

Commentary

Karzai's Toughest Job Is in Afghanistan

By P. EDWARD HALEY

The end of the war in Afghanistan is in sight, so let us look beyond: Where is history likely to position Hamid Karzai?

Will he stand with Konrad Adenauer of Germany, Syngman Rhee of South Korea and the other U.S. aid success stories?

Or will he be among U.S.-supported leaders who failed, including Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam and the shah of Iran?

As in Afghanistan today, the stakes in all those cases were the survival of governments, the welfare of people and the vital interests of the United States. The relationships between the United States and Germany, South Korea, South Vietnam and Iran offer insight into what makes for success and failure within a country as it struggles to recover from destructive war and internal disunity.

In Germany, Korea and South Vietnam, the United States went to war to achieve its ends. Successful in Germany and South Korea, American military intervention failed in Vietnam and was not attempted when the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the shah of Iran. The United States gave generous economic assistance to all four countries.

In Afghanistan, American military action has succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban and capturing or killing many members of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. Economic assistance to Afghanistan has been pledged by the United States and its wealthy allies in Europe and Asia.

A striking feature of the German and Korean experience is the ex-

History shows that the keys to his country's future aren't abroad.

periment to which their economic success came from domestic rather than external causes. The United States provided external security and large-scale economic aid, but the German and Korean "economic miracles" were largely the result of the hard work of ordinary citizens who sacrificed themselves to make a better future for their children and grandchildren.

Neither South Vietnam nor Iran was able to make its economy or political system succeed. South Vietnam's task was the more difficult. The government and people had to cope with a debilitating civil war and a decade of combat between an American expeditionary force and North Vietnamese military units as well as guerrillas. In the end, the South Vietnamese government gave the U.S. everything it wanted except an honest, effective government, which was the key to everything else.

And bent on forcing modernization on his society regardless of cost, the shah of Iran isolated himself and alienated his people.

In Afghanistan, the centralization needed for economic recovery and political effectiveness can come only at the expense of the warlords who destroyed post-Soviet Afghanistan.

Fighting has already broken out between some of them. It was Afghans, not Afghanistan, who de-

feated foreigners in the past. And it is Afghans who threaten Afghanistan today.

Here lies the first and one of the most important tests of Karzai's abilities. Can the interim prime minister discover ways of satisfying these competing warlords without surrendering all chance for unity and development?

And then there is the second major problem, religion. Some South Asians say that "the Arabs," or Islamic extremists, have hijacked Islam, and that moderates who are believers have failed to answer the radical mullahs. Inevitably, Karzai's political and economic plans for recovery will collide with Islamic law and custom. On this score, there is little that the industrialized nations can do to help.

In short, the political, economic and religious keys to Afghanistan's future are at home, not abroad. Karzai must find the means to inspire his people to reconcile their differences and postpone their present hopes for comfort and prosperity on behalf of future generations, while working harder than they ever have.

It may be easier for Karzai to deal with foreigners than with his own fractious, divided and long-suffering people. That was true of the shah and the South Vietnamese government. Karzai's challenge is to centralize authority while preserving unity and the opportunity for progress. Now that he has completed a round of travel to the U.S., Western Europe, China and Japan, Karzai should stay home and begin the hard work.

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