

# CeSPI

## A road-map for Afghanistan

In 2006, CeSPI together with CeMiSS and UNSSC embarked on a systematic review of the post-war reconstruction and development processes carried out since 1991, with the aim of identifying the limitations and successes in terms of best practices and lessons learnt. Among the first three cases to be studied, Afghanistan was chosen because the process was in full swing, which offered the possibility of examining “live”, as it were, the unfolding of the dynamics generated by the intervention of the international community. The analyses that emerged from the research, in light of developments in recent months, enable us to put forward a series of recommendations which we propose here as a road map offering a way out from what appears to be a serious stalemate, both on the military and political levels.

Almost thirty years of uninterrupted war has reduced the country to an extremely critical state, the consequences of which affect the population with such intensity that it is no longer possible to envisage any solution which does not involve serious and appropriate intervention by the international community. Afghanistan can never recover through its efforts alone. However, at this point, the results achieved in the last five years tell us that the operation conducted so far has essentially been a failure. In fact, the technical standards and rules of international law that could have ensured its success were never applied. While most debate on the topic, and not just in Italy, revolves around ideological themes (such as interventionism vs. pacifism, the fight against terrorism and the “West-Islam clash”), living conditions, security and protection of the fundamental rights of Afghans is not given any exposure or consideration. The experience of the last twenty years shows us that this is a serious conceptual and political mistake which can only lead to the failure of the intervention.

So what is the way out?

1. In accordance with international law and on the basis of sixty years of experiences of peacekeeping and other international military missions, it is necessary first and foremost to make a clear distinction between “Enduring Freedom” (an act of war against the Taliban regime) and ISAF, the UN-mandated NATO intervention for the stabilisation of the country. In particular, the United States and Great Britain, as the invading forces, have occupied the country and struck the population in various ways. In keeping with established doctrine and common sense, they cannot don the blue helmets of peacekeepers. Confusing an invading force with a peace mission is an error that was already committed in Somalia in 1992-93 and subsequently repeated in Iraq with consequences that we are all aware of.
2. Accordingly, the mandate of the Security Council should be reviewed, widening its ambit beyond NATO to include forces from neutral and, possibly, Muslim countries. NATO is too readily identified with its Anglo-American core, which is by now viewed with hostility by a growing segment of the population. The military forces should concentrate on safeguarding and protecting the civilian population, public order and disarmament, with a clear distinction of roles in respect of civil forces operating in the field of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction work.
3. Afghanistan dramatically needs large-scale assistance but received one of the lowest per capita aid quotas of all the operations conducted after 1990. During 2002-2004, every Afghan received 67 dollars, compared to 256 dollars in East Timor, 249 dollars in Bosnia and 219 dollars given to Palestinians. While in 2005 there were efforts made to increase this amount taking it to 182 dollars per person, this has proven to be largely insufficient, also due to the manner in which such funds are spent. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked at 173<sup>rd</sup> position on the human development index, and is the holder of various world records for rates of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, illiteracy and lack of drinking water. Investment should be extended for at least another ten years and should be directed towards

Afghan society in particular. The practice of awarding large international contracts which absorb vast resources to create wealth abroad should cease, with funding going directly to local businesses and NGOs that are perfectly capable of responding to the needs of the population at this stage.

4. Afghan society is deeply divided. Its more advanced and innovative members find themselves caught in the midst of a feudal power system imposed by “warlords”, Taliban fundamentalism, the interests of organised crime and the conservative forces of traditional society. A full commitment is needed to supporting the creation of a new courageous and competent civil society, capable of bringing about change and integration of the country within the international system. This requires resources and strong and continued support.
5. The Afghan crisis is a regional one. The bordering countries, including China, Iran and India, are key to dealing with the crisis successfully, as Afghanistan is a destabilising factor for the whole region and the interests at stake are significant and often in conflict. Multilateral dialogue is needed if these competing interests are to be reconciled.
6. The Taliban are one of the main players in this crisis. It cannot be assumed that the only option available in dealing with them is a military one, which has so far proved ineffective, has taken a heavy toll on the population and entails an economic burden that is unsustainable in the long term. Given their resilience and the growing control they exercise over almost half the country, negotiations must be opened with the Taliban. The notion that “we don’t negotiate with terrorists” tends to confuse the criminal actions of a part of the Taliban regime with a popular groundswell that is highly diversified, enjoys wide consensus in many provinces of the country and is increasingly taking on the role of a “liberation front” in the eyes of many Afghans, including in the north of the country.
7. Opium is by far the most important product of the country. It represents 60% of farmers’ income and it is not conceivable that it will be eradicated solely through repressive policies, conducted with great inconsistency, or with largely ineffective policies concerning the substitution of crops. It is therefore necessary to develop a creative and intelligent initiative which also considers other options such as legalization and compensation for crops that are discontinued.

This road map must be considered as a set of coherent actions, none of which may be implemented in isolation, independently of each other, if their effectiveness is to be ensured. It aims to bring together principles of international law, the spirit of solidarity and the wisdom of lessons learnt, avoiding viewing Afghanistan as an ideological issue, but rather identifying it as a problem which the international community has a duty to resolve, both to restore the fundamental rights of the population and to guarantee the stabilisation of the entire region.

*(by Gianni Rufini, researcher CeSPI – 22 March 2007)*