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Center for American Progress

Fixing Failed States: The Case of Afghanistan

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The Center for American Progress hosted **Dr. Ashraf Ghani**, Chairman of the Institute for State Effectiveness and former Minister of Finance in Afghanistan, to discuss the troubling state of nation building in Afghanistan and what can be done to improve the situation. Dr. Ghani was introduced by **Gayle Smith**, Senior Fellow and Co-Chair of the ENOUGH Project at CAP.

Dr. Ghani began by describing the current conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. **He said Afghanistan today is suffering from a loss of trust of the population in both its government and in the intentions of the international community, as well as loss of trust within its political elite.** There is also an absence of will in the government to govern; corruption is endemic and short-term gains substitute for long-term solutions. **He said the Afghan Police is dysfunctional and corrupt, and that the insurgency is expanding such that Afghans now lack the basic freedom of movement.**

Ghani noted that Afghan nation-building was on a good course from 2001-2005. The Bonn Process led to a successful benchmark approach to peacemaking, which was gradually legitimizing new national leaders and allowing the public to buy into the system incrementally. **Ghani then discussed the issue of donor aid, and described it as an asset and a curse.** He said it is essential to create a transparent system of rules for donors to facilitate both reconstruction as well as the building of economic sectors. **He noted the many failures of the international aid regime.** He said it has created a system of dual bureaucracies in which the UN and international aid organizations are not accountable to the Afghan people. Ghani noted that the government's affinity for quick-impact projects did not work, as there was no accountability to the rule of law and an absence of necessary standards.

Ghani noted a few positive trends emerging. He said there was a clear bipartisan American commitment now, as well as a recognition of the long-term time horizon of 10-20 years. He also said there has been a substantial increase in the technical capabilities of the younger generation, as well as the emergence of a significant national construction sector. **He also noted the overwhelming desire of the population for order and rule of law, and stressed that the population is not ideologically committed to the Taliban agenda; it is the weakness of the government, rather than the strength of the Taliban, that is the problem.**

He said that in the short term, the government must prioritize law and order and the creation of jobs to mitigate the 40-60% unemployment rate. He suggests focusing on 6 provinces initially, to create models that other provinces can look to. Ghani called for a commitment to free elections, rule of law, and increased regional cooperation. He stressed that only the Afghan people can defeat the insurgency, and must regain trust in their government.