do what we must."

Maybe Gates should speak to his own Commander-in-Chief about the importance of Afghanistan (which has [no dedicated link on the White House website](#)).

More troops might be useful in Afghanistan, if they had the right mission. Put in more troops with the wrong mission, and they will just fail more quickly and more messily. But the whole "blame Europe" trope is just an exercise in the Bush administration's favorite activity: avoiding accountability. (By the way, is [authorizing the use of torture](#) an impeachable offense, like covering up illicit sex? Just wondering.) A few facts:

- In 2001 the administration rejected an offer from the UK, France, and Germany to place the entire Afghanistan mission under NATO.
- Until 2003, the administration rejected increasingly urgent requests from President Karzai, the United Nations, and many others to expand the International Security Assistance Force.
- The administration continues to claim that Afghanistan and Iraq are one struggle, knowing full well that most NATO members did not support the U.S. invasion of Iraq.
- Before major deployments of Canadian and European NATO troops to southern Afghanistan in 2005, the administration assured its partners that it would take care of the infiltration of Taliban from Pakistan; the administration had completely ignored Pakistani support for the Taliban until then and had not even deployed any intelligence resources to track it. Since then infiltration has increased, and Pakistani Taliban allied with al-Qaida now have free reign in much of the border

region, as the authority of the administration's chosen partner, General Pervez Musharraf, continues to crumble, and Europeans continue to be killed by guerrillas and suicide bombers trained, funded, and equipped in Pakistan.

- The administration continues to press relentlessly for an escalation of eradication of Afghanistan's opium poppy crop, even though the conditions for successful use of this counter-narcotics tool do not exist, and the UK, Canada, and the Netherlands, whose troops will bear the brunt of the resulting increase in insurgent activity, have opposed these pressures.

In any case, a retired four-star general speaking at a private meeting recently characterized the lack of troops in Afghanistan as a "sixth-order problem." The key problems are the lack of a coherent regional strategy, especially toward Pakistan and Iran, and the failure from the very beginning to invest adequately in governance and development and in any aspect of security but the Afghan National Army. All of these resulted from decisions taken by the Bush administration in 2001-2002, not from our European allies.

Some of these same allies may have made some of these points in private at Edinburgh. As a result of Gates' new attitudes, he is now [working with other NATO members to address these shortfalls](#):

Nicholas Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, who joined Gates at the conference, told reporters afterward that he and his counterparts agreed that the nonmilitary part of the effort to stabilize Afghanistan also needs to be re-energized and improved.

"There was a strong sense that the civilian side, run by all of our governments and by the U.N., needs now to be elevated and expanded and be made as strategically purposeful as what we see on the military side," Burns said.

Gates said the Edinburgh talks produced a consensus on the need to fashion an "integrated plan" for what needs to be achieved in Afghanistan within the next three to five years as well as specifics on how those things can be accomplished.

The major proposal circulating to address these issues is the appointment of a high-level coordinator. The leading contender for this position, former Bosnia High Representative Paddy Ashdown, has [argued](#):

"I've always said that Afghanistan was more likely to succeed if the international community co-ordinated itself and spoke with a single voice," the former Bosnia chief told Sky News television.

"Its failure to do so has led us to a position I think where the relatively low level of resources we are putting into Afghanistan are seriously wasted," he added.

Such coordination is badly needed. But calling someone a "high level coordinator" does not enable him to produce high-level coordination. The position is reported to include being appointed both UN SRSG and the NATO Senior Civilian Representative and perhaps eventually EU Special Representative as well. But the UN SRSG has no budgetary authority over the UN agencies, let alone the bilateral donors (led by the U.S.) that provide aid through their own parallel (and very wasteful) channels. The NATO SCR has authority over neither military activities nor the civilian assistance provided by the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. The EUSR has no authority over the aid provided by the European Commission. Unless the "coordinator" presides over a pooled international budget for Afghanistan, including security sector reform, development aid, and counter-narcotics, he will just become another agency that needs to

be coordinated. Inevitably, he will be tempted to spend his time hectoring the Afghan government rather than coordinating the international actors.

The Afghan government badly needs coherent support from the international community; but a high-level "coordinator" without real authority will not deliver it. Afghans will listen to such a coordinator only if he actually produces more coherent assistance. Otherwise he will be a focal point not for coordination, but for blame. I hope that's not the point.

III. Comment on Pakistan (January 1, 2008)

The Pakistan Electoral Commission's decision to postpone the elections scheduled for January 8 because of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto could be justified on technical grounds, but few people in Pakistan will believe the decision was made on technical grounds. Under current conditions in Pakistan, which are worse than most U.S. reporting indicates, it is impossible to hold a free and fair election. But there is little indication that the government ever intended to hold a free and fair election, even when it could have.

I called a friend in Lahore this morning. The obstacles are not just that electoral materials (possibly including those prepared for rigging) were destroyed in the rioting. The country's infrastructure is under severe stress. In Lahore there are only 7 hours of electricity a day, and water pressure is also reported to be unreliable (I know those of you in Kabul may not feel their pain). Optic fiber lines were cut in Sindh, blacking out telecommunications for a while. The front page of [Dawn online](#) yields the following: There has been massive damage to the country's rail network. Fuel is in short supply, and the shortages are likely to get worse. The stock market and the currency are both crashing. Government ministers are charging "foreign elements" (i.e. India) with organizing the riots, a useful excuse for martial law.

In Pakistan there is a massive outburst of rage against Musharraf and everything associated with his government, including the government's claim that it has evidence that the Pakistani Taliban, led by Baitullah Mahsud, carried out the assassination. I still lean toward the hypothesis that the operation was carried out by organizations connected to al-Qaida. Given the relationship of the Pakistani military to jihadi organizations that by no means absolves the Musharraf regime of responsibility.

But what recent events demonstrate even more clearly is that the Bush administration's policy of relying on a personal relationship with a megalomaniac manipulator like Musharraf to fight al-Qaida has strengthened that organization immeasurably and perhaps fatally damaged the U.S.'s ability to form the coalition it needs to isolate and destroy that organization.

Many, probably most or nearly all, Pakistanis don't see the "War on Terror" as struggle of "moderates" against "extremists." They see it as a slogan to legitimate the military's authoritarian control. Through the classic psychological mechanism of reducing cognitive dissonance, it is only a short jump from believing that the threat of al-Qaida is being manipulated to strengthen authoritarian rule, to believing that the threat of al-Qaida is a hoax perpetrated to strengthen authoritarian rule. A similar mechanism of reducing cognitive dissonance has led many Americans to accept propaganda that the "anti-American" Saddam Hussein and the "anti-American" Islamic Republic of Iran must be allied with the "anti-American" al-Qaida. (Before some member of the nutosphere calls me out for using quotation marks around "anti-American," let me stipulate that the purpose of the quotation marks is to call attention to the fact that every organization that opposes the U.S. is not defined solely or even primarily by that opposition. It is not to claim that these entities are in fact "pro-American.")

The Bush administration's terrible simplification has not only harmed U.S. security interests; it has also done perhaps irreparable damage to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some readers protest when I lead with the implications of such events for U.S. foreign policy, as if I didn't think it worthwhile to mention the effects

on those directly concerned. Believe me, I understand that Afghanistan, Pakistan, and all those other countries out there have purposes other than playing a role in scripts drafted in Washington.

But I am an American writing for a primarily American audience. I don't think that Pakistanis are looking to me to explain their country to them. I am trying to use my experience and expertise, such as it is, to convince my compatriots, our allies, and the international organizations to which we belong, to change their relationships with other countries. Sometimes I appear on the media here (the US) or speak to non-specialist audiences. They always ask me to explain the implications for them.

There is a connection, however, between the foreign policy interests of the U.S. and the direct effect on, in this case, Pakistan. That is because the script writers in Washington impose their own terrible simplifications on the people whose behavior they are trying to affect, without understanding who those people are and what they want, often with disastrous consequences.

The current situation in Pakistan is a case in point. The Bush administration has decided that in the "Muslim world" a battle is going on between pro-American "moderates" and anti-American "extremists." According to them, the "Muslim world" has a two-party system organized around how Muslims feel about America. In Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf is a "pro-American moderate." Benazir Bhutto is a "pro-American moderate." Therefore it is only logical (and in U.S. interests!) for the U.S. to realign Pakistan politics so that the "moderates" work together against the "extremists."

This ignores a few problems. It is not just a random problem that the "pro-American moderate" institution headed by General Musharraf executed Benazir's father and held her for years in solitary confinement. Despite Musharraf's propagation of the PR slogan, "enlightened moderation," the institution that he headed, and which put him in power, supported the Taliban unstintingly for many years and failed to deliver any results against al-Qaida when it would really have counted. This is the same institution that massacred hundreds of thousands of its own countrymen in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

The administration's plan for Pakistan was based on a model of transition from authoritarianism that took place in several Latin American countries, which is known as a "pacted transition." (If you want to know more about it, Google "transitology.") The basic idea is that the "moderates" in the bureaucratic authoritarian regime and the "moderates" in the democratic opposition negotiate a peaceful process of extrication of the military from power through elections, which may initially be "guided" rather than "free and fair." Of course the administration seem to have neglected one of the research's main findings: pacted transitions give rise to "democracies with birth defects." Among those birth defects are continued control by the military over key areas of policy and the limited consolidation of democracy. Much depends on what the leaders of the military are actually trying to accomplish.

This already happened in Pakistan. In 1988 General Zia-ul-Haq's hand-picked Prime Minister, Muhammad Khan Junejo, got in several conflicts with Zia over Afghanistan (the negotiation of the Geneva Accords and the explosion of weapons destined for the Afghan mujahidin at an ISI warehouse in Rawalpindi). After the as yet unsolved Case of the Exploding Mangoes, which killed General Zia, ISI Director General Akhtar Abdul Rahman, and U.S. Ambassador Arnie Raphel, the military dismissed Junejo and agreed to a reasonably free election, which was won by Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. After the death of General Zia, whom Bhutto and many Pakistanis held responsible for her father's death, she was able to return.

But her electoral victory did not settle the issue. Bhutto first had to negotiate with the military and agree not to remove military authority over security issues, notably Afghanistan, the nuclear program, Kashmir, and senior military appointments. After the failed attempt by the ISI with U.S. backing to orchestrate the conquest of the Afghan city of Jalalabad in March 1989 (using not only Afghan mujahidin but also al-

Qaida), Bhutto sacked ISI director General Hamid Gul. Other conflicts with the military ensued. As a result, the military had President Ghulam Ishaq Khan remove her on corruption charges in August 1990. The military and bureaucracy rigged the elections in October 1990 so that she would be defeated by Nawaz Sharif.

I will come back to the election rigging, because the government used the same technique that it was apparently planning to employ this time as well, namely the establishment of "ghost polling places" to return fake ballots in key constituencies identified by the ISI's Electoral Cell. This method of rigging is not visible to foreign election observers.

When Nawaz Sharif in turn became too independent, it was his turn to be sacked. This was followed by two rounds of alternance determined by the military (Bhutto in 1994, Sharif in 1996). The final confrontation between Nawaz Sharif and General Musharraf was provoked again by a struggle over the military's prerogatives. Sharif charged that Musharraf organized the Kargil campaign in Kashmir on his own initiative, while Sharif was pursuing negotiations with the U.S. over Bin Laden behind Musharraf's back.

The leaders of the Pakistan military, of which Musharraf is a typical example, do not see themselves primarily as "pro-American moderates" battling with "anti-American extremists." They see themselves as responsible for building a powerful militarized state in Pakistan representing the heritage of Islamic empires in South and Central Asia against the threat from India and the selfish maneuvers of politicians (not necessarily in that order). In the course of doing so, they have enriched themselves and gained control of much of the economy and civilian administration. The military has always aspired to control the judiciary as well, and Musharraf has now restored to that institution the supine illegitimacy that it possessed under General Zia. This means of course that the use of institutional power for private gain by the military is legal (as the judiciary has no power over the military), while similar use of institutional power by civilians is "corruption."

The military allies with the U.S. because that is the only way to get the weapons and money for their national security project and to prevent the U.S. from aligning with India. It has nothing to do with "moderation." The "pro-American moderate" Pakistan military has used the "anti-American extremist" jihadis for its national security project. (By the way, the Afghan Taliban were not originally anti-American. In 1997, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, who later became foreign minister, told a meeting I was chairing at Columbia University that the Taliban would help the U.S. "in its struggle against international terrorism," and nobody wanted to build the Unocal pipeline more than they did.)

The goal of the Pakistan military has been neither moderation nor extremism as defined in Washington. Its goal has been to stay in power in order to pursue its national security project, which is also in its institutional interest and the private interest of its members. So why did Musharraf enter into negotiations with Bhutto? As Chief of Army Staff, Musharraf occupied a role similar to that of head of the ruling party in a one-party dominant system. His party, the military, unlike the other parties, is a disciplined cadre organization which, along with its fellow travelers (civilian allies of the military) controls all the key levers of power, including the civil administration and the judiciary. Such control is, it believes, required by the national interest. Musharraf added to this an economic policy under the guidance of his Prime Minister, former Citibank official Shaukat Aziz, that has indeed succeeded to some extent. In fact it helped create the middle class and new communications media that are leading the fight to oust Musharraf.

In order to maintain the essential base of his party's control (U.S. weapons and money) after 9/11, Musharraf had to abandon the military's historic political alliance with the religious right and its allied militants. But Pakistan is not a "banana republic," i.e. a tiny country with a single cohesive landowning

elite that can run a dictatorship informally through intimidation, violence, and patronage (though these have a role to play). It is a country of 160 million with one of the largest cities in the world (Karachi) and a well-developed middle class. Running such a country requires a higher degree of institutionalization and political legitimation. Hence Musharraf needed new political allies to run institutions.

But he did not want political allies to negotiate a transition to democracy: he wanted political allies to legitimate continued military rule. The Islamist parties were willing to partner with the military on that basis, because it was their only way of acceding to power. But the PPP and the PML-N (Nawaz Sharif's party) could actually win elections. While the military tried to use Washington's interest in an alliance of "moderates" to legitimate its own rule, it could not allow a party that actually aspired to rule to come to power. Enter the PML-Q (Musharraf's party, aka the King's Party). The military assembled this party out of notables of various sorts to represent those civilian allies that supported military rule. This description does not apply to every official of the PML-Q (some of whom are friends of mine), who joined for different reasons. Some, in particular, supported the relatively successful economic policies of Shaukat Aziz. But the party exists basically in order to win elections rigged by the military.

Benazir Bhutto, however, probably imagined that the opening provided by the U.S. pressure on Musharraf for a "moderate" alliance (to legitimate Musharraf's power for the sake of the "War on Terror," not democracy) might provide her with an opening she could exploit to regain power. I will not attempt to judge among the various claims about Bhutto -- from heroine of democracy to power-hungry corrupt feudal. I will just note that she knew she was risking her life and did not need to do so. When President Karzai met her the morning of her death, she told the Afghans she feared she would be assassinated soon. She represented the hopes of millions of people. To represent them, she would have had to challenge the military's power. Nor did she take the easy populist route (seemingly chosen by Nawaz Sharif) of belittling the threat of the militants. Though what she said about the militants pleased Washington, many things she said about General Musharraf did not. I believe that events will tragically show that she was right.

Her strategy appeared to be to exploit the military's weakness and the support of the U.S. to enlarge the space for her party's power, and therefore, in the flawed sense this word has in the real world, of democracy. (The family inheritance of leadership has a rational function too: without it, there is a good chance that the PPP would tear itself apart in factional struggles. It still might do so, but the appointment of her son as heir and her husband as regent has provided some breathing space.)

But Musharraf was not going to let her win. On December 11 Dawn published a story [purportedly announcing the "official poll results"](#) nearly a month before the scheduled elections. The PML-Q was to win the most seats, with the PPP second and PML-N third. The numbers were chosen in such a way that the Islamist parties that supported the Afghan Taliban, the military's old partners, would have few seats but enough to hold the balance of power.

How to get such results? The ISI has an electoral cell that, among other things, conducts polling. (A friend who is familiar with the operation claims that the polling is not reliable and tends to be driven by the desired outcome.) The purpose is not to win a referendum with 99% of the vote, but to get a balance that leaves the military in charge through its political allies. This does not require rigging every constituency, but controlling the media and administration to create a positive environment for the military's allies, and then rigging only a few dozen constituencies where the outcome is nonetheless in doubt (plus constituencies of key leaders). The principal technique is the printing of more ballots than are needed and the establishment of "ghost polling places" in the constituencies that are to be rigged. The excess ballots are filled out for the desired candidates and placed in "ballot boxes" belonging to the ghost polling places. The ballot boxes and their fictitious totals are forwarded to the returning officer together with the legitimate ballots. The system needs only to approximate its target to achieve the desired political

results.

The PPP now wants to capitalize on the public's anger and sympathy. The time that the electoral commission could use to reconstitute the infrastructure for a free and fair election is also time that could be used to reconstitute the infrastructure for rigging. Hence the PPP probably sees no good reason to allow the electoral apparatus to reconstitute itself.

A genuine free election in Pakistan today could very well confront President Musharraf with a parliament that would not recognize him and that would openly challenge the power of the army. But the military no longer has the capacity or legitimacy to rule Pakistan. The time for a pacted transition is past. The choice before Pakistan is democracy or disintegration.

IV. Comments on Narcotics and Counter-Narcotics

In the past year (2007-2008), opium production in Afghanistan reached a record level, estimated at 8,200 tons of raw opium. Traffickers also refined nearly all of the opium into heroin opiates exporting it. The Taliban-led insurgency supported by al-Qaida spread to new areas in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The level of terrorism, especially suicide bombings, set record levels in both countries, hitting high-profile targets such as Pakistan's most popular politician, Benazir Bhutto, and the Serena Hotel in Kabul. After six years of assistance to the Afghan government by the UN, NATO, the world's major military powers, the world's largest aid donors, and international specialists on all subjects, the expansion of both the illicit industry and the insurgency constitutes a powerful indictment of international policy and capacity.

In response, the United States Government and other major actors decided to make counter-narcotics in Afghanistan a priority in 2007 and 2008 and link it to counter-insurgency. To assure coherence and coordination of this complex policy area, the government of Afghanistan and the United Nations agreed that the February 6, 2008, meeting of the Joint Coordination and Management Board, which they co-chair, should focus on counter-narcotics.² This meeting could reach agreement on effective measures to cope with the opiate industry and insurgency in Afghanistan, but it could also confirm international commitment to escalating eradication of the poppy crop in 2008, a policy that will invigorate both the opiate industry and the insurgency.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) led off its Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007 with findings linking the opium economy to the insurgency. It first summarized trends in opium cultivation.³

First, the area under opium cultivation rose to 193,000 hectares from 165,000 in 2006. The total opium harvest will be 8,200 tons, up from 6,100 tons last year. . . .

Second, in the centre and north of Afghanistan, where the government has increased its authority and presence, opium cultivation is diminishing. The number of opium-free provinces more than doubled from six to thirteen, while in the province of Balkh opium cultivation collapsed from 7,200 hectares last year to zero. However, the opposite trend was seen in southern Afghanistan. Some 80 percent of opium poppies were grown in a handful of provinces along the border with

² The JCMB, including all the major donors and troop contributors, is the body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact. In January 2006, over sixty states and international organizations adopted the Compact as the framework for their assistance to Afghanistan over the coming five years.

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghan Opium Survey 2007*, August 2007, p. iv, via http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/AFG07_ExSum_web.pdf, accessed on December 3, 2007.

Pakistan, where instability is greatest. In the volatile province of Helmand, where the Taliban insurgency is concentrated, opium cultivation rose 48 percent to 102,770 hectares.⁴

UNODC then “highlight[ed] three new circumstances,” allegedly linking the increase in opium poppy cultivation to the insurgency:

First, opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty – quite the opposite. Hilmand, Kandahar and three other opium-producing provinces in the south are the richest and most fertile, in the past the breadbasket of the nation and a main source of earnings. They have now opted for illicit opium on an unprecedented scale (5,744 tons), while the much poorer northern region is abandoning the poppy crops.

Second, opium cultivation in Afghanistan is now closely linked to insurgency. The Taliban today control vast swathes of land in Hilmand, Kandahar and along the Pakistani border. By preventing national authorities and international agencies from working, insurgents have allowed greed and corruption to turn orchards, wheat and vegetable fields into poppy fields.

Third, the Taliban are again using opium to suit their interests. Between 1996 and 2000, in Taliban-controlled areas 15,000 tons of opium were produced and exported – the regime’s sole source of foreign exchange at that time. In July 2000, the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, argued that opium was against Islam and banned its cultivation (but not its export). In recent months, the Taliban have reversed their position once again and started to extract from the drug economy resources for arms, logistics and militia pay.

These assertions are misleading and partly false (see Appendix B for a refutation of these claims). They have been cited in support of a plan to escalate poppy eradication especially in the South to deprive the Taliban of funding and starve the insurgency. The proponents of this plan have also justified it on the grounds that it will not harm the “poor,” who are in the north, but only the “rich and greedy” in the south. These arguments consist of a series of fallacies:

- First, the difference between the “rich” southern province of Helmand and the “poor” northern province of Balkh, according to UNODC’s own survey of household income, is the difference between an average daily income of \$1 per person in Helmand and \$0.70 per person in Balkh.⁵ Household studies of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan indicate that poor households are most dependent on poppy cultivation for their livelihoods. Poppy eradication in Helmand, especially in insecure areas not reached by development projects, may primarily harm the livelihoods of those earning less than \$1 per day. The first UN Millennium Development Goal aims to reduce by half the number of people living on less than \$1 per day. If these desperately poor people have easier access to armed resistance than alternative livelihoods, they may well choose the former.
- Second, poppy (or coca, or cannabis) cultivation migrates to the most insecure areas capable of producing it. Hence poppy cultivation migrated to Afghanistan and within Afghanistan to the areas most affected by the insurgency. Political and military conflict created the conditions for the drug industry, not vice versa, just as political and military conflict is now

⁴ Appendix A explains why it is a fallacy to call areas where poppy is not grown “opium-free.” Trafficking continues through such areas.

⁵ Mansfield and Pain.

creating conditions for poppy cultivation in Diyala province of Iraq.⁶ Field research on poppy cultivation has identified insecurity exploited by drug traffickers, not the greed and corruption of Afghan cultivators, as the primary driver of opium poppy cultivation.

- Third, the Taliban were not solely dependent on narcotics financing in 1996-2000, nor are they now. Research by the World Bank and others indicated that the Taliban derived more income and foreign exchange in the 1990s from taxing the transit trade in licit goods smuggled through Afghanistan from Dubai to Pakistan than from the drug trade.⁷ Today, too, the Taliban have other sources of income.

The advocates of responding to the drug problem by escalating eradication compound these errors with a further fallacy: the claim that poppy eradication reduces the amount of drug money available to fund insurgency, terrorism, and corruption. In 2000-2001, when the Taliban prohibited poppy cultivation with almost complete success in the areas they controlled, they suffered no financial problems. Drug traders are not florists. Trafficking continued from stockpiles of opiates, and the loss in quantity was compensated by a tenfold increase in price. Eradication raises the price of opium and causes its cultivation to migrate to more remote areas. It does not provide for a sustainable reduction in the drug economy, nor does sustainable reduction of the drug economy start with eradication.

Focusing on poppy cultivation when economic alternatives are not secure conflicts with the broadly accepted view in Afghanistan that poppy cultivation is undesirable, but that it is inevitable in situations of dire poverty and insecurity. Hence pursuing eradication under these circumstances provides evidence that the international operation and the government that it supports derive their legitimacy not from Afghan people but from external powers.

According to a 2007 poll conducted by Charney Research, 36 percent of the national sample in Afghanistan (in both poppy growing and non-poppy growing provinces) believed that poppy cultivation was acceptable either unconditionally or if there was no other way to make a living. In poppy-producing provinces, a third of respondents believed that elimination or reduction of poppy was a bad thing. In Helmand, the main province targeted for eradication, this figure climbed to about one half. Over 60 percent in all poppy growing provinces and 80 percent in Helmand agreed that "the farmers whose opium crops are eradicated are usually poor or don't pay bribes." The following table illustrates the perception of hardship imposed by poppy eradication in poppy-growing provinces (figures for Helmand in parentheses):⁸

Q-107. Are you personally aware of farming families in this province who have had opium crops eradicated who:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. Suffered hunger or hardship as a result?	40% (73%)	52%	8%
b. Had to give up children to creditors when they could	14%	77%	9%

⁶ Patrick Cockburn, "Opium fields spread across Iraq as farmers try to make ends meet," *The Independent*, January 17, 2008.

⁷ Barnett R. Rubin, "The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan," *World Development* 2000.

⁸ Charney Research survey in Afghanistan, November 2007. Our thanks to Craig Charney for providing this data.

not pay debts?	(25%)		
c. Ran away from this province because they could not pay their debts?	26% (52%)	65%	9%
d. Became more sympathetic to the Taliban as a result?	16% (38%)	74%	11%

Note that one out of seven respondents in poppy growing provinces and one in four in Helmand said they knew of farming families who **had sold their children (most likely girls)** in payment of opium debts as a result of eradication. This might help explain why 38 percent of the Helmand respondents said they knew of someone who became more sympathetic to the Taliban as a result of eradication.

The Afghanistan Compact requires a different approach to counter-narcotics. That agreement outlines a strategy to achieve two over-riding goals: “to improve the lives of Afghan people and to contribute to national, regional, and global peace and security.” To accomplish these over-riding goals, the Compact prescribes three pillars of activity: security; governance, human rights, and justice; and economic and social development.

The Compact defines counter-narcotics as a “cross-cutting” theme across all these three pillars. It integrates counter-narcotics with the other pillars both because achieving counter-narcotics goals requires policies and programs under all pillars, and to emphasize that counter-narcotics is not separate from or parallel to the overall goal of the Compact and its three pillars. Achieving the Compact’s counter-narcotics goal, “a sustained and significant reduction in the production and trafficking of narcotics with a view to complete elimination,” is part of an overall strategy to build security, governance, and development to improve the lives of Afghans and provide security to Afghans, their neighbors, and the entire international community.

The threat to the Compact’s objectives comes not from drugs per se, but, as stated in the *U.S. Counter-Narcotics Strategy for Afghanistan* (August 2007), from “drug money” that “weakens key institutions and strengthens the Taliban.”⁹ According to estimates by UNODC, the “drug money” to which the Strategy refers comes mainly from the 70-80 percent of the gross profits of narcotics earned by traffickers and processors and partly passed on to power holders, including Taliban, Afghan government officials, and other illegal armed groups, not from the 20-30 percent that goes to poppy farmers and laborers.¹⁰

Counter-narcotics policy in service of the Afghanistan Compact’s goals requires reducing the amount of illicit value created by the drug economy and should focus on the part of the drug economy that “weakens key institutions and strengthens the Taliban.” This distinction has implications for how to define and measure success in counter-narcotics and how to achieve it. The most commonly used measure of both the problem and the progress of counter-narcotics – the extent of cultivation of opium poppy – biases policy in the wrong direction. It focuses attention on the quantity of narcotics rather than the value and toward the smallest and least harmful part of the drug economy – the raw material that produces income for rural communities. A better indicator of success is the one included in the benchmarks for economic and social development of the Afghanistan Compact, “a decrease in the absolute and relative size of the drug economy.”

The Afghan narcotics industry, the annual gross profit of which is equal to approximately half of the country’s licit GDP, makes a significant proportion of the Afghan population dependent for their

⁹ Citation to US Strategy report.

¹⁰ UNODC Citation from the summary table at the start of the 2006 Opium survey.

livelihood on drug traffickers and those who protect them, whether corrupt officials or insurgents.¹¹ That includes not only the one in seven Afghans who depend directly on poppy cultivation according to UNODC, but also all those involved in trafficking as well as the commerce, construction, and other economic activities that narcotics revenue finances. The political goal of counter-narcotics in Afghanistan is to break those links of dependence and instead integrate the Afghan population into the licit economy and polity, which are in turn integrated with the international community's institutions and norms. That effort is the equivalent of the counter-insurgency goal of "winning hearts and minds" and the post-conflict reconstruction goal of strengthening legitimate government and reconstruction.

Both globally and within Afghanistan, the location of narcotics cultivation is the result – not the cause – of insecurity, as shown by the expansion of poppy cultivation into a destabilized Iraq. The essential condition for implementing counter-narcotics policy is "a state that works."¹² Counter-narcotics can succeed only if it political efforts establish the basis for policing, law enforcement, and support for development. Unlike military action, policing and law enforcement require the consent of the population. State building includes military action to defeat armed opponents of the project, but in a weak state such as Afghanistan it succeeds only by limiting the scope of state activity and gaining sufficient legitimacy and capacity so that the population consents to the state's authority over those areas in which it acts. Winning consent for counter-narcotics requires providing greater licit economy opportunities, and providing security for people to benefit from those opportunities. Scarce resources for coercion should be reserved for targeting political opponents at the high end of the value chain, rather than farmers and flowers. Winning a counter-insurgency while engaging in counter-narcotics also requires acknowledging that the transition from a predominantly narcotics-based economy to a licit one will take years. It is not possible to win the consent of communities to state authority while treating their livelihoods as criminal.

Proponents of escalating forced eradication argue that the government and its international supporters do not have years – if the drug economy continues to expand the whole effort will fail. Escalating forced eradication, however, will only make the effort fail more quickly. Escalating forced eradication does not integrate counter-narcotics with counter-insurgency: it integrates counter-narcotics with building the insurgency. What drives rural communities to align themselves with the Taliban is not illicit drugs, but a program to deprive those communities of their livelihoods before alternatives are available. An internationally supported effort to help Afghan communities gradually to move out of dependence on the drug trade without being stigmatized as criminals during the transition will integrate counter-narcotics with counter-insurgency and peace building.

In areas where the government and its international supporters have access to the population (including both poppy growing and non-poppy growing areas), a gradual policy should focus first on: development of licit livelihoods; improving governance, including reduction of narcotics-related corruption; and interdiction, targeted especially against heroin production. The international community must contribute by assuring markets for licit Afghan products, cooperating in interdiction with intelligence and force protection, preventing the export of precursors for heroin production into Afghanistan, and assuring that its operations in Afghanistan do not enrich or empower traffickers. Many international organizations in Afghanistan employ private security companies linked to figures involved in drug trafficking or rent

¹¹ It is not accurate to add the gross profits of narcotics to licit GDP to obtain a figure for total (licit and non-licit) GDP (reference to IMF chapter in UNODC/WB collection). The gross profits would have to be transformed to value added by including changes in stocks held, subtracting costs of inputs to manufacture (e.g. precursors) and including the net international flow of capital from the industry, among other adjustments.

¹² Colombian Deputy Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo, "Fighting Drugs and Building Peace: Toward Policy Coherence," New York City, May 14–15, 2007. For a conference summary, see Barnett R. Rubin and Alexandra Guáqueta, "Fighting Drugs and Building Peace: Towards Policy Coherence between Counter-Narcotics and Peace Building," *Dialogue on Globalization Occasional Papers* No. 37, November 2007.

properties from such men. At least two organizations funded by USAID for the Alternative Livelihoods Program rent their premises from men reputed to be major drug traffickers.

In areas where the insurgency prevents regular access by government, the first priority should be to gain access and establish state presence with consent of the local population. Introducing forced eradication whether by air or on the ground before the government is able to provide security or help communities develop alternative sources of livelihood undermines this effort.

The recovery of control over Musa Qala district of northern Helmand followed the pattern of putting access and security first, followed by interdiction and alternative livelihoods. The Afghan government and international forces carried out a joint political-military operation, gaining the support of a major Taliban commander (Mullah Abdul Salaam) and then defeating the remaining insurgents. Once in occupation of the district, government and international forces seized about \$25 million worth of narcotics¹³ and destroyed over 60 heroin laboratories.

Confiscating products from the upper end of the value chain, however, depended on regaining control of the territory. Had the government and international community engaged in forced eradication in Musa Qala before launching the operation, Mullah Abdul Salaam might not have changed sides, the local people might not have supported the government or remained neutral, and the district might have remained under Taliban control. If eradication had destroyed locally produced raw opium, the Taliban-supported heroin laboratories could have purchased opium from other sources. Having first undertaken political and military measures to establish security in Musa Qala, however, Afghan and international forces were able to interdict high-value illicit products without harming rural communities. They now can begin to help communities break their dependence on the drug trade. This is how to integrate counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency.

For both political and economic reasons, crop eradication should be implemented, as stated in Afghanistan's National Drug Control Policy, "where access to alternative livelihoods exists." Where communities are confident in alternative livelihoods, they will consent to the eradication of illicit crops.

From an economic point of view, crop eradication does not meaningfully increase the opportunity cost of illicit cultivation unless the cultivators are able to engage in other cash-earning activities.¹⁴ Afghan farmers do not cultivate poppy out of greed for the highest possible return. They cultivate it because for many it is the only way to supplement their subsistence farming with a cash income for food and social security, which has become essential over the past few decades of war-induced inflation and destruction of the rural economy. The drug economy provides the only access to land, credit, water, and employment. There are many potential cash crops and sources of monetary income other than poppy cultivation, but additional investments and more security are required to make these economic opportunities available to most Afghan communities, especially those more distant from markets and in areas with less government presence.

From a political point of view, where these opportunities are available, eradication is hardly necessary, except to discipline some deviants, which communities can do themselves. Where these opportunities are not available, eradication promotes corruption and insurgency rather than alternative economic activities. Implementation of "forced eradication" in the absence of such conditions will neither reduce the size of the narcotics economy nor weaken the insurgency. Rather, it will strengthen insurgency while weakening

¹³ U.S. Ambassador William Wood described the seizure as worth \$500 million in "street value," that is, if it had been sold in Amsterdam or London. Musa Qala, however, is rather distant from Amsterdam and London, and the prices there are correspondingly different.

¹⁴ Mansfield and Pain.

and corrupting the Afghan government. Afghans will conclude that foreigners are in Afghanistan only to pursue their own interests, not to help Afghanistan.