



As we reach the five-year anniversary of the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, it is natural to cast an eye on Afghanistan. While attention generally focuses on Iraq, Afghanistan remains one of the central fronts in the War on Terror. After all, only five years ago Afghanistan was a lawless region that provided a training ground and sanctuary for Osama bin Laden's deadly al-Qaeda network.

In today's age, there is often a tendency to measure progress against an unrealizable ideal—to expect development to occur in a vacuum that does not factor in preexisting conditions. It is hard to comprehend how destitute Afghanistan was in 2001—and how much progress has been made since. Afghanistan was one of the poorest nations in the world with little infrastructure; it was ruled by a vicious totalitarian regime; drought had decimated agricultural mainstays; the economy was a shambles; and decades of war had left it a broken, lawless nation.

And yet now, despite ongoing violence in some provinces, there is a vast array of promising indicators across a broad spectrum—from security to education to health care. Afghanistan is now a fragile democracy, and a strong ally in the War on Terror. The population is free and is taking advantage of the increasing political and economic opportunities. And the government continues to extend the arm of peace and order to long-neglected regions of the country.

This is not to downplay the very real threats that still face Afghanistan. It is merely to say that any candid discussion of the mission should include the good as well as the bad. Five years on, there is a multitude of good news—testament to the hard work and dedication of our armed forces, the international community, and, most important, the Afghan people themselves.

Democratic Reforms

The Taliban ruled by force and imposed a radical interpretation of Islam on the entire population. There were no freedoms to speak of, particularly for women. There were numerous bans on leisure activities, such as television, various games and sports, even kite-flying. There was only one state-sanctioned radio station. Criminal punishments for those who ran afoul of the regime included amputations, stonings, and public executions.

Today:

- ❖ The Afghanistan constitution, signed into law in 2004, includes provisions to protect individual rights, particularly for women.
- ❖ In the 2004 presidential election, more than 8 million Afghans voted, and 41 percent were women. In the 2005 parliamentary election, more than 50 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot.
- ❖ Women hold 68 of 188 seats in the lower house of parliament.

- ❖ Approximately 50,000 domestic election observers were trained for the 2005 parliamentary election.
- ❖ At least 40 judicial centers have been built or rehabilitated, and almost 600 judges trained.
- ❖ There are now 32 independent radio stations that reach 60 percent of the population.
- ❖ At least 4.7 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan.

Education

It is a well-known fact that the Taliban did not believe in education for women. But the Taliban's neglect of Afghanistan's people was not limited to women: By the end of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan had a 70 percent illiteracy rate, and 80 percent of schools had been damaged or destroyed. In 2002, only 32 percent of school-age children were enrolled, and 97 percent of girls did not attend.

Today:

- ❖ At least 5 million students are enrolled, a 500 percent increase since 2001. Of these, 40 percent are women and girls.
- ❖ More than 50,000 teachers have been trained. At least 65,000 teachers regularly listen to a radio teaching program that airs daily.
- ❖ More than 500 schools, which serve 400,000 students, have been built. All are repaired with local materials and expertise—and are earthquake-resistant.
- ❖ The United States helped create an Afghanistan Primary Education Program to make up for lost schooling years under the Taliban. At its peak, 170,000 students attended daily, 58 percent of whom were women.
- ❖ The United States has helped print more than 48 million textbooks and distribute more than 42 million textbooks.

Health Care

In 2001, only 8 percent of Afghanistan's population had access to health care. The maternal mortality rate was the highest in the world. There was no health-care infrastructure to speak of.

Today:

- ❖ At least 80 percent of the population has access to at least basic health care.
- ❖ More than 500 health clinics have been built and serve 340,000 patients per month. These clinics reach approximately 7.4 million citizens.
- ❖ For rural areas, at least 2,000 community health workers have been trained, and they treat an additional 150,000 people per month.
- ❖ Since 2004, full immunization for children 1–2 years of age has increased 150 percent, to 37 percent of the population. The United States has helped vaccinate at least 5 million children.
- ❖ The United States has treated 700,000 cases of malaria.
- ❖ To combat childhood polio, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Health Organization provided vaccinations of 9.9 million children.

Economics

After 25 years of war, the economy of Afghanistan in 2001 was almost non-existent. There was no centralized government to institute economic policies, and little infrastructure—not even a formal banking system. What commerce there was existed outside of any domestic or international structure. There were few opportunities available to Afghans to better their situation.

Today:

- ❖ The Afghanistan economy was valued at \$2.4 billion in 2002. The number for 2006 is \$7.3 billion, and projected to rise to \$8.8 billion next year.
- ❖ Per capita income has doubled since 2001.
- ❖ The government of Afghanistan collected more than \$177 million in revenue in 2002–2003, and \$300 million in 2004–2005, an increase of 70 percent. President Karzai estimates the revenue for 2005–2006 will be \$500 million.
- ❖ More than 3 million land deeds and more than 55,000 businesses have been registered since 2001. At least 85 percent of all property deeds have been restored or reorganized, decreasing land-ownership disputes.

- ❖ There is now a Central Bank with 32 computerized provincial branches. The Central Bank has \$2 billion in foreign reserves.
- ❖ More than 10,000 kilometers of road have been built or improved since the Taliban fell. And at least 3,000 kilometers more are under construction.
- ❖ The average speed on most roads has increased 300 percent.
- ❖ The completion of the Kabul-Kandahar highway improved transportation for 30 percent of country, and reduced travel times for those two cities from 15 hours to 6 hours. USAID 9.12
- ❖ The U.S. portion of the Kandahar-Herat highway has reduced travel time between those two major cities from 10 hours to 4.3 hours.
- ❖ Rehabilitation of the Kajaki Dam and surrounding transmission lines will bring power to 1.7 million Afghans in a critical security area.
- ❖ According to the World Bank, Afghanistan ranks near the top of all nations in ease of starting a business.
- ❖ Coca-Cola opened a \$25 million bottling plant in Kabul, which employs approximately 500 Afghans.
- ❖ Ford, 3M, and Boeing are examining business opportunities in Afghanistan.
- ❖ Wherever the infrastructure and security situation is improved, what little support there is for the Taliban continues to decline.
- ❖ Numerous structural-improvement projects are ongoing, and many others are planned and have funding committed for them.

Agriculture

Agriculture has long been a mainstay of the Afghanistan economy, and it is estimated that 70 percent of the population makes its living off the land. Opium production remains a problem, but in areas where infrastructure and security has been improved—and where alternative-livelihood programs have been initiated—there has tended to be a decline in opium production.

- ❖ There have been more than 28,000 micro-loans given out for agricultural activities.
- ❖ At least 140 farm markets have been constructed.

- ❖ Agricultural programs to increase farming efficiency now extend to more than 1 million farmers.
- ❖ At least 2.5 million Afghans have benefited from irrigation and road projects linking farms to market.
- ❖ Irrigation rehabilitation has improved water supplies for more than 1 million acres—approximately 10 percent of nationwide farmland.
- ❖ More than 210 irrigation structures have been built and nearly 4,500 kilometers of canals cleaned.
- ❖ Since 2004, there has been a 40 percent increase in cereal production, and a 46 percent increase in wheat production.
- ❖ Almost 4,000 acres of fruit and nut orchards have been planted in the eastern region.
- ❖ More than 19,000 women have been trained in improved poultry management.
- ❖ At least 14 million head of cattle have been vaccinated or treated.
- ❖ For every \$1 USAID has invested in agriculture, there has been an \$11 return.
- ❖ Only 8 percent of the population makes its living from the opium trade.

Security

There is no doubt that security continues to be a major challenge. Remnants of the former Taliban regime and elements of al-Qaeda continue to try to derail progress throughout the country. But just five years ago, there was no formalized rule of law; there was no respected national army; there was no national police force. The nation had been wracked by war for nearly 30 years—and was a pariah from the international community. Only three states were willing to accord the government diplomatic recognition—and there was little order within Afghanistan. The Taliban harbored and supported al-Qaeda, the world’s most deadly terrorist organization.

Today:

- ❖ Afghanistan is no longer an open sanctuary for al-Qaeda.
- ❖ The Afghan National Army (ANA) currently has more than 30,000 trained and equipped troops; the Afghan National Police has more than 46,000 trained and equipped forces. Approximately 4,000 Afghan security forces are still in training.

- ❖ The ANA is growing at a rate of approximately 1,000 a month, and the force may increase to 70,000.
- ❖ The ANA has successfully conducted independent combat operations and continues to improve its combat capabilities.
- ❖ The ANA is composed of five corps and ten brigades. It is an infantry-centric force focused on counterinsurgency capability.
- ❖ After the Taliban fell, the private militias of tribal chief and “warlords” were placed under the control of the Ministry of Defense—then disarmed and demobilized.
- ❖ There are 21,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan; there were less than 10,000 in 2002; and approximately 13,000 in 2003; and similar numbers to present in 2004 and 2005.
- ❖ There are 40 nations with troops on the ground in Afghanistan, and approximately 40,000 international troops in country.
- ❖ For the first time in its history, NATO forces are deployed beyond their traditional European borders.
- ❖ NATO’s command in Afghanistan—the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—expanded in July to cover Afghanistan’s southern provinces.
- ❖ The Operation Enduring Freedom Coalition transferred authority for all security operations to NATO/ISAF on Oct. 5. This will improve command and control and coordination within Afghanistan.
- ❖ There are 24 Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) controlled by NATO operating throughout the nation. These entities, a mixture of military and civilians, are involved in infrastructure improvement.

While it has become fashionable in some circles to call Afghanistan a forgotten war, or to say the United States has lost its focus, the facts belie the myths. To be sure, no one doubts that great obstacles still exist; the recent up-tick in violence reiterates that the enemies of a stable, peaceful Afghanistan remain persistent and motivated.

Even so, the Afghan people—with strong support from free nations across the globe—are building a future they can be proud of: secure and prosperous at home, and respected abroad.