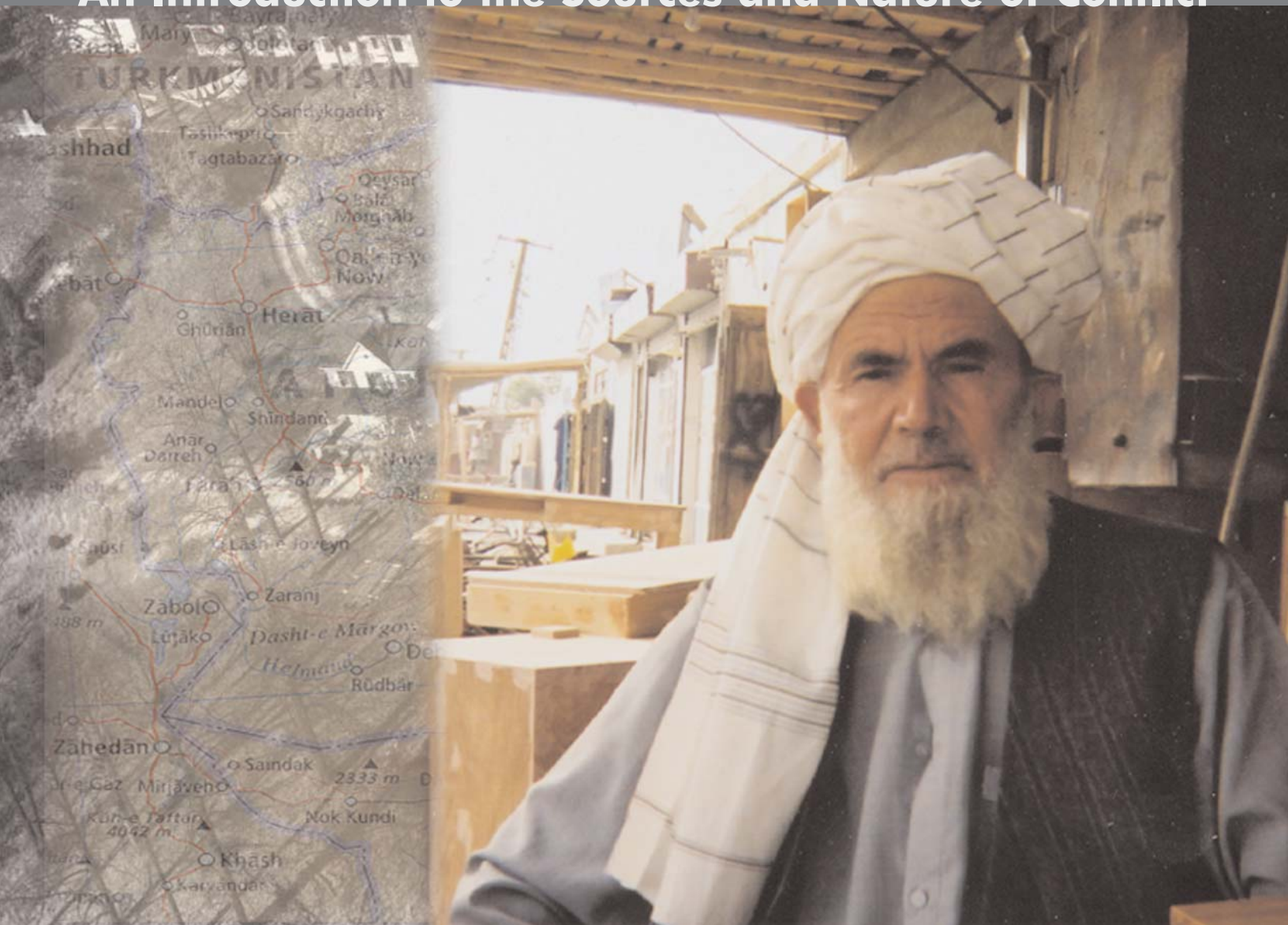
AFGHANISTAN

An Introduction to the Sources and Nature of Conflict



Executive Summary

Emerging from conflict and building lasting peace requires reestablishing normal relationships that are acceptable to all parties of a conflict. Peace-building interventions should attempt to address the context and underlying factors that trigger and sustain an armed conflict. [1] To effectively diagnose the causes of an armed conflict, practitioners must identify the variables that contribute to conflict, assess the specific contributions each variable makes and examine their interactions.

Creative Associates International presents this introduction to the sources and nature of conflict in Afghanistan to development practitioners in hopes of describing the cycles of violence on a national level and identifying instances in which strategic interventions can break these cycles. While we have taken note of literature on conflict diagnosis, both general and specific to Afghanistan, our work has resulted from direct dialogue with Afghans at home and abroad.

The application of a conflict lens has enabled this analysis to better understand the conflict, map its origins, and identify key peripheral tensions that inadvertently create or sustain conflict. Implicit in this methodology is the explicit identification of actors who are involved in conflict and their active engagement in conflict mitigation and prevention. Conducting a conflict mapping analysis prior to embarking on specific interventions has not been a common practice in development efforts. Lack of research on conflict indicators, the inherent difficulty in quantifying the causes of conflict, and narrowly focused methodologies to study conflict have hindered effective analysis of conflict. This introduction to the sources and nature of conflict in Afghanistan is meant to provide the reader with new and creative instruments with which to analyze conflict.

Variables fueling conflict in Afghanistan

More than three years of study have led us to conclude that discontent, which has in turn fueled violent conflict in Afghanistan, has many root causes. To varying degrees, the following factors have played a role in creating and sustaining conflict in Afghanistan:

- Continued threats to religion and dignity.
- Ethnic repression and political exclusion.
- Incompetent and illegitimate government leadership.
- History of foreign intervention.
- Presence of foreign troops.
- The role of the elite in sustaining discontent.
- Destroyed social and physical infrastructure.
- Manifestation of ethnic, party, and personal interests.
- Manifestation of hatred, prejudice, and violent behavior.
- Veteran and war-related status and wealth.
- Access to small arms and the illegal black market economy.
- Environmental degradation.
- Migration of internally displaced persons.

1 Conflict is an interaction between actors (individuals, groups, organizations and states) where at least one of the actors sees incompatibilities in goals, wanting, interest, thinking/ imagination/ perception and or feeling with another actor in a way that affect their relationship [modified from Friedrich Glasl's 1994].

These issues—referred to as variables—continually reemerged as signposts of the Afghan reality during our analysis. It is our hypothesis that the active and methodical exploration of these variables with the Afghan citizenry can serve us to effectively describe the status of peace and conflict at any given time. The main body of this study describes these variables and analyzes indicators, suggesting how they may be used to frame development interventions within the context of conflict prevention and mitigation.

Early warning indicators

Broadly speaking, outbreaks of violence in Afghanistan can be explained as the citizenry's response to perceived threats to religion, sovereignty, and dignity; an increase in severity, ethnic repression, and political exclusion; foreign influence; and public distrust of the government.

Social trends, including low literacy, poverty, and lack of economic opportunity, are underlying conditions that can exacerbate other risk factors.

Conflict prevention efforts should incorporate a comprehensive analysis of risk factors—assessing their potential for conflict. A systematic and sustained effort to "map" the conflict variables through interviews, discussions, and training with a broad cross-section of the population, is key to identifying early warnings of conflict, understanding them as they evolve, and responding effectively. Given the complex and sometimes deceptive nature of a conflict's life cycle, the assessment of conflict variables must be systematic and continue over time.

Conflict mapping as a means to development

Conflict cycles in Afghanistan have continued for more than two decades: foreign troops have engaged in aggression against the people; successive governments have proven inept and illegitimate; and threats to survival, dignity, and religion have become daily realities. For twenty-four years, ethnic repression and political exclusion oppressed the Afghan people; military and political groups focused on personal, party or ethnic interests; economic and social structures became devastated; and illiteracy ensured that populations would remain marginal and volatile. As poverty and unemployment skyrocketed, thousands of young men took up arms as a means to survival. Law and order were nonexistent and long-term hostility gave way to deep-rooted hatred and prejudice.

The actors committed to Afghanistan's long-term reconstruction would be well advised to take thorough account of all of the variables that have kept conflict alive for so long. Without a holistic understanding of the nature of conflict, development goals in Afghanistan—including the resurrection of the education and health sectors, the development of a healthy civil society sector, social and economic reinvigoration, and the development of a competent government that carefully balances Islamic and modern values—will remain unattained.

This introduction to the sources and nature of conflict in Afghanistan is only the first step, an attempt to gauge the nature of conflict over time. Development endeavors seeking to build lasting peace in Afghanistan should begin with real understanding of the needs, fears, and perceptions of the Afghan people. Only then will efforts offer the potential to contribute positively to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Methodology

A community diagnostic approach was applied in gathering qualitative information on sources of tension and frustration among the interviewed groups, utilizing a holistic model that was derived from the public health arena. [2]

The first step in the design of this methodology entailed gathering information through formal and informal group discussions and interviews as well as peace education training workshops. Group discussions, workshops, and interviews were conducted between 1999 and 2002 with a broad cross-section of Afghan citizenry, including intellectuals, political leaders, tribal elders, leading businessmen, local commanders, and private citizens. Studies took place in Peshawar; Islamabad; Kabul; Jalalabad; Rome; London; Frankfurt; Washington, D.C.; Ottawa; and Toronto. Training workshops, one- to five-days in length, typically were problem-based participatory events held in Peshawar, Pakistan and Kabul, Afghanistan. Training sessions typically included an overview, small group discussions, and presentations of summary deliberations before peers. In some cases, written copies of summaries were submitted to workshop facilitators. In addition to discussing the causes of and contributing factors to Afghan armed conflicts, peace education sessions covered the following topics:

- Hatred and prejudice as byproducts of lingering hostilities.
- The role of anger in problematic relationships.
- Coping with grief and stressful situations.
- Communication and problem-solving skills.
- The impact of chronic hostility on disposition and relationships.
- Approaches to conflict transformation.
- Reconciliation across societal levels.
- The role of journalism in building peace.

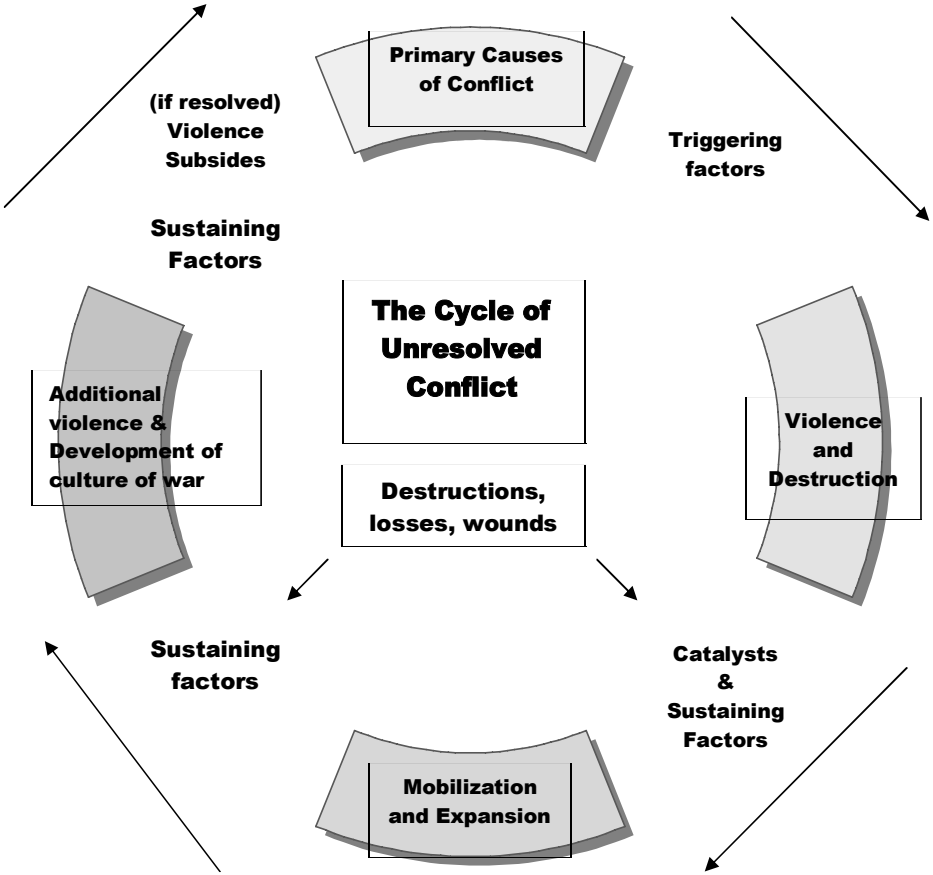
Peace education workshops were organized by field partners including the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA); British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); Afghanistan Education Project; the Afghan University in Peshawar; the Afghanistan Women Council (AWC); Cooperation for Assistance for Afghans (CAA); Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF); Council for Peace and Unity (CPAU); Research and Advisory Council of Afghanistan (RACA); and the Afghan Interim Administration's Ministries of Education, Higher Education, and Information and Culture. In addition to the author, facilitators included Professor Johan Galtung, director of TRANSCEND; Professor Graeme MacQueen; Dr. Joanna Santa Barbara; and Dr. Jack Santa Barbara from the Center for Peace Studies at McMaster University and peace educators from SDF, RACA, and CPAU.

2 A HOLISTIC APPROACH IN PUBLIC HEALTH ENTAILS SEARCHING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF DETERMINANTS, TRENDS, PATTERNS OF HEALTH CONDITIONS AS WELL AS THE CYCLES OF EVENTS LEADING TO A DISEASE, DISABILITY OR DEATH.

Organizing, summarizing, and analyzing this qualitative information involved the following steps:

- Between November of 1999 and the Spring of 2002, information was collected from more than 1,000 Afghan men and women representing diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. See Appendix One

- During the winter and spring of 2002, multiple conflict-analysis models were assessed in order to identify the variables and co-variables responsible for causing and sustaining armed conflicts in Afghanistan. The following model best illustrates cycles of Afghan violent conflicts over the last 23 years:



- In the spring of 2002, determinants and co-determinants were grouped into themes, resulting in a twelve item theme-list. Through peace education sessions, this theme-list was applied to three Afghan conflicts as a checklist: 1978-1992, 1992-1996, and 1996-2001. This exercise was conducted with more than 600 Afghan men and women between March and June of 2002 in Peshawar, Jalalabad, and Kabul. Conflict-specific maps and solution-oriented recommendations resulted from these sessions.

Key variables sustaining conflict as identified by participants

The following sources of discontent were identified as having contributed to the persistence and exacerbation of more than two decades of conflict in Afghanistan. To varying degrees, each of the following play a key role in mapping the Afghan conflict:

- Continued threats to religion and dignity.
- Ethnic repression and political exclusion.
- Incompetent and illegitimate government leadership.
- History of foreign intervention.
- Presence of foreign troops.
- Elite population's role in sustaining discontent among population.
- Destroyed social and physical infrastructure.
- Manifestation of ethnic, party, and personal interests.
- Manifestation of hatred, prejudice, and violent behavior.
- Veteran and war-related status and wealth.
- Access to small arms & drug trafficking.
- Environmental degradation & population migration.

These variables consistently reemerged as a checklist of the Afghan context, providing an illustration and an approximate, though qualitative, picture of the status of peace and conflict in Afghanistan. Elaborations on each of these indicators follow in the text below.

Continued threats to religion and dignity

Threat to religion was defined as a perception of danger confronted by religious institutions and those who have a certain religious identity or undertake certain practices. Because of the important role that religion plays in all aspects of Afghan life, a regime that is alleged to undermine religious integrity loses popular support--especially among rural Afghans–and can even be perceived as the enemy. As such, outside forces that disrupt or disrespect Afghan religious and social values become lightening rods for conflict.

Afghan Society's Islamic Roots

Religious teaching is a major influence in the lives of most Afghans. The deep religious roots of the Afghan people are reflected in the role the mosque has come to play over 10 centuries of Afghan history. While access to schooling in some parts of the country has been as low as 7 percent, access to conveniently located mosques is almost universal. According to some participants, "there is one mosque for every 50 to 100 households, while countless villages have no school at all." Mosques are community-built, community-run, and community-supported institutions, the expenses of which are paid through voluntary or community-organized mechanisms. Communities remunerate clerics (mostly in kind), cover their eating expenses, and regard them as special members of the community. Community members even take pride in donating and contributing to the mosque or helping with its renovation and furnishing. In some instances, the mosque is the most luxurious and best-decorated building in an entire village or town. The historic role of mosques and clergy are tied with a deeply held, passionate commitment to religious rules and ideals.

The conflict surrounding the government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) [3] offers a concrete example of the supremacy of issues of religion and sovereignty in Afghan conflict. As one participant put it, "While the PDPA attempted to establish a modern socialist/communist system in Afghanistan, they demonstrated little respect for the religion of the Afghan people and posed evident threats to religious identity, practices, and institutions." Group members asserted that the PDPA exacerbated conflict by trying to impose foreign values on the people of Afghanistan. Specific examples of the ways in which the PDPA was perceived to threaten the dignity and honor of the Afghan people, included by forcing rural Afghans to comply with reform and aggressively promoting the intermixing of men and women. The policies of King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) were cited as generators of tension because of the degree to which they were perceived to threaten religious principles and practices. Despite his popularity during the early years of his reign, Amanullah's political and social reforms remained largely unsuccessful. On the other hand, the absence of noticeable threats to religion, honor, and dignity, a brutal dictatorship and the aggressive promotion of foreign values may have allowed King Zahir Shah's [4] modernizing reforms of 1963 to 1973 to succeed.

3 The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was formed in 1965 as a leftist nationalist party favoring Soviet revisionism of the Afghan state. The PDPA's reformist agenda came to be through two factions, the "Khalq" (Masses) faction and the "Parcham" (Flag) faction. Differing social and tactical priorities caused an early split within the party. Known as the "royal communist party", Parcham was rightist in orientation and had strong ties to Kabul bourgeoisie. Khalq enjoyed support from petty bourgeois strata from the provinces. Leftist radical currents emerged opposing imperialism, the king, resisting Soviet revisionism and the PDPA. This prompted massive government retaliation. Dissatisfaction grew rampant, poverty worsened and in the early 1970s Afghanistan plunged into a severe drought. The backdrop was set for a 1973 coup, overthrowing King Zahir Shah.

4 King Zahir Shah was overthrown in 1973 by a military coup proclaiming Afghanistan a republic, and reinstalling Shah's cousin Prince Daud into power. Daud represented the dominant bourgeoisie in Afghanistan and initially enjoyed support from the revisionists of the Parcham faction. Reform was minimal and repression became the hallmark of Daud's regime. Islamic Fundamentalist opposition factions were forced to flee to Pakistan where they received support from the Bhutto regime and Islamic Party activist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar, an Islamic student activist from Kabul University, was head of one of the most rigid right-wing groups in the devastating Mujahedeen resistance of the 80s and 90s. Moving further and further to the right, Prince Daud's regime was overthrown in April of 1978 by a military coup dominated by the revisionist PDPA.

Foreign behavior and unpalatable policies play a large role in generating tension, but the effect of foreign troops is even more quantifiable. British troops were perceived as a considerable threat to religious identity throughout their presence in Afghanistan, lasting intermittently between 1839 and 1919. Soviet troops had a similar effect on people's perceptions, and the resulting resentment was not confined to the troops themselves, but was also directed at the PDPA government which accepted their presence.

Participants confirmed the pivotal role that honor codes (Ghairat, Namoos, and Ezat) have played and continue to play in Afghan society. Groups echoed the glory attached to 'defending' and shame connected to 'failing to protect', dignity and honor. Perceived threats to dignity and honor from both foreigners and urban indigenous progressive groups, prompted massive resistance. Afghans acknowledged the role of symbolism in defining 'threats to honor and dignity'. Discussions pointed out that these threats, when widespread and continual, have not only mobilized Afghan resistance (against foreigners and/or Afghan authorities), but also caused intertribal and inter-familial hostilities.

Ethnic repression and political exclusion

Protracted hostility converts identity from a relatively neutral organizing principle or identifying label into a powerful tool towards the provocation of mass violence. Participants echoed that civil wars between 1992 and 2001, though not motivated by ethnicity, were fueled by aggression, repression, and exclusion based on ethnicity. Referring to increased ethnic divisions among warring factions, a participant stated: "Ethnic, linguistic, and religious fault lines, soon after the collapse of Najibullah's government [5], turned into dividing walls of hostility among political groups." Another participant added, "Acts of revenge (an unfortunate response to severe repression) and manipulation of ethnicity by politicians (for advancing their interests) created further spin-off conflicts and deeper hostilities."

Examples of political exclusion included the oppression of Islamist groups by the Daud/Parcham regime in 1975, the sidelining of the Parcham group by the Khalq faction of the PDPA, the exclusion of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's faction by Masoud/Rabani, and the exclusion of all parties by the Taliban.

5 In April of 1988, the U.S. and USSR signed a deal over Afghanistan. Moscow agreed to withdraw and it completed this withdrawal in February 1989. The interference by both superpowers in Afghanistan continued. The US-USSR accords provided for them to continue pouring in huge amounts of weapons. The pro-Soviet Kabul regime was now headed by Dr. Najibullah, the secret police chief who had succeeded Karmal a few years before the US-USSR deal. His government was expected to fall rapidly once the Soviet withdrawal was complete. The Mujahedeen were divided, and the Najibullah regime was able to make deals with various reactionary forces. But, with the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, Russian aid dried up and the Najibullah regime came to an end with the fall of Kabul on April 15, 1992.

The correlation between threats to religion and failed modernization efforts in Afghanistan

Having endured decades of isolation from rest of the world, Afghanistan remains a strongly traditional society. Farmers make up 85 percent of the Afghan population and only 30 percent of the population is literate. Rural-urban disparity played a crucial role in the success or failure of modernization efforts in Afghanistan. This disparity has been marked by thirty years of development practice focused largely on urban areas. Easy access to secondary and higher education, movie theatres, libraries, audio-visual and written media, and exposure to relatively modern marketplaces and imported goods, were particular to the city of Kabul and, to some extent, Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad, and a few other cities.

The decade of democracy (1963-1973) led to the emergence of political parties mostly formed by the urban educated. The modernization agendas of leftist parties proved less sensitive to the religious tradition and honor codes of Afghan society and caused mistrust between rural traditionalists and urban modernists. Examples of this rift between urban and rural are the modernizing regimes of King Amanullah (1919 to 1929) and the PDP government (1978 to 1992), which became intolerable, especially among the rural population. At this stage of development in Afghanistan, modernizers and reformists who did not reflect the rural and Islamic values of the nation found little voice and often encountered resistance from the Afghan population.

Vehicles facilitating ethnic repression and political exclusion were identified as: directing vengeance toward innocent civilians; labeling and stereotyping entire ethnic, linguistic or religious groups; monopoly of power/inadequate ethnic or party representation in government leadership; denying the right to employment and access to higher education; unequal distribution of resources; unfair treatment of certain ethnicities by the constitution; and the monopoly of the media by one group. Discussions of stereotyping uncovered recent examples of wrongful labeling of ordinary clergy and critics of the Afghan Interim Administrations as Taliban or Al-Qaida.

Ethnic repression is reflected in acts of violence driven by anger, hatred, and revenge. Examples include the mass killings at Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997; the killings, burning of property and resulting forced migration in the Shomali valleys from 1997-1999; mass killings at Bamyan, which were initiated in 1998 and continued until last year; and the abuse of Pashtuns in Northern Afghanistan between 2001 and 2002. Afghans emphasized that ethnic division, hatred and stereotyping were fueled largely by rival factions and intellectual groups, not by ordinary Afghan citizens.

The 23 year-old cycle of oppression and revenge was characterized by Afghans as follows: “The party in power, by excluding sections of the population, basically facilitates oppression and allows the will for future revenge to flourish.”

Incompetent and illegitimate government leadership

A corrupt and incompetent government, particularly when coupled with widespread repression and systemic poverty, leaves populations discontented and volatile, providing a breeding ground for violent confrontations.

Afghans characterized an incompetent government as one that:

- Cannot or does not adequately address major grievances, including threats to religion, dignity, and ethnicity.
- Cannot enforce law and order.
- Cannot meet the basic needs of the people, particularly in times of crisis.

The disparity between Afghan and U.S. perspectives on war crimes:

Discussions on political exclusion and ethnic repression brought to the surface a noteworthy remark by one participant on American double standards: "The U.S. treats some former warriors as heroes while others are perceived as criminals. In the eyes of the U.S., ordinary Taliban and followers of Hekmatyar are labeled supporters of terrorism; however, in the eyes of Afghans, they are no different from other former Mujahedeen groups, including those in power. They all committed the same atrocities." Another participant added, "If you look at the good and bad behaviors in both Mujahedeen and Taliban, you will find that Mujahedeen groups took part in the war against the Soviet invasion as well as in infighting and destruction of their own country. Likewise, the Taliban freed a large part of the country from looting and the raping of warlords while also taking part in infighting and destruction of the country."

"None of the Afghan governments over the past two decades has demonstrated capability to effectively respond to crises, address major grievances, bring security and enforce law and order," noted one participant.

The risks incurred by illegitimate governments are evident when one looks at the governments of the PDPA and Mujahedeen, which rose to power through military coups and self-serving councils. Interviewees expressed regret for the legal shortcomings of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, though they confirmed popular support for this agreement.

History of foreign intervention

Afghanistan's geographic location, tension with neighbors, and a fiercely competitive regional economic and political arena have had serious implications for peace and stability in the country.

While Afghan xenophobia remained controversial, participants differentiated between foreign intervention and foreign involvement. Foreign involvement was characterized as development work by expatriate parties aimed at addressing priority needs identified by Afghans themselves in consultation with Afghan authorities and/or local communities. Examples of the gray area between involvement and obvious intervention include the promotion of other religions and the pursuit of hidden political, military or intelligence agendas.

Reflecting on more than two decades of history, Afghans identified four overlapping levels of foreign intervention in Afghanistan:

- Encouragement and provocation (e.g., presently by several neighboring countries).
- Provision of financial resources and logistics (e.g., presently by several neighboring countries and regional parties).
- Provision of weapons, ammunition and advisors (e.g., by regional players to both Northern Alliance and Taliban).
- Provision of advisors, trainers and other fighting groups (e.g., by multiple nations between 1996 and 2002).

Prior to the Anglo-Afghan and Russo-Afghan wars, foreign intervention was characterized as the roles of London and Moscow in setting government policy and hiring and firing high-ranking government officials. Significant importance was placed on the extent and duration of interventions especially when coupled with the presence of foreign troops, widespread poverty, unemployment, and the practice of politics along ethnic lines.

Low literacy and global isolation were suggested as co-variables that leave the average Afghan susceptible to manipulation by geopolitical players and indigenous leaders. There was consensus that, on a number of occasions, warring factions were manipulated by foreign states while such states pursued their own political and economic interests. Examples of Afghan groups manipulating their own people in the struggle for power included the exploitation of ethnic or religious affiliations by Mujahedeen groups, who even referred to their infighting as a "jihad of good against evil."

Afghanistan's Role in the Global and Regional Geopolitical Environment:

Discussions with Afghan politicians and intellectuals referred to "small games:" The Pakistan-India dispute over Kashmir, the Afghanistan-Pakistan tension over the Durand line, the Iran-Pakistan competition over Central Asian markets and resources, coalitions among Iran-India-Russia, and the Pakistan-Arab, Iran-Saudi, and Iran-USA tensions. They also referred to the "great game": Russia-China-India military coordination against the NATO-Japanese expansion across Euro-Asia. Below follows a brief synopsis of discussions and literature on geopolitical issues around Afghanistan:

The Kashmir Dispute, Durand Line, and Pakistan-Iran Competition:
The intractability of the Kashmir standoff and the controversy over the Durand Line (which separated tribal Pastun lines from Afghanistan for a hundred years) have played a major role in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. By supporting particular groups within the Afghan resistance and against the Soviet occupation and more recently the Taliban, Pakistan was trying to establish strategic distance from India by using Afghanistan as a corridor to Central Asia and for the import of gas and oil. Pakistan's resistance to a broad-based Afghan government stemmed from attempts to keep the Pashtunistan issue repressed [Peter Tomsen, Geopolitics of an Afghan Settlement February 2001]. Pakistan remains impatient to begin its export of light industrial goods to the Central Asian republics while Iranian cheap goods are already flowing to these countries. Participants remembered that Pakistan kept to a minimum the role of Iran in Afghan developments (e.g., minimal representation given to Iran-based Afghan Shiite parties in the Peshawar-based Afghan Interim Government from 1989-1991). Pakistan is increasingly nervous about reconstitution of the Kabul-New Delhi axis [Oliver Roy 2001].

Iran was pleased to see the pro-Saudi, pro-Pakistan, Sunni regime of the Taliban fall in 2001. Iran remains uncomfortable about the possibility of a pipeline extending from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and concerned about the influence of Turkey and the U.S. in the region.

The Central Asian Republics and Russia:
While wary of the export of Islamic radicalism and drugs, Central Asian republics are keen to see the development of the trade corridor from Northeast Asia to Europe, China, and other Asian markets. Russia is interested in a presence in Afghanistan at low fiscal and political cost. In order to secure its place in the global community, Russia has tried to reintegrate Central Asia through economic, political, and security circles. Russia wishes to protect its oil market share from the competitive republics of Central Asia.

Russia, China, India, and Iran:
The influence of Pakistan during the Taliban era sparked heavy interest in Afghanistan from the Russia-India-Iran grouping. China's interest stems largely from its discomfort with the U.S. and Japan and NATO's expansion into Euro-Asia. China's Shanghai Five forum, China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, is motivated both by its apprehension of Islamic radicalism and by its interest in economic ties with the nations of Central Asia (which include a $1 billion agreement with Kazakhstan to build an oil pipeline to China). Beijing is attempting to maintain Pakistan as a hedge against India in the geopolitical game (e.g., China provided secret support to Pakistan's nuclear weapon program).

The U.S. and Western Europe:
Discussions about the role of the United States in Afghanistan started with remarks that the U.S. turned down requests for assistance made by the Afghan governments in 1950. Referring to U.S. support of the Afghan Mujahedeen, participants stated: "The U.S.'s short-lived friendship with Afghans lasted until the end of the Cold War." "The Cold War was fought and won on Afghan soil, with over one million lives sacrificed, but the Americans simply walked away, leaving their Cold War partners in misery." Referring to Mujahedeen groups during the 1980s, one participant blamed the U.S. government for "creating a political and military mess and never bothering to clean it once the job was done."

When discussing current U.S. interests, participants raised such concerns as security, economic and military expansion into Euro-Asia, and drug production and trafficking. Reference was made to the "friendly competition" between the U.S. and some Western European countries that from time to time has been thought to fuel rivalries by supporting rival parties. Examples included periods when France was supporting certain groups within the Northern Alliance, and the U.S. and Pakistan were supporting Hekmatyar. It was also brought to light that there were NGOs favoring certain ethnic groups that may have had an adverse effect on ethnic tension.

Presence of foreign troops

The presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan, when involved in fighting and imposing foreign values, arguably has the greatest effect on popular mobilization. Until British troops entered the country in 1839, 1869, and 1919, Afghans reacted little to the intervention of British colonialists, despite the heavy hand of the latter in matters of foreign policy in Afghanistan. Gradually increasing intervention by the Soviets from 1954 to 1977 caused tension and dissatisfaction, while the physical engagement of Soviet troops in a battle against the people--combined with PDPA dictatorship--fueled extensive mobilization within the Afghan nation. It should be noted that support to the Mujahedeen by the West, Pakistan, and several Arab nations facilitated in large part the expansion and sustenance of the resistance.

Similar examples of invasive practices by foreign troops throughout the history of Afghanistan include: the invasions by Alexander of Macedonia, Genghis Khan, and Timur Lenk, all of which involved the presence of foreign troops, threatened sovereignty and dignity, and brought on looting, the destruction of private property, and massive indiscriminate killing.

Specific circumstances during which foreign troops heightened the risk of armed conflict in Afghanistan include:

- Participation in conflict against the people (e.g., 1978-1992).
- Support for unpopular governments (e.g.,1978-1992).
- Threats to religion (1978-1992) or promotion of other religion(s).
- Promotion of foreign values or engaging in immoral activities (e.g., promotion of alcohol, free mixing of men and women, and western style of dress especially for women).

U.S. and Allied troops in Afghanistan were among the most controversial points discussed with participants. Kabul residents were very grateful for the security brought by the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and had no complaints about ISAF's conduct.

Many Afghans regretted the need for foreign military in obtaining adequate security, pointing to failures of the Mujahedeen and Taliban forces.

It should be noted that Afghans were open to friendship with the U.S. based on mutual respect and equal rights. Considerable concern was expressed about the U.S. approach to dealing with international crises. As one participant expressed: "Americans come out forcefully only to address the symptoms, with no attempt to tackle the underlying causes, and some of their short-term remedies create more long-term harm than good."

A minority of participating Afghans called the presence of U.S. and Allied troops an invasion and threat to Afghan sovereignty, religious identity, and honor. Such statements sparked debate about whether these troops were involved in a war against the people of Afghanistan. Many participants warned, "If the bombing of civilians continues, it could be perceived as a war against the people."

When the Afghan Interim Administration was discussed, concerns were raised over a lack of ethnic balance within the administration. Afghans did not, however, rush to label President Karzai's administration as "puppet". One participant offered: "We have to wait and see how things turn out."

Expectations of U.S. and Allied forces, as voiced by participants, can be summarized as follows:

- Resist becoming involved in promoting Christianity or other religions.
- Resist promotion of western lifestyle (In the words of one participant, "Development does not require wearing mini-skirts or drinking alcohol.").
- Resist supporting illegitimate governments.
- Assist Afghans in building defense and security infrastructures.
- Adopt an exit strategy.

The role of the elite in sustaining discontent

The emergence of leaders to organize repressed and severely discontented people can contribute to the momentum for violent engagement. (This is especially true when these circumstances coincide with ruthless political exclusion and ethnic repression.) The likelihood of violence increases, participants noted, when foreign support is added to this equation. Elites, including Hekmatyar, Rabani, Mojaddedi, Gailani, and others, were cited as examples of leaders Afghans had endured, while also suffering harsh treatment by the PDPA regime and their Soviet backers (1978-92). [6]

In the face of extreme impoverishment, low literacy, and lack of opportunity for economic advancement, dissatisfied populations become an ideal pool of recruits. Participants noted: "Some Afghan politicians, by presenting social and economic incentives, capitalized on vulnerability among the people and have built armies to serve their own interests." The PDPA regime, for example, drafted young men, punished those who resisted, and granted financial rewards to those who fought well. Similarly, the CIA and ISI in the late 1970s and early 1980s created a mechanism that forced refugees to follow warring groups. Membership in a Mujahedeen party was a prerequisite for receiving any humanitarian support, including tents, food rations, etc. Similar techniques were adopted by the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, which drafted young men and provided them with financial rewards in an environment where economic opportunity and employment were virtually nonexistent.

6. When support, channeled through Pakistan from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and others was added to the equation, it seized the momentum for expansion and the sustained the strife in Afghanistan. In 1999, while the population suffered from a lack of law and order, bombings, shelling, poverty, and hunger, the Taliban served as organizers of the discontented. As foreign support by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and The United Arab Emirates (to the Taliban) and Iran, Russia, and India (to the Northern Alliance) ensued, unrest endured and intensified.

Loss of vision by elites

Participants made reference to Mujahedeen leaders expected to form a unity government and rebuild Afghanistan after successfully liberating their country from the Soviets.

Many attribute their failure to do so to, "A loss of vision for the country, deviation from subordinate goals and retreating to personal, party, and ethnic interests." As one participant exclaimed, "Instead of working for what is good for Afghanistan and the Afghan people, some Mujahedeen parties and leaders worked toward what was good for their parties and their pockets." Some participants blame political underdevelopment and external influences for the failure of Mujahedeen groups.

The following conclusions were drawn regarding political parties and their leaders:

- Parties should have stayed focused on the interests of the nation.
- Parties and political leaders should have discouraged interference from neighboring countries. (It was commented that they should treat each other fairly and give priority to serving their own nation versus serving ethnicities or single political parties.)
- Competition for power should be peaceful; popular support should be gained by sound platforms, and optimal services should be provided for the good of all people.
- Citizenry should have been consulted and their will respected, rather than government leaders resorting to isolationist autocratic means.
- Hypocrisy should have been replaced by a degree of political honesty. (Participants repeatedly alluded to hypocrisy and dishonesty on the part of warring groups. As one participant expressed, "Warring factions, out of opportunism, became democratic, flexible, and ready for negotiations only when they felt weak and on the verge of defeat; however, they opposed any negotiations when hopeful for winning over the enemy.")

Destroyed social and physical infrastructure

High levels of devastation caused by lingering war in Afghanistan destroyed not only physical infrastructure and livelihoods, but also damaged intellectual patterns and behavior. Damage caused by continued warfare includes the near-complete destruction of highways, government buildings, schools, hospitals, power supplies, irrigation systems, airports, and houses. This destruction coincided with immense suffering, massive casualties, loss of loved ones (to death, imprisonment or migration), constant fear and despair, accumulated anger, ethnic hatred, and extreme poverty. (It was not uncommon for citizens to eat grass to avoid being forced to exchange their children for a bag of wheat.) As the war continued, Afghans agreed that traditional conflict resolution, decision-making, and problem-solving structures were disrupted entirely. Skilled fighters emerged as the new elite, replacing the traditional Khans, Meers, Maliks, Arbabs, and wise elders.

An inability on the part of warring groups to transform their Tanzeems (Mujahedeen groups) into organizations to facilitate social change became clear through successive failed regimes between 1992 and 2001. Though resulting from war, in many aspects, the destruction itself supported the continuation and expansion of armed conflicts.

Conflicting attitudes and behavior

A dangerous grab for power and resources, particularly when coupled with political exclusion and the conducting of politics along ethnic lines, mobilized groups against one another. Atrocities committed by groups while fighting against each other abounded. Afghans identified the vicious cycle of ethnic and political oppression and revenge—particularly in the minds of warring groups and some intellectuals—as sustaining factors in Afghan civil war and as the cause of spin-off wars since 1992. As the impact of chronic hostility on attitudes and relationships was discussed, participants agreed that biased attitudes, unfair judgment, and a lack of empathy and compassion were driving the actions of rival groups and their supporters. As a result of 23 years of relentless burning, destruction of private property, torture, and killing, compassion was lost for one another and one another's basic needs.

Civil strife's detrimental impact on the mental well-being of Afghans:

Chronic civil strife and its impact on the mental well-being, thinking, behavior, and ability of the population to solve problems cannot be ignored. Loretta Hieber-Girardet of the World Health Organization's (WHO) unit in Kabul estimated (in May 2002) that the majority of approximately 27 million of Afghanistan's citizens suffer from some form of mental illness. A report in November 2001 by WHO in Geneva estimated that the illness is serious for one in five Afghans, some 5 million people. Dr. Lynn Amowitz of the U.S. group Physicians for Human Rights, a public health specialist who studied depression among Afghan women, said: "If half the population is depressed, you can't rebuild society. The population is vegetative, passive, pushed along, and helpless."

Participants stated the following to be among the biases and conflicting views and approaches that have contributed to instability in Afghanistan:

- **One-sided claims of victimization**

Warring groups and biased intellectuals have made numerous claims serving as a basis for ethnic hatred and reflecting only one side of a story. Independent and scholarly verification of such claims in conjunction with public awareness of the nature of these claims, Afghans proposed, would reduce inter-ethnic tension in Afghanistan.

- **Illegitimate means of achieving or maintaining legitimate rights**

Over the last 23 years, Afghanistan has condemned the gross violation of lower classes by parties in power. Afghans argued that fear of an unjust future may tempt groups to maintain their illegitimate power even if doing so requires the use of force and acts of large-scale violence. One example was that of several ministers in the late interim administration who insisted on maintaining their posts due to fear of an unjust future. Afghans complained that there was no open communication within the government about such concerns and no mechanism for addressing fears collectively.

Imaginary threats to national unity

According to an earlier model of national unity, "good Afghans" were expected to place more emphasis on their national identity as Afghans than on their ethnic and religious affiliations. Moreover, working towards basic identity-related rights is mislabeled as a separatist attempt in the minds of warring factions and some intellectuals. It was noted by participants that Afghans recognize and sincerely respect the right to take pride in ethnic identity, language, and the advancement of Afghan culture. The exercising of these basic rights has been mistakenly labeled as inherently disloyal to national unity. Participants echoed that exercising identity-related rights, if not aimed at ethnic supremacy and oppressing others, is a culturally enriching process, which ultimately strengthens national unity.

Lack of empathy in views and behavior

Lingering hostility and related anger and hatred prevent sensitivity to the rights and basic needs of the 'enemy group.' Warring groups, their supporters, and some intellectuals were charged by participants with suffering from a lack of empathy. Lack of empathy has been traditionally characterized as denying the rights of 'others', being dishonest about one's own misconduct, and excessively blaming others for their mistakes. During inter-group warfare in Afghanistan, lack of empathy has been coupled with extremes of injustice and unfairness in the form of strict political exclusion, the torturing of 'enemy' prisoners, denying the right to employment, deprivation of basic needs, and destruction of 'enemy' property. Examples of such acts reflect in the treatment of the supporters of the Mujahedeen by the PDPA and vice versa, and of followers of Hekmatyar by those of Masoud's group and vice versa. It is reflected in the way in which aggressive groups treated each other and how the Taliban and the Northern Alliance interacted and treated each other's cohorts.

Legitimacy and eligibility games - erroneous political culture

For more than two decades, various regimes have used physical strength and bogus self-serving councils to claim legitimacy. Military victory and claims of "good service to the nation" have also been used as justifications for retaining illegitimate power. Likewise, allegations and labels such as "war criminal" are assigned only to the warriors of rival groups, without the assumption of any responsibility for accusers' own war crimes. This hypocrisy and political dishonesty were identified as serious obstacles to a national reconciliation program, in which assuming responsibility and trying to learn from mistakes is an essential step towards the mending of broken relationships and regaining of lost trust.

Expert-defined problems

Small groups of politically active, urban intellectuals have traditionally presumed knowledge of the wishes of the Afghan people. In the absence of a mechanism for public consultation, intellectuals have introduced their own definitions of problems and issues of concern to the people of Afghanistan, and sometimes claimed to independently possess solutions.

Some intellectuals focus all their attention on a federal political structure, and others fastidiously oppose such a model, but neither group has queried the population on their thoughts. Likewise, misconceptions exist regarding a strong central government versus regional autonomy, and regarding relationships between minority and majority parties.

Participants agreed that lingering hostility contributes to the continuation of armed conflict in several ways. Groups develop blame and subsequent anger for each other: Blame and anger lead to hatred and the denial of basic rights (loss of empathy and compassion). Further hatred causes the categorical labeling of ethnicities (homogenization). This cycle leads to the continuation of hostility and the perception of the enemy as evil, responsible for all problems, and, therefore, "to be eliminated"(dehumanization and demonization).

Veteran and war-related status and wealth

One of the factors sustaining conflict is the attempt by warriors to hold on to the wealth, power, and status gained from fighting. This situation is particularly evident after prolonged armed conflict and holds true for Afghanistan, where government is one of the few avenues to power, wealth, and status. Ideological aspirations and love of power have motivated leaders of the PDPA government, the Mujahedeen, and the Taliban to repeatedly ignore the will of the people. Participants commented that, "Both Mujahedeen and Taliban commanders gained prominence through their military skills and success in fighting, but when the time came for transition from military battle to political and bureaucratic leadership they failed badly.' Young, desperate fighters, faced with little or no economic opportunity and encouraged by lack of law and order, became involved in smuggling, theft, looting, banditry, and enjoyed status and personal enrichment.'

Access to small arms & drug trafficking

Because of the traditional value attached to arms by Afghan society, easy access to small arms was not seen as a serious risk factor by interviewees. However, the availability and abundance of arms was seen as a problem when coupled with a lack of law and order, absence of economic opportunity, worsening poverty, inter-factional fighting, and drug trafficking. Afghans expressed that security in cities would require security forces, while, in rural communities, security would be attainable if traditional communal structures were revitalized and made operational. (It should be noted that, in the past, rural communities were said to receive security assistance from the central or provincial government only when local resources did not suffice.)

Environmental degradation and population migration

Three years of drought, decades of widespread destruction, and the presence of landmines have taken their toll on Afghanistan's natural resources. Infrastructural damage, drought, the collapse of the economy, and disruption of trade have drastically worsened poverty. A resulting decline in agricultural production has further destroyed an already volatile population and has aggravated inter-group tension.

Environmental degradation is exacerbated still more by a growing refugee and internally displaced population—more than seven million people during the 1990s. This has led to an increase in poverty, lootings, robbery, banditry, and murder.

Afghans did not see a direct correlation between violence and population growth, urbanization, and financing from Diaspora communities. Interviewees did allude to the "ruralization" of major cities, or the migration by rural Afghans to the cities, as a cause of unrest.

The way forward

The deliverance of a peaceful and stable regime in Afghanistan is a foreign policy and security priority for many countries, is crucial to regional stability, and is critical to more than 25 million Afghans exhausted by decades of strife. It would be unrealistic to expect that the Bonn agreement of December 2001 and the more recent June 2002 Loya Jirga agreement will cause the driving forces of civil war and instability in this country to dissipate completely. In order to maximize the peace-building impact of their activities, the aid and development communities, UN agencies, donor countries, and Afghan authorities must recognize and examine the broad determinants of peace and conflict in Afghanistan and design and adjust their policies and programs accordingly.

Participating Afghans unanimously agreed that conflict analysis serves as a useful educational tool for intellectuals and political elites. Participants in group discussions, interviews, and workshops helped elucidate the causes of, and contributing factors to, conflict. These discussions also confronted and, to some extent, counteracted the blame that often surfaces in conflict and post-conflict environments.

Once tested and developed further, this work can serve as a step toward the development of more precise formulas for risk assessment and in determining the likelihood of the eruption and sustenance of conflicts. Once proven useful, a conflict mapping formula may complement existing "early warning systems" and guide conflict-prevention policy and program development. One could then begin to classify situations according to risk, model a response, and design appropriate development programming, effectively changing the face of conflict resolution and peace building as we know it.

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APPENDIX

Peace Education Workshops, discussions and interviews from 1999 through 2002:

Date of session	Place of sessions	Organizing partner	Total Participants	Female participants	Facilitators
November 1999	Peshawar, Pakistan	Multiple meetings with 12 NGO & UN representatives	Not documented	Not documented	Seddiq Weera
March 2000	Peshawar, Pakistan	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) & BBC Afghan Education Project	15	7	Seddiq Weera
March 2000	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghanistan Women Council (AWC)	6	5	Seddiq Weera
October 2000	Peshawar, Pakistan	Council of Cooperation for Afghanistan (CCA)	5	1	Seddiq Weera
October 2000	Peshawar, Pakistan	Group of former Mujahedeen commanders	11	0	Seddiq Weera
October 2001	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghanistan Women Council	30	29	Seddiq Weera
February 2001	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghan University in Peshawar, Norwegi an Church Aid, ACBAR, UNDP, Independent groups of Afghan mediators	137	26	Johan Galtung, Graeme MacQueen, Joanna Santa Barbara, Jack Santa Barbara
February 2001	Peshawar, Pakistan	Group of former Mujahedeen commanders	8	0	Seddiq Weera
March-April 2002	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghan University in Peshawar	98	11	Seddiq Weera
March-April 2002	Kabul, Afghanistan	Ministry of Information and Culture	30	0	Seddiq Weera
March-April 2002	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghanistan Women Organization	202	18	Seddiq Weera
May 2002	Peshawar, Pakistan	Afghan University in Peshawar, CPAU, SDF, RACA	112	16	Joanna Santa Barbara, Johan Galtung, Seddiq Weera
May 2002	Peshawar, Pakistan	Sahaar, Afghan Newspaper in Peshawar	104	4	Johan Galtung & Seddiq Weera
May 2002	Kabul Afghanistan	Ministry of Education	137	31	Johan Gultang Seddiq Weera, Joanna Santa Barbara
May 2002	Kabul, Afghanistan	Ministry of Higher Education	100	29	Johan Galtung, Joanna Santa Barbara Jack Santa Barbara
May 2002	Kabul, Afghanistan	Ministry of Information & Culture	89	9	Joanna Santa Barbara, Jack Santa Barbara, Seddiq Weera
November 2000-June 2002	Peshawar, Kabul, Frankfurt, Rome, London, Toronto, Ottawa, Washington	Various small groups of intellectuals, politicians, tribal & spiritual leaders and ordinary citizens	Approximate group size 60	Approximate group size 15	Seddiq Weera

About the Author

Dr. Seddiq Weera is Director of the Peace Education Program and Senior Country Advisor for Creative Associates International. In these capacities, Dr. Weera is guiding psychosocial rehabilitation and reconciliation training for the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, and Information and Culture of the Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan. He assists community and government leaders in the provinces of Nangarhar, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Dr. Weera has led peace education programs in Afghanistan under the auspices of the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University since 1999.

Dr. Weera immigrated to Canada in 1991, where he completed his master's degree in Health Research Methods. He began his research and teaching career at the Center for International Health, where he worked on international projects related to the impact of war on the health of children. He initiated community-based assessments of disabilities and capacity building of educational institutes and, from 1994-1998, taught graduate courses on the fundamentals of health and development and coursework related to equitable and sustainable development. Dr.Weera has guided the production and field-testing of computer-assisted educational materials on micronutrient malnutrition for university students in developing countries. In 1998, during his work towards a doctoral degree in Public Health Science, Dr. Weera developed educational materials on psychosocial rehabilitation for teachers and parents in Afghanistan.

Dr. Weera was born in Afghanistan, where he studied and practiced medicine and was a founding member of the Ministry of Public Health with the exiled Afghan government in 1989. During this time, he advised the government in developing provincial public health plans.

In his work with Creative Associates International, Dr. Weera is committed to designing and implementing reconciliation programs and facilitating the establishment of effective media and education sectors, thereby bolstering the democratization process.

About Creative Associates International Inc

Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) is a professional and technical services firm that, since its inception in 1977, has been working to improve the lives of underserved populations. CAII is internationally recognized as a quality provider of innovative, results-driven technical assistance with effective managerial and financial support systems. Creative Associates has successfully implemented numerous short- and long-term projects in over 68 countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. CAII has field offices in El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Peru, Senegal, Serbia & Montenegro, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia.

The Creative Associates portfolio reflects a strong emphasis on countries in the transition from conflict toward a productive, participatory civilian life. Endeavors in the aforementioned countries and others have assisted citizens in identifying, stabilizing, and rebuilding their communities through conflict resolution, vocational training, infrastructure development, civic education, interethnic integration and cooperation, and the creation of sociopolitical linkages. CAII responds to the demand for development at the local level and implements community participation in the rebuilding of trust where communities suffer from deep divisions along ethnic, political, racial, and religious lines.

CAII's first program experience in Afghanistan was in 1992, guiding the implementation of a USAID-funded education support project. In February 2002, Creative Associates facilitated a week-long Food and Education Workshop through its USAID-funded Basic Education Policy Support (BEPS) contract. This workshop brought together key officials from the Afghan Interim Administration's Ministry of Education, as well as leading local and international NGOs and donor agencies, in developing the collaborative process necessary to initiate the World Food Program's food and education program. In December 2002, through the USAID-funded BEPS contract, Creative Associates will provide a forum for the Afghan Ministry of Education, NGOs, donor agencies, and teachers to participate in strategic planning for curriculum content and methods at the first post-Taliban national education workshop hosted in Kabul.

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