

Among the challenges to good governance in Afghanistan is a long litany of negative indicators on conditions for Afghan men, women and children, including estimates of literacy rates, access to and quality of education and health care. While these challenges to governance are great they are not insurmountable. They could be addressed through medium to longer term development interventions. Other challenges include human security issues, the current humanitarian crises, the current conflicts and their regional and international players as well as the lack of political will to stop them. There is a lack of banking/savings/credit facilities, making the building of sustainable livelihoods difficult. Finally, there is historically an absence of a strong centralised government: local power structures have developed largely in response to this.

A Possible Scenario

The U.S. government has decided already to commit ground troops and to invade Afghanistan. The military logic would suggest that occupation is the next step. On the one hand, the U.S. government understands the negative implications of a prolonged military campaign and has been careful not to commit a massacre. On the other hand, a "trophy" is required for the troops to exit the ground successfully. Therefore, the U.S. government will try to achieve at least one of two goals: a) capture Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice, b) unseat the Taliban government as a part of efforts aimed at combatting terrorism. Option b) may be easier and allow the necessary claims of victory. It may be also much quicker to overthrow the Taliban regime directly than arm/finance local resistance. It is likely that the U.S. will take control of Kabul, perhaps without the Northern Alliance (which has been largely cut out of the U.S. drive at Kabul). While the initial transition will be driven by the Americans, they will not want to stay long, opening a path for the creation of a UN Protectorate. A U.S. invasion and occupation would see Canada in a support role.

5. Policy Options

General recommendations include:

- Do not engage in any actions in Afghanistan without a prior knowledge of the country.
- Do not engage in any actions in Afghanistan without a plan. ("Easy to get in, hard to get out.")
- Do not "cut and run" when the crisis is over (there has to be a long-term commitment, beyond supervising elections).

Policy Options for Canada:

1. Canada could use its leverage on the U.S.A. and others to create a government in Afghanistan free of old ties. The new government should not be a coalition of the existing forces (which include a large number of war criminals). Instead, it might draw heavily on the Afghan diaspora (who may, however, have their own political agendas/baggage).
2. Canada should try to dissuade the Americans from making alliances with Afghan factions for the sake of convenience.