

Solving the Statebuilders' Dilemma

The international mission to reconstruct Afghanistan may be the most ambitious statebuilding exercise ever undertaken. Since 2009 at least, the country has been the focus of tremendous international political will, extensive development assistance, and overwhelming military power. While the effort has generated real progress in quadrupling GDP,¹ increasing literacy rates,² and building up the Afghan National Security Forces,³ the news coming out of Afghanistan is dominated by stories of corruption, electoral fraud, and the impunity of regional powerbrokers.⁴

Although these stories obscure the progress being made both in the statebuilding effort and on the battlefield, the stakes of these accountability failures are not trivial. If the principal goal in Afghanistan is to establish a legitimate state whose population accepts its authority, that goal will remain elusive as long as the population associates the government with abuses of power.

Much of the commentary on failures of accountability revolves around the particular personalities of Afghan leaders and the peculiarities of Afghan politics. But what if these issues are not unique to the Afghanistan mission? What if they are a product of the statebuilding effort itself? The lessons learned from the last decade in Afghanistan demonstrate why a new approach to international statebuilding is necessary. This new approach, what could be called a “triple compact,” should commit the international community to both the government and the population of the state being rebuilt in order to help citizens hold their political leaders to account.

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The Statebuilders' Dilemma

A new approach to international statebuilding is necessary.

International support for a statebuilding process inherently creates a hybrid form of governance. The landmark 2008 report by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined statebuilding as “action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups.”⁵ The irony of international efforts to support statebuilding is that to re-establish the state’s authority, the international community must perform some of the functions of that state: restoring a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, providing basic services to the population, administering public finances, etc. To repair a broken social contract between the governed and the governing, in other words, the international community must insert itself between the two. This unnatural insertion of external actors into an inherently endogenous relationship muddies the relationship between power and responsibility.

This governance model clearly violates the norm of national sovereignty. The violation is justified by relying on the hope that this will be a temporary aberration, a “transitional” process on the path to resuming full sovereignty. Afghanistan is not the only statebuilding exercise whose longevity suggests that “transition” may be a misleading term. When the international community exercises preponderant political power for years on end, it becomes a part of the political landscape. Stripped of the hopeful thinking about an imminent transition, statebuilding is more realistically understood as a hybrid form of governance involving both internal and external players shaping domestic affairs.

This hybrid form of governance serves as an obstacle to accountability in two ways. First, when the international community performs some of the functions of a national government, citizens find it harder to know who in fact wields power. The lack of clarity makes it more difficult for the population to know who decides what and whom to punish when the public interest is not served. Second, the power of the international community conditions the behavior of domestic actors, making the emerging government more answerable to outsiders than to its own citizens. The military and financial guarantees the international community provides the emerging government mean that the government owes its survival more to the international community than to the support of its own population. This insulates the government from

domestic pressures and weakens the incentive it has to respond to popular demands. When those in power take advantage of the lack of accountability, the result is corruption, electoral fraud, and even predatory behavior. At worst, these behaviors can further alienate a population, causing additional destabilization as dissatisfaction and resentment generate new recruits for insurgency.

What we may be observing in Afghanistan, then, is not the result of any particular defect in the country's political culture or in any particular individual. Failures of accountability may be the result of incentives established by the statebuilding effort itself. Insulated from both internal and external sources of pressure by the unique position it occupies in this hybrid form of governance, the Afghan government can act with impunity.

In situations where a government chooses to take advantage of the incentives inherent in an international statebuilding effort, it creates a Statebuilders' Dilemma. In reconstructing a government in countries that are generally poor and severely lacking in infrastructure, the international community must invest heavily in building up state capacity. More capacity means increased ability to deliver basic services, ideally reinforcing the relationship between the people and their government. And yet, the more resources that donors pour into building the size and power of government structures, the more beholden those structures actually are to outsiders and not the population. If measures to strengthen the power of a government outstrip measures to subject that power to the will of the people, abuses of power become more likely.

Why does this present a dilemma for the international community? Because by strengthening capacity, it could actually undermine accountability. If resources are power, providing more resources to a government that need not account to its own population could incite abuses of power and leave the government less legitimate in the eyes of the people—the exact opposite of what state capacity-building programs are meant to achieve.

By strengthening capacity, the international community could actually undermine accountability.

The Problem of Accountability

Over the past 20 years, the international community has experimented with different solutions to the problem of accountability in statebuilding. In the early days of the explosion of multilateral “peacemaking” or “peace-building” missions in the 1990s, peace treaties established institutions through which international

representatives played a direct role in the domestic political sphere, allowing them to uphold accountability by confronting abuses of power directly.

At the conclusion of the Bosnian conflict, for example, the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement established an appointed High Representative to “facilitate the Parties’ own efforts”⁶ to implement the agreement. This High Representative also coordinated the disparate organizations devising and implementing reforms that impacted every aspect of Bosnia’s politics and institutions. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was in charge of elections, the legal system, and ensuring civilian control of the armed forces. The UN International Police Task Force performed police work while reforming the police into an ethnically-balanced and professional force. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was in charge of transitional justice. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) took the lead on refugee return, while the World Bank and International Monetary Fund led economic reforms.⁷

In response to the intransigence of the parties coerced against their interests into an agreement by the Clinton administration, the United Nations’ Peace Implementation Council voted on the “Bonn Powers” that gave the High Representative the authority to enforce the implementation of Dayton. Each High Representative used these powers with increasing frequency, interpreting them broadly to enforce any internationally suggested reform, from privatization to a new national flag.⁸ With the power to threaten and even remove democratically elected leaders from office, the High Representative became a benevolent autocrat, reflecting the implicit view that “what Bosnia and Herzegovina needs is not democratic domestic politics, but government by international experts.”⁹

Kosovo followed a similar path, with the 1999 Kosovo War ending in an agreement that mandated a UN transitional administration. The United Nations oversaw the international effort and directly controlled the security sector, the UNHCR took responsibility for humanitarian issues, the OSCE oversaw elections as well as the press, and the European Union drove reconstruction and development.¹⁰ The transitional administration assumed nearly all power, as it had “structures [that] included councils with Albanian and Serbian leaders, but initially none of the Kosovars had decision making authority.”¹¹ Although the international community explicitly stated that it would temporarily assume power, the return of sovereignty has been as slow as in Bosnia. Five years after the war, Kosovo was still described as “an international protectorate with limited administrative powers devolved to the local population and with an international military and civilian presence.”¹²

By the first decade of the new century, the risks of establishing a direct political role for international representatives began to outweigh the benefits. In

both Bosnia and Kosovo, the preponderant political role of outsiders served as a disincentive for domestic actors to reconcile and establish coalitions of interest across the former boundaries of conflict. Freed from the responsibility of holding final authority, domestic parties had an incentive to pander to their base to retain influence.¹³

This accompanied a more general concern about the destabilizing effect of elections in post-conflict situations, leading to debates about the “sequencing” of political development in statebuilding exercises. This debate was carried by proponents of institution-building as an essential prerequisite to accountability. Advocates of this approach argued that strong institutions were a precondition for democracy and political liberalization.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of this approach came from Roland Paris, the director of the University of Ottawa's Center for International Policy Studies, who made the case for “institutionalization before liberalization,” in which external forces perform certain state functions, strengthen institutions, and then return authority over time.¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama went so far as to claim that statebuilding and democracy work at cross purposes, with one strengthening the state and the other constraining it. Both are necessary, but to have a democratic state, you must first have a state.¹⁵

Yet, if democratic governance is a luxury that states recovering from conflict can ill afford, what constraints exist to ensure governments do not abuse power? In other words, how can statebuilding exercises uphold accountability when the government is not accountable to its own population? In 2005, former Afghan Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart offered a compelling answer in what became their book, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*.¹⁶ In statebuilding exercises such as Afghanistan, they proposed that the international community and the government enter into a Double Compact, in which the government would make commitments to its own population that would be upheld by commitments the international community makes to the government.

Ghani and Lockhart's approach stems from the recognition that, in the hybrid form of governance which statebuilding exercises represent, the government is not fully sovereign. If it is not the only actor exercising power over the lives of its citizens, it cannot be held to account. The Double Compact therefore establishes a “sovereignty strategy,” in which the international community transfers increasing degrees of power and responsibility to the government. This strategy would ideally set out a vision for the future of the country, identify responsibilities in each sector, and harness collective effort as well as capital to meet those responsibilities.

In Afghanistan, the government and the international community explicitly negotiated a Double Compact at the London Conference of 2006.¹⁷ Parties to

the “Afghanistan Compact” signed at the conference outlined a vision in which all state responsibilities would be in Afghan government hands by 2011. It laid

In practice, the only compact in Afghanistan was between the international community and government.

out a series of benchmarks for the performance of those responsibilities in the areas of security, development, and governance capacity.

In practice, however, there was only one compact in 2006: the compact between the international community and the government. The government made no parallel compact with the Afghan people. The United States pressed President Hamid Karzai to lay out a compact with the electorate after his 2009 re-election, but did not secure anything more concrete

than vague commitments with no enforcement mechanisms.¹⁸

Rethinking Accountability in Statebuilding

A more effective way to ensure that governments are accountable to their own populations would be to develop accountability mechanisms that tackle the power dynamics of statebuilding head on—by adapting them to the hybrid form of governance that is international statebuilding.

To do so requires unpacking the concept of accountability. Authors such as Philippe Schmitter of the University of Chicago define accountability as a relationship between two sets of actors, in which one submits his actions to the judgment and sanction of the other.¹⁹ In simple terms, it might be described as a relationship between those who exercise power and those for whom it is wielded. The former submits its action to the judgment and sanction of the latter. For the purposes of statebuilding, the relevant kind is political accountability, and so the relationship that matters is between rulers and those in whose name they rule.

In a seminal 1999 article, Austrian political scientist Andreas Schedler identifies two dimensions of accountability. As with any relationship, each side has a responsibility to the other: the government’s role is to be answerable to the population, informing them of its decisions and providing justification for them, and the population’s role is to judge the government’s decisions, and if they are not satisfactory, to enforce its will on the government.²⁰

There are a number of forms that enforcement can take: sanctions could include public rebuke, legal action, and/or ultimately the government’s removal from power. This process is often termed vertical accountability, but the state itself can also ensure enforcement through mechanisms of horizontal

accountability. When constitutions such as Afghanistan's separate the powers of different branches, and create checks and balances between them, one actor within the state can take action against another. If a president acts in a manner inconsistent with the public interest, for example, the legislature may attempt to sanction him. If a provincial judge accepts bribes, the governor may seek his removal. These internal rivalries are forms of horizontal accountability, and offer more feasible means for limiting abuses of power than external constraints on the state. Indeed, in a statebuilding exercise such as Afghanistan's, they may be the only means of holding the state to account since the international community's hands are tied by its dependence on maintaining good relations with the host government.

How should the international community incorporate accountability into statebuilding efforts? First and foremost, by recognizing that the fundamental relationship for accountability must be between the government and its own population, not the government and its foreign partners. Although this point is intuitively obvious, the domestic pressures at play within countries contributing to statebuilding missions often get in the way. When countries place millions or billions of dollars on the line and sacrifice dozens, hundreds, or thousands of soldiers' lives, their governments are tempted to demand specific commitments from the recipients of these efforts.²¹

If all parties agree that the government must be accountable to its own population above all else, other activities should be aligned where possible to strengthen that primary accountability relationship. The government must take measures to answer to its own population. When the population believes the public interest is not being served, it must have the means to enforce its will. The international community must then be given an explicit mandate to advance both of those objectives. It must help the government become answerable to its population, informing the people of its actions and justifying the decisions it takes. And it must stand up for enforcement measures when the population judges the government's actions to be wanting. To institutionalize this role, the international community must move beyond the Double Compact and enter into a Triple Compact with both the state and the population of the country recovering from conflict.

A Triple Compact

The key failing of the Double Compact is that it makes the international community entirely reliant on the government to uphold the public interest. When the government is not willing or able to do so, the Statebuilders' Dilemma sets in and further international support risks eroding legitimacy and stability. A Triple Compact would overcome this dilemma by explicitly recognizing a

A Triple Compact also commits the international community to the governed public.

political role for the international community, consistent with the de facto role it plays when it supports statebuilding exercises. It would draw the international community into a direct relationship with the population as well as the government, and commit all three parties to measures that would build the accountability of the government to its population. In this way, it would allow the international

community to escape the Statebuilders' Dilemma.

The Triple Compact would consist of three mutually supporting undertakings to uphold accountability:

- **Between the Government and the Population:** The primordial accountability relationship must be between domestic actors: the rulers and the ruled. In this relationship, the population essentially agrees to seek change through the existing political system in return for a commitment that the system can deliver change when demanded.
- **Between the International Community and the Government:** Recognizing the limited capacity of the government and the daunting prospect of having the population hold it to account, the international community provides the government with capacity to deliver for the population. But in the Triple Compact, it also assists the government in its efforts to be answerable to its people for the use of its power. In turn, the government agrees to accept responsibility for its own population, discarding the option of blaming the international community for shared failings.
- **Between the International Community and the Population:** Crucially, under a Triple Compact the international community would also commit to use its power to ensure that the public will is heard and upheld. This would entail efforts to help the population express that will, and efforts to reinforce mechanisms to impress that will upon the government when necessary. In return for the population's commitment to seek change within the existing political system, rather than seek violent alternatives, the international community would apply its influence to ensure the system can deliver change.

Like the Double Compact, the Triple Compact would not be a legally-binding engagement. Rather, it would be a normative framework for the statebuilding process: a public commitment by the international community and the government to place the interests of the population at the center of the statebuilding effort. It would not require identifying specific representatives of the population to enter into an agreement with the international community, a

process that would be fraught with political and practical challenges. Rather, the Triple Compact would guide the interaction of the government and international community by invoking the common goal of advancing the interests of the population. The Triple Compact would mitigate the normative constraints that sovereignty places on the international community's exercise of its political role by shifting the terms of the debate away from the sovereignty of the state and to popular sovereignty, recognizing that the ultimate authority must rest with the people if stability is to take root.

Applying the Triple Compact to Afghanistan

To demonstrate how a Triple Compact would improve accountability in statebuilding exercises, the framework can be applied to Afghanistan. On issues of accountability, Afghanistan may appear to be an outlier, facing such extreme challenges that it offers few useful lessons for statebuilding exercises more generally. But the severity of these challenges in fact serves to clarify matters, demonstrating the futility of solutions to the problem of accountability under the existing Double Compact. In Afghanistan, the international community has already devoted considerable resources and time to building up institutions and has already applied as much diplomatic pressure as it can to induce more accountable behavior by those in power. And yet three problems of accountability—electoral fraud, powerbroker impunity, and corruption—persist, at levels that threaten the legitimacy of the Afghan state and imperil the statebuilding exercise.

Three problems of accountability persist that imperil the statebuilding exercise.

A brief examination of each problem will suggest how the international community's efforts to address them have revealed the limits of the existing approach and how a Triple Compact would equip international statebuilders to do better.

Electoral fraud

Determined to divest itself of any domestic political role in Afghanistan at the first available opportunity, the international community transferred responsibility for administering the 2009 presidential elections to Afghan authorities. An Afghan Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was established and an ambitious program to build its capacity launched. Concerns over the huge logistical challenge and the security threat that insurgent violence posed for voters overshadowed failures to ensure that the IEC

was fully independent of the government, since commissioners were named by the president.

Despite extensive evidence of fraud, the IEC initially declared President Karzai the victor by a large enough margin to preclude a second round. The stage for confrontation was set when the Electoral Complaints Commission excluded almost one quarter of all votes cast, bringing the president's votes below the threshold of 50 percent.²² It took extraordinary diplomatic pressure to induce a second round, an effort that split the UN Mission in a bitter internal dispute. Although President Karzai was elected after the second ballot was cancelled due to the withdrawal of his challenger Abdullah Abdullah, it set the relationship between him and the international community in a downward spiral. Rather than reconcile after this dangerous dispute, however, Karzai responded by forcing through legislation to reduce the independence of the Electoral Complaints Commission. The 2010 parliamentary elections saw similar levels of fraud.²³

In keeping with the Double Compact, the international community sought to respect the sovereignty of the Afghan state by transferring responsibility for administering elections to Afghan institutions. But rushing to do so before these were fully independent of the government deprived the Afghan people of an indispensable tool to hold its government to account.

A Triple Compact approach would draw attention to the interests of the population in addition to those of the government. From the population's perspective, elections are far more important as a tool of accountability than as a symbol of the increasing capacity of the state: they are the primary means by which it can influence who exercises power over them. Accordingly, the principal concern of the international community should be the integrity of elections, regardless of who administers them. If institutions such as the IEC show sufficient independence to administer the elections, then it would make sense to pursue the secondary objective of building up the capacity of local actors as well—but not at the expense of the population's interest in free and fair elections.

Under a Triple Compact approach, the international community would pursue six objectives to reduce electoral fraud in Afghanistan:

- Signal that the principal objective in supporting elections is to ensure the integrity of the process to insure the accountability of the government to its people;
- Work with the government to ensure the full independence of electoral institutions;
- Support extensive civic education to ensure voters understand their role;
- Insist on procedural rigor in adjudicating complaints;

- Conduct extensive lessons learned exercises to establish a common narrative on any fraud that occurred and the steps taken to address it; and
- Transfer responsibility for administering elections to local institutions only when they demonstrate the ability to operate independently.

Powerbrokers

If the dispute over the 2009 elections elevated international concerns about the accountability of the Afghan government, those concerns were not new to Afghans themselves. Perhaps the most significant obstacle the Afghan people face in holding their government to account is that many of the decisions that affect their lives are not made by formal government institutions—over which they could have at least some minimal influence—but by informal powerbrokers that dominate the subnational level.

Indeed for years, accountability in Afghanistan has been hobbled by two parallel systems of subnational governance: the formal system established by the 2004 constitution, headed by a governor in each province, and an informal system that consists of a network of powerbrokers, or warlords. These are regional heavyweights who control local security forces, dominate both licit and illicit commerce, and manipulate tribal politics to control key constituencies. In return for acknowledging the nominal authority of the Karzai regime, they enjoy de facto impunity from the rule of law.

Accountability has been hobbled by two parallel systems of subnational governance.

The system has its roots in the Afghan civil war and was carried over into the post-conflict political order. In practice, the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga and the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga served as a means for powerbrokers that emerged victorious from the 2001 regime change to strike deals with one another. Even some notorious warlords sat in the assemblies and were able to influence proceedings without restraint by internationals who “felt it would compromise their agendas and interfere with their efforts to arrive at an elite compromise between existing power-holders.”²⁴ According to one international representative, the outcomes of public consultations prior to the constitution-writing process “were swept under the carpet in last-minute backroom deal-making.”²⁵

The Karzai government did make initial efforts to rein in these powerbrokers. From 2002 to 2004, the international community helped in an effort to absorb illegally-armed groups and their commanders into the Afghan National Army or

Afghan National Police. Central government control was extended over revenue flows on which powerbrokers depended for their autonomy, such as through the establishment of a customs agency to crack down on smuggling. Local barons who had operated as powers in their own right during the civil war were brought under presidential authority. The most significant example was moving powerbroker Ismail Khan from his base in Herat to a mere cabinet-minister position in Kabul in 2005.²⁶

The limited reach of the government outside Kabul, however, made it untenable for the president to take on all powerbrokers. With few international troops outside the capital, whoever had guns ruled. To shore up Kabul's authority, President Karzai made peace with local powerbrokers by indulging their excesses in exchange for loyalty. Under the guise of "traditional" governance, many powerbrokers amassed personal fortunes through the drug trade, smuggling, extortion, corruption, or other illegal activities, unfettered by government interference. This informal system of governance reminded some observers of feudalism, as powerbrokers exercised supreme authority in many parts of Afghanistan, above the rule of law as long as they did not challenge the president.²⁷

As the international military presence expanded, it unwittingly strengthened these powerbrokers as necessary means for the reconstruction effort. Considered legitimate because of their alliance with the democratically-elected president, NATO cooperated with powerbrokers and added a veneer of legitimacy to their role.²⁸ Powerbrokers made themselves indispensable to NATO by providing supplies, security, land, and intelligence, and received constant financial and political support in return.²⁹

After the controversial 2009 elections, NATO began to express greater concern about the impact that powerbrokers had on public confidence in the government. Particularly as the alliance began to increase the international presence in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, many worried that the tremendous resources being invested to expand the central government's presence would fail to generate greater public support for the government if "malign actors" were able to operate unconstrained.³⁰

NATO brought this issue to a head in a confrontation with President Karzai over the role that his half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, played in Kandahar before his assassination in July 2011. In March 2010, *The New York Times* reported that U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and General Stanley McChrystal, head of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), had pressed President Karzai to remove his brother from Kandahar.³¹ The president rebuffed this pressure and complained of international interference in the

domestic politics of Afghanistan. Determined to avoid any future pressure of this kind, President Karzai even used a press conference at the White House to assert his refusal to remove his brother from Kandahar.³²

The episode revealed the limitations the international community faces in influencing domestic politics when the government's accountability is at stake. Overt political interference such as demanding the removal of particular political figures is unacceptable. Unfortunately, a Double Compact arrangement does not provide any other options for addressing this kind of problem, because it explicitly leaves issues undermining the relationship between the government and the population to the government itself.

A Triple Compact approach would not offer a silver bullet, but would at least expand the range of options the international community could pursue to address egregious threats to accountability. By elevating the interests of the population to equal status with the interests of the government, it would recast the problem of powerbrokers away from the fruitless debates over which powerbrokers are "benign" or "malign." Rather, it would cast the problem in terms of the ability the population has to hold those in power to account.

This would suggest a strategy around which both the international community and the government could unite: a strategy not of going after particular powerbrokers, but of gradually bringing all under the authority of the government, where they could be held to account in the public interest. This would end the impunity with which powerbrokers violate the rule of law and reverse the corrosive effect that its unequal application has on public confidence in the government.

Under a Triple Compact approach, the international community would pursue four objectives to reduce the influence of powerbrokers in Afghanistan:

- Treat the issue of powerbrokers not as a legal problem but a political one, given the damaging effect they can have on the credibility of the government;
- Assert the primacy of formal government institutions and help the government to bring powerbrokers under its authority;
- Identify the most "malign" actors and press the government to confront their most egregious violations of the rule of law; and
- Use media exposure to undermine the reputation of the most malign actors, if the government fails to take appropriate action.

Corruption

Perhaps the greatest threat to accountability in Afghanistan is the endemic practice of corruption. Understood as the abuse of public power for private gain,

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corruption carries a heavy price in Afghanistan. It discourages private and foreign direct investment, degrades the quality of infrastructure and services, and exacerbates economic inequality.³³ Perhaps most seriously for a country facing insurgent violence, corruption erodes the legitimacy of political institutions as well as citizen trust in government.

Corruption is a particularly nefarious problem in statebuilding because the massive influx of outside resources can actually exacerbate matters. Although international assistance helps with capacity building, awareness campaigns, and various anti-corruption efforts and reforms, it can also create perverse incentive structures that further promote abuse. Research by the U.S. Institute of Peace's Andrew Wilder documents how hiring private security firms to protect development projects creates rich opportunities for local powerbrokers.³⁴ The institutionalization of these incentives makes combating corruption even more difficult. Certain powerful and privileged interests become quickly entrenched and donors acquiesce on corruption issues for reasons of perceived political stability and expediency.

Some Afghan commentators make a compelling case that corruption is an intrinsic part of the international statebuilding effort in Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani expounded on this view in a 2011 speech at Stanford University, where he claimed that "corruption in Afghanistan is no longer a threat to the system, it IS the system."³⁵ For Ghani, the very definition of corruption as an abuse of public office or interest presumes that the playing field is level—that there is a system to abuse. However, if the whole playing field itself is crooked, there is in fact no system from which corruption is a deviation; it is simply the norm. He believes that the international community itself has played a predominant role in creating and reinforcing this uneven playing field. In Afghanistan, the lucrative opportunities offered by contracts for goods and services to support large military bases, rebuild infrastructure, and supply agencies' operations as well as programming has generated an economic mafia that controls and manipulates procurement processes. International contractors and audit agencies are often complicit and strong disincentives exist to changing the status quo.

With the Afghan government and the international community both at fault for the continuing problem of corruption, the debate has polarized into an unhelpful stalemate with each side blaming the other. This stalemate is another

product of the Double Compact, for when the government rebuffs the international community, there are no legitimate enforcement mechanisms to compel change.

A Triple Compact approach highlights the role of the principal victim: the Afghan population whose interests are discarded by the pursuit of private gain. Reinserting the population into the equation clarifies that the principal responsibility of the government is to be accountable to its own population, not the international community. This could help to unblock the stalemate over corruption because it shifts the zero-sum game of the international community against the Afghan government to a game in which both sides are induced to improve outcomes for the Afghan population.

Under a Triple Compact approach, the international community would pursue five objectives:

- Establish the principle that the Afghan people themselves should be the ultimate arbiters of acceptable behavior when it comes to corruption;
- Help Afghans strengthen the competitiveness of their political system so the Afghan people can hold their government to account;
- Promote transparency in development assistance through social audits that allow individual communities to review how funds were spent to improve their welfare;
- Practice what it preaches by eliminating its own contributions to aggravating corruption (for example, it should allow external audits of its contracting procedures); and
- Link on-budget funding with improved transparency by channeling funds through government coffers only once the government can demonstrate how the money will be spent.

Learning Afghanistan's Lessons for Statebuilding

The experience of Afghanistan has been a trying one for the international community, to say nothing of Afghans themselves. The ongoing instability in that country has demonstrated the limits of statebuilding, leading many to question the wisdom of engaging in any future statebuilding exercises. Until more practical alternatives to address the threat of failed and fragile states exist, however, the international community is not likely to have the luxury of abandoning statebuilding. Instead, the lessons of Afghanistan must be learned to adjust statebuilding practice accordingly.

The international community is not likely to have the luxury of abandoning statebuilding.

One principal lesson of Afghanistan is that the very structure of statebuilding exercises serves to undermine accountability of the local government to its people. It creates a hybrid form of governance that splits power and authority between the government and the international community, obscuring where accountability lies and leaving the population disempowered and frustrated. In these situations, efforts to build state capacity can further undermine accountability and destabilize the

country. Ghani and Lockhart's calls to negotiate a Double Compact to incorporate accountability in the design of the statebuilding effort itself is likely to fail if the international community cannot leverage its domestic political influence in support of an otherwise powerless population.

A more viable strategy for building accountability in statebuilding exercises would be to establish a Triple Compact in which the international community could work directly with the population to hold the government to account, alongside its efforts to help the government serve its population. A Triple Compact may strike some as a violation of national sovereignty, but if the objective is to end conflict by building a state that can serve the interests of its people, then ultimately the needs that must be upheld are those of the population, not the state in and of itself. Applying the power of the international community to help the population hold its government to account would reverse the dysfunctional politics of statebuilding that insulate the government from the demands of its people.

If the international community and the government can agree that the principal beneficiaries of the statebuilding process must be the people themselves, and give them a real say over the governance of their country, the population may finally come off the fence and throw its support behind the central government. A Triple Compact could demonstrate at last to a skeptical population that change is more likely to come through the government than through its violent overthrow.

Notes

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