

# INTERVIEW

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## REBUILDING AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH H.E. AMBASSADOR SAID TAYEB JAWAD

*In February 2006, H.E. Ambassador Said Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's top diplomatic envoy to the United States, sat down with IAR Editor-in-Chief Adele Waugaman to discuss the process of nation-building in one of the world's youngest democracies. His comments focused on the next phase of Afghanistan's reconstruction following successful implementation of the institution-building objectives outlined in the 2001 Bonn Agreement.*

**IAR:** There has been tremendous progress since the 2001 Bonn Conference drew up a roadmap for the political reconstruction of Afghanistan. A Transitional Administration, supported by an ethnically diverse and representative Loya Jirga, was created in 2002; a new Afghan Constitution was adopted in 2003; President Hamid Karzai was voted into office in 2004; and, most recently, successful parliamentary elections were held in 2005. What is the next step?

**STJ:** The Bonn process was the roadmap for rebuilding Afghanistan in many aspects. First, it started a new page of cooperation and reconciliation among the Afghan people, and enhanced the commitment and ability of the international community to help Afghanistan. The Bonn process also paved the way for the reestablishment of democratic national processes and institutions

in Afghanistan, including elections, a new constitution, the Human Rights Commission, as well as an army and police force. The implementation of these objectives, fortunately, has been a tremendous success.

But establishment of these institutions does not mean that our responsibilities or the commitment of the international community is over. The next step ahead of us is to make these newly-created national institutions truly operational, effective and efficient: to enable them to deliver services to the Afghan people. For example, we need further training for the Afghan police and national armies. A portion of each are being rebuilt and put in place, but they need more training and more resources to maintain the security of Afghanistan.

**IAR:** A major component of the Afghan nation-building and stabilization process rests on the country's economic development. This is clearly a challenging project given the damage done to the country's human and capital resources by decades of violent conflict. The United States estimates that over half of the Afghan population lives below the poverty level, and that 40 percent are unemployed. What are the major initiatives now underway to help rebuild the Afghan economy?

**STJ:** The most important development was the completion and launch of the Afghan National Development Strategy (NDS) at the London Conference. The NDS sets forth the priorities of rebuilding Afghanistan. On the one hand it sets specific benchmarks for Afghanistan; on the other hand it seeks the commitment of the international community to provide adequate resources to meet our development objectives.

The major challenge that we are facing in Afghanistan's reconstruction is the lack of qualified Afghans to do the job properly. The limited human capital that is available is, to a large extent, being consumed by NGOs and the UN. This leaves the Afghan government in a difficult position because it does not have the financial resources to compete. Unless we find a way to channel financial resources to the Afghan government, the capacity to build and deliver services will not be sustained.

Of course we appreciate the contribution of the many NGOs that have done a wonderful job in Afghanistan, and also a number of the consultants that have come to Afghanistan. But the work of consultants has certain limitations. There are certain jobs that have to be filled by Afghans. For example, you can not import a judge. He has to be Afghan, properly trained and adequately paid.

**IAR:** One of the biggest challenges to Afghanistan's economic development is the country's booming illicit drug trade. Opium is the largest cash crop in Afghanistan, and, in turn, Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium. This is particularly problematic because the drug trade is linked to warlord-ism and funding for insurgent groups. What strategies is Afghanistan implementing to combat the drug trade?

**STJ:** The second major challenge that the Afghan people face, after terrorism, is the problem of narcotics. The proceeds of this deadly trade go not only to criminal elements in Afghanistan, but also to fund terrorism globally. We consider the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan part of the fight against terrorism. We continuously have asked our partners in the international community to help us out with this fight with the same sense of mission that they bring to counterterrorism.

The detail of our strategy for how to fight narcotics effectively is set forth in the new National Drug Control Strategy, which was launched in London. The strategy has eight pillars: law enforcement, alternative livelihoods for farmers, strengthening regional and international cooperation, reform of the judicial system, building a national police force, drug eradication, and other steps that provide a more long-term, focused, coordinated and holistic approach.

We don't think a 'silver bullet' solution will work in Afghanistan. Instead, we have to provide for sustained development over the long-term. One reason that people have turned to cultivating poppy over the past 30 years has been for lack of hope for the future. So it is important for the Afghan people to gain a vested interest in peace and in the political process in Afghanistan.

**IAR:** In comparison with the United States, Afghanistan is a relatively small territory roughly the size of the state of Texas. But the country's geographical location, and particularly its shared borders with Iran and Pakistan, makes it of obvious strategic interest to the United States in its "Global War on Terrorism". Since the 2001 toppling of the Taliban by U.S. military and Afghan Northern Alliance forces, a major component of international engagement with Afghanistan has been the hunt for and suppression of suspected terrorists. Particularly in light of the recent spike in insurgent-style attacks in Afghanistan, do you believe this effort is succeeding?

**STJ:** Well, the war in Afghanistan after 9/11 started as a war against terrorists as individuals; a war where the United States Army was trying to capture some

of the criminals who caused the death and destruction in New York City, and in many other places. But now this war has evolved into a new phase, a phenomenon which includes fighting terror but also narcotics and lawlessness, as well as creating lasting regional and international partnerships.

The United States and the Afghan government have achieved a lot in this war. Afghanistan now has a democratically-elected government, and at the [January 2006] London conference, over 60 countries demonstrated their confidence in the Afghan government by pledging \$10.5 million

Although we have not yet captured Osama bin Laden and some other criminals, overall the network for terror in Afghanistan has been destroyed. And while not yet eliminated, the Taliban is defeated. Afghanistan is no longer a haven for terrorism; instead, it is a model for successful state-building.

**IAR:** The United States and, more recently, the broader “Western world” has had its image soiled by a series of devastating scandals from the first revelations of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo in 2003, to the recent cartoon controversy emanating from Europe. This has caused some throughout the Muslim world to interpret the “Global War on Terror” as tantamount to a global war on Islam. What can the “Western world” do in the context of Afghanistan, or more broadly, to counter this negative perception?

**STJ:** Let’s be clear about the fact that the war on terror in Afghanistan is certainly not a war on Islam. In Afghanistan, over sixty countries are helping Afghans, some of the most devoted Muslims in the world. There are thousands of U.S. soldiers fighting in Afghanistan in order to make Afghanistan and the world a safer place. And the Afghan people and the international community appreciate their sacrifice. The Afghan people have asked for them to come and help us out. And the act of some soldiers who are doing really stupid things should not negatively reflect on the values of a country.

For instance, the Scandinavian countries have been very helpful with humanitarian assistance for the rebuilding process of Afghanistan. Freedom of speech, democracy, respect and diversity have strong root in these countries, and these cartoons should not be upheld as a reflection of these countries as a whole. This is the act of one individual. In the future, one will need to be more careful not to offend people. But at the same time, the act of one misguided soldier or one adventurous cartoonist should not detract from the goodwill and also the good work of the international community in many countries, including Islamic countries.

**IAR:** Turning now to the justice and reconciliation component of nation-building in Afghanistan, there is widespread concern that some alleged human rights abusers have found their way into various positions in the Afghan government. How will this concern be addressed?

The 9/11 terrorist attacks came as a surprise and a quick response was needed. The United States and the international community did what they needed to bring down the Taliban, including cooperating with some who were accused of human rights violations. The immediate objective was to destroy al-Qaeda and the Taliban government, which was achieved. In a post-conflict situation, short-term goals do not automatically support long-term peace building objectives.

Some of the warlords were allowed into government as part of the temporary measures designed to fight terrorism and to stabilize the country. Their inclusion in the government and parliament does not make them immune to prosecution for war crimes. Now a soft approach is used to sideline those people responsible for the most serious crimes and to remove them from power.

**IAR:** An additional component of the Bonn process was, as you mentioned, the creation of Afghan International Human Rights Commission. Why was this Commission established?

**SJT:** The Human Rights Commission is an independent commission established under the Bonn Agreement and also further enshrined in the political process by the new Afghanistan Constitution. It is a powerful commission with the specific charge and mandate under the Constitution to preserve human rights.

There is no doubt that during the past 30 years of war and violence in Afghanistan different groups have committed human rights violations, and all Afghans have not yet benefited from a peace dividend and the full protection of our constitution. The Bonn process focused mainly on establishing a government as the first step in working toward stability. In the past four years, we have placed emphasis on stability and therefore in some areas justice was not delivered.

This was the right policy. If you emphasize justice in post-conflict countries without having a strong judicial system capable of sorting out the allegations

from the true crimes, then instead of justice you will have revenge. And this cycle of revenge is something that we have been successful in avoiding.

But once national institutions are built we must provide the Afghan people with justice, which is an important component of stability in the long run. We will work with different segments of the Afghan society to make them understand that forgiveness and reconciliation is the best way of keeping the country on the right track. But serious offenders must be held responsible to the Afghan people for their criminal acts. We hope that the transitional justice system will gradually be developed in order to bring those criminals to justice. 