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The 'War on Terror': Nation-Building or Nation-Neglecting? ^[1]

Now is the time to finish the job we began in Afghanistan five years ago. Last year saw a desperate and vicious onslaught by a new generation of Taliban forces with enhanced logistical and financial support. More than 4,000 Afghans, many of them civilians, were killed in military actions in 2006, a three-fold increase from the previous year. Suicide attacks -- a phenomenon unknown to Afghans before 2002 -- jumped to 118 from 21. As our intelligence capabilities improve, we are finding and arresting more boys who arrive in Afghanistan fresh from ideological brainwashing in foreign madrassas. They weep when they are caught, not out of remorse, but because they have been denied their martyrdom. And despite the presence of aid workers from more than 60 countries in Afghanistan, 44 Afghan women die each day in childbirth.

Millions of Afghan men and women face this environment of insecurity and remember the promises made to them five years ago. The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States demonstrated that a neglected Afghanistan can have tragic consequences for global security. While nation-building is not cheap, nation-neglecting is far more costly.

The U.S. government announced last week it plans to provide another \$10.6 billion for Afghanistan, and the European Union has proposed a further \$780 million in aid. The international community must cooperate closely with the Afghan government to ensure the realization of these pledges. The sight of new schools, banks, police stations, factories and roads is just as valuable as a successful military sweep in winning the hearts and minds of the people.

Despite these promising developments, three destabilizing factors with local, regional and transnational dimensions contribute to deteriorating security in Afghanistan. At the local level, the government's lack of capacity and resources impedes its ability to meet popular demands for basic services. After 30 years of war, Afghanistan suffers from weak state institutions, and the Afghan army and police force reform of the last five years has not received adequate attention and investment from the international community. Without security, reconstruction proceeds slowly or not at all.

While the international community has pledged long-term support to Afghanistan's reconstruction, regional actors have concluded that this commitment will be short-lived. Although Afghanistan is the world's original front in the global war against terrorism, attention and resources have been diverted elsewhere, a fact not lost on Afghanistan's neighbors.

Transnational drug traffickers and terrorists have taken advantage of Afghanistan's slow pace of reconstruction, effectively hijacking the country's economic re-emergence. The relationship between drug mafias and terrorists is mutually beneficial. The Taliban finances some of its operations through a 10 percent tax collected from opium producers. Narco-terrorists continue

to enjoy an enabling environment as global demand for Afghanistan's heroin far outpaces the international community's ability to provide licit agricultural development and alternative livelihoods for poor Afghan farmers.

To address these root causes of instability in Afghanistan, the international community must rethink its peace-building approach. First, the international community must deliver on its commitment to implementing the Afghan "Marshal Plan" or peace will remain elusive.

Second, terrorist sanctuaries outside of Afghanistan's borders must be shut down. Afghanistan sits in the middle of a predatory neighborhood. The ability of the Taliban insurgency to operate in Afghanistan depends on a sophisticated extremist infrastructure in Pakistan that recruits, indoctrinates and trains terrorists. This infrastructure capitalizes on endemic poverty and illiteracy to recruit young men into traveling to Afghanistan to fight in the name of jihad.

Third, drug-consuming countries must recognize their stake in ending regional narco-terrorism. Millions of lives and billions of dollars are lost to the war on drugs in Iran, Russia, Europe and the United States each year. If major consumer countries invest preventively to revitalize Afghanistan's agricultural economy, they will save the lives of their own citizens and deal a blow to their own domestic drug mafias. When Afghan farmers see that their crops can be preserved with cold storage and transported to neighboring countries on a modern road, they will replant their previously uprooted orchards. But if all they perceive is neglect and mismanagement, these farmers will keep falling back on the guaranteed profits of a poppy crop.

History has demonstrated that winning the peace has a higher rate of success in post-conflict countries where the majority of people support international intervention. In Afghanistan, the people overwhelmingly support the presence of the international community and their forces to help secure and rebuild the country. Capitalizing on this strategic asset will guarantee the success of nation-building in Afghanistan and set a valuable precedent for future post-conflict reconstruction.

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