



“Hammering the bread and the nail”

**Lessons from counter-terror, stabilisation
and statebuilding in Afghanistan**



Hesta Groenewald

January 2016

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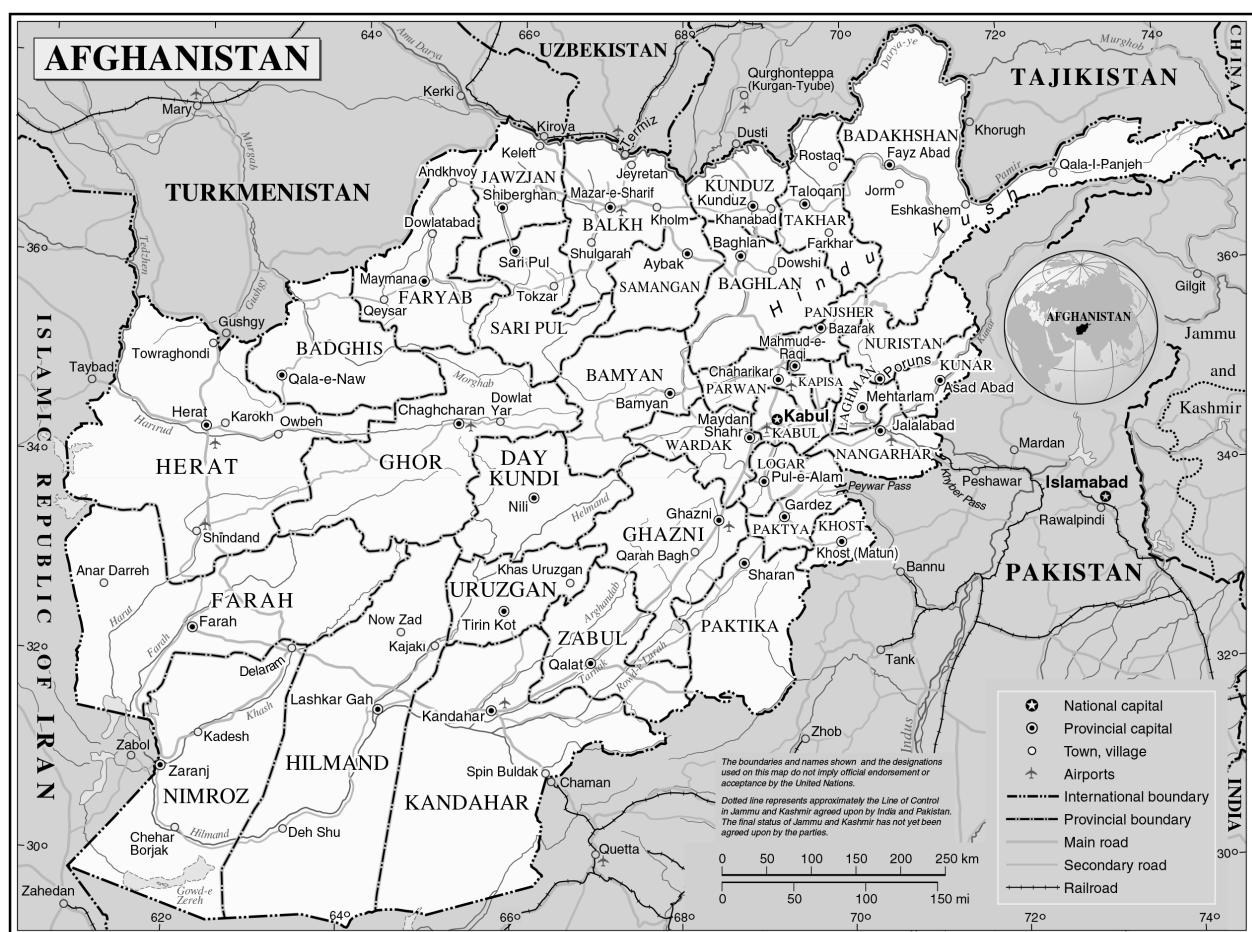
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The paper builds on the Saferworld discussion paper, by David Keen and Larry Attree, *Dilemmas of counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding* (2015) and is accompanied by two other case studies on Somalia and Yemen. It intends to stimulate debate on the lessons learnt from applying these approaches in Afghanistan, and the alternatives that could be considered in similar contexts.

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Executive summary

THIS RESEARCH REPORT reviews international engagement in Afghanistan with a view to identifying lessons and recommendations regarding statebuilding, peacebuilding and counterterrorism in the country and elsewhere. Based mostly on existing literature, the report focuses in particular on US, UK and EU involvement. While providing an overview of the key dilemmas, the analysis generates important recommendations for future support to Afghanistan, and also aims to inform ongoing policy debates about international engagement with ‘terrorism-generating’ contexts.

The context

The international intervention in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014 was in many respects a watershed for the country and for the global agenda on combating terrorism. The decision to react to the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 with a military-led response was intended to close down al-Qaeda’s operational space in Afghanistan, which the Taliban regime refused to challenge. Yet, the country was also in ongoing civil conflict and the actions of the Taliban regime were as much targeted against the Afghan population as they were causing insecurity for Western countries and Afghanistan’s neighbours. Focusing the international intervention on the narrow counterterrorism aims of defeating al-Qaeda and removing the Taliban from power meant missing early opportunities to support political transition, development progress and long-term peacebuilding.

Afghanistan has experienced many phases of violent contestation for state power, with each phase involving external support to particular factions. Afghan society is diverse and ethnic groups span the borders into neighbouring countries, notably the majority Pashtun, who also live in Pakistan. The strength of ethnic identity has long shaped Afghan politics at the local and national levels. Conservative traditional values, particularly towards women, were reinforced by religion and traditional justice mechanisms. Some civil liberties, like women’s suffrage, were removed by the Taliban regime. Multiple centres of power have always existed, encompassing tribal leaders, religious leaders and political leaders at local and national levels. Conflicts about access to resources, land and family issues were mostly adjudicated by local leaders rather than the state. The many decades of conflict also gave rise to warlords, notably within the mujahidin, who benefited from significant Western support to defeat the Soviet-backed Afghan government in the 1980s. The decades of insecurity undermined many civilian institutions and empowered armed actors, who increasingly developed economic interests around the drugs trade and other illegal economic activities. The lack of an effective government meant a near-total absence of social services, (legal) economic opportunities and access to justice for the population.

In 2001, the Afghan population therefore broadly welcomed the defeat of the brutal Taliban regime, just as they welcomed the Taliban's overthrow of their predecessors, the mujahidin warlords. Hoping that international engagement could assist the country to start addressing the many conflict and development challenges it faced, people were initially optimistic.

International interveners supported a political transition process in the form of the Bonn Agreement, but the Taliban and some of their key allies were excluded. The government was dominated by the Northern Alliance leaders, many of whom were former warlords from non-Pashtun communities. In parallel, the international emphasis remained on eliminating al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders militarily, with large numbers of international troops operating on the ground. A long-term strategy for supporting development, reconciliation and representative governance structures at all levels was not devised in these early years. The US and the UK in particular remained committed to a military-led strategy, apparently confident that the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda would be sufficient to remove the threat of international terrorism from Afghan territory. Gradually, the international approach evolved into a more ambitious agenda encompassing a range of areas, including building up the Afghan National Security Forces, promoting access to justice, development, and peacebuilding. But military objectives continued to dominate, leading to a long-running counter-insurgency (COIN) campaign that created strategic contradictions and fuelled discontent among the population against international forces.

Some important progress was made with international help, including marked improvements in health, education (particularly for girls and women) and infrastructure. Credible civil society organisations have also come into being that are engaged in a range of governance and peacebuilding work, and try to influence government policy and accountability. Some innovative mechanisms like the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF, established in 2006) promoted more coordinated and coherent donor support for the government. And an official shift in US policy in 2008 also saw more emphasis being placed on the potential for peace talks with the Taliban, even though the military offensive continued.

Despite the significant international investments, Afghanistan today still faces very serious challenges. The conflict with the Taliban has increased in intensity again, with civilian casualty figures rising in the last two years, and poverty levels remaining severe. The illegal economy is thriving with opium production at its highest level since 2002, while corruption by the state and state-associated actors has ballooned in the last 15 years.

Learning lessons

With NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) closing at the end of 2014, international actors engaged in Afghanistan have an opportunity to learn important lessons and adjust their policies in the country and in similar contexts worldwide.

The first lesson is that military intervention, if undertaken, needs to be a subordinate part of an overall political strategy in order to ensure that it contributes to long-term peacebuilding and development aims. If military objectives lead the thinking, the space for other interventions becomes more limited and the overall engagement risks becoming inherently contradictory. Grievances are certain to be created among the local population – especially due to civilian deaths and injuries and damage to civilian property, all a consequence of current dominant military doctrines – that may in turn fuel conflict dynamics and recruitment into violent groups. In Afghanistan, the international strategy became one of “hammering the bread and the nail”.¹

¹ An Afghan proverb meaning the international community tries to bring peace while they are fighting a war, said by village elders and shura council members in a focus group discussion in Qara Bagh district, 31 March 2015

Second, Afghan society has suffered from decades of war, high levels of social and political division and serious challenges to establishing governance structures that are representative and able to deliver services to the entire population. In such a context, ambitious statebuilding and peacebuilding objectives will take a long time to come to fruition and the ability of international actors to influence such change may be more limited than anticipated. Intervention strategies therefore needed to recognise earlier on that quick results were unlikely, and the focus should have been more strongly on long-term support for development, peacebuilding and governance, led by a broad and inclusive constituency of Afghan players. The high volumes of international spending were counterproductive in exceeding local absorptive capacity, fuelling corruption and creating parallel administrative structures.

Third, backing unaccountable and abusive allies fuels grievances and undermines the potential for long-term peace and stability. In Afghanistan, the international community supported a warlord-dominated government as part of a victor's peace agreement. This was a choice of necessity and an effort to tie into a political settlement the key actors who have the potential to return to war. Yet continuing to back these leaders, even when it became clear that the political process was not becoming more inclusive or accountable, ended up fuelling grievances and conflict. The result was uncontrolled government-linked corruption and the entrenchment of warlord and militia networks and criminal activities at all levels of society. This ultimately undermined everything the international intervention was trying to achieve and tarnished international actors by association.

Fourth, supporting more accountable leaders who are genuinely interested in peace is a complex task and it takes time for such actors to emerge. Complex, conflict-affected environments like Afghanistan often present a range of unpalatable options in that democratic, peaceful actors either do not exist or are difficult to identify. Although international support was eventually provided to many *Loya Jirgas* and peace conferences, these have seemingly not yet added up to a broader process of sustainable gains in peaceful politics. The current Afghan government shows potential in making progress towards a solution to the conflict with the Taliban, an improvement in the most important regional relationships (including Pakistan) and tackling the country's many governance and development challenges. Civil society is also mobilising around consultations on peace plans and remains active on anti-corruption and human/women's rights issues. It is therefore an opportune moment for the international community to learn lessons about what types of support have and have not worked and how best to help sustain promising government and civil society initiatives.

Fifth, international actors can inadvertently fuel conflict dynamics through their own behaviours and tactics. There is much evidence that civilian casualties, night raids, house searches, culturally insensitive behaviour by some foreign troops, drone strikes and the rendition of Afghans created resentment among the Afghan population and contributed to support for the Taliban. While efforts were made by NATO forces to address these challenges, notably in reducing civilian casualties, the Afghan population can be forgiven for thinking that international forces did not practice the accountability and human rights principles that they preached.

Sixth, regional allies can equally play a significant role in either fuelling conflict or blocking progress. In the case of Afghanistan, the US relationship with Pakistan in particular proved problematic. Pakistan uses Afghanistan as a pawn in its geopolitical manoeuvring against India and has an ongoing dispute with its neighbour about the Durand line dividing Afghan and Pakistan Pashtuns. Pakistan played a dual role of sharing intelligence – which some say was manipulated in any event – and otherwise seemingly collaborating with the US and its allies in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is also alleged to have supported the Taliban and allowed them and al-Qaeda to operate from its territory. Without a change in policy within the Pakistani government and ISI, this alliance remains problematic in terms of achieving stability in Afghanistan.

Learning from the past, the international community now has a new opportunity to support Afghanistan's transition to a more peaceful future. Achieving this will require prioritising locally led processes that aim to include all sections of society and forge a common agenda for the country's future. The scale-down of international investment in Afghanistan presents an opportunity for a long-term, thoughtful and coordinated engagement that is realistic about the expected pace of change, the absorptive capacity of Afghan institutions and the risks of fuelling unhelpful dynamics like corruption and militarism. In particular, the international community should:

- Provide political support to the current government in its engagement in peace talks with the Taliban and improving the relationship with important neighbouring countries like Pakistan.
- Support reconciliation initiatives among Afghans with a view to improving community-level relationships and linking up micro-level impacts to a national dialogue on a peaceful vision for the future.
- Work with the government and civil society to promote long-term development objectives, taking care not to fuel corruption, and re-directing funding if it is proven to fuel corrupt networks.
- Support the Afghanistan National Police and state justice institutions to provide civilian policing and effectively resolve grievances at the local level, within a national framework that allows for checks and balances across the system.
- Support traditional justice mechanisms and civil society to strengthen human and women's rights in their adjudication processes in locally appropriate ways.

Most importantly, the lessons from Afghanistan need to be learned. The Taliban have not been defeated militarily and other groups like the Islamic State (IS) now operate in Afghanistan. The heart of the international engagement in this context needs to be to support local actors working towards an inclusive political settlement in the country and to make progress on development aims. Any new military responses need to be subservient to the overall political strategy. Otherwise, the international community would risk contributing to further social and political fragmentation, renewed violence and weakened civilian governance. Not only would that be a disaster for Afghanistan, but it would also increase the threat of terrorism and insecurity, in Afghanistan, the region and further afield.

Introduction

AFGHANISTAN HAS A HISTORY OF CONFLICT and violent power struggles and of external interference in its conflicts that have been largely internal in nature. From the Cold War period of Soviet/United States (US) rivalry, external powers had backed rival factions and governments, supplying arms, cash and training of state and non-state fighting forces. The country experienced several phases of civil war from the Soviet withdrawal until 2001, when al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Centre. Led by the US as a ‘War on Terror’, the next 13 years evidenced large-scale intervention by Western governments, with the aim of eliminating the terrorist threat and establishing peace and stability.

As international troops leave Afghanistan, many would have hoped to celebrate a ‘job well done’. But the international intervention is leaving behind a country that remains deeply insecure and at risk from violent political groups. This paper aims to stimulate debate on the lessons learnt from applying statebuilding, stabilisation and counter-terrorism approaches in Afghanistan, and what alternatives the international community could consider for future interventions in the country and similar contexts around the globe. The report first considers the Afghan context and the key factors contributing to conflict and violence. It then provides a snapshot of the main areas of intervention by three major international actors in Afghanistan – the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) – and reviews the peace and conflict impacts of these efforts. Lastly, some reflections are presented on some of the dilemmas and lessons for similar contexts.

1

Context analysis

ON 28 DECEMBER 2014, NATO ended its combat mission in Afghanistan and transitioned to the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), a ‘train and assist’ mission for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). This brought to a close a 13-year international military intervention in the country that included a US-led combat mission [under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)] and a UN-mandated security and development mission, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), eventually led by NATO. The OEF set out to defeat the Taliban and remove the potential for terrorist networks, notably al-Qaeda, from Afghan territory. ISAF was supposed to provide security – initially only to Kabul, but eventually expanded across the country – in order to protect the new government and enable development and humanitarian activities to take place. The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), also established in 2002, was mandated to work on political, development and humanitarian issues.

Today, serious security concerns remain, and under the RSM, the US will retain 10,000 troops in the country until 2016, reducing by about half by 2017.² The withdrawal process has been slowed down in response to a renewed escalation in the conflict, and supported by a more positive relationship between the Obama administration and the Ghani government.³ The international engagement has achieved some successes: the establishment of a democratically elected central government; functioning armed forces and police service; marked improvements in aspects of the health and education sectors; and increased access of women and girls to services and public service jobs.

However, Afghanistan today still faces enormous challenges. It is regarded as the 7th most fragile country in the world out of 178 countries⁴ and ranks 169th out of 185 countries on the UN’s human development index.⁵ A third of the population lives on less than US\$1 a day, while half are vulnerable to falling below this line if they experience one negative shock.⁶ The gradual withdrawal of the international presence has exposed the weaknesses of the Afghan economy, with the annual economic growth rate falling from 9 per cent (which it had been since 2002), to 3.1 per cent in 2013.⁷ And on the security front, the UNAMA recorded in 2013 a 14 per cent increase in civilian casualties (deaths and injuries together) from the year before,⁸ with the 2014 report indicating a further 22 per cent increase – the highest number since UNAMA started

² Rosenberg, M., Shear, M. D. (2015), ‘In reversal, Obama says US soldiers will stay in Afghanistan to 2017’, (15 October), *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/asia/obama-troop-withdrawal-afghanistan.html?_r=0

³ Associated Press (21 February 2015)

⁴ Fund for Peace (2014), Fragile States Index, 2014, <http://ffp.statesindex.org/>

⁵ UNDP (2014), Human Development Report 2014, *Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience* (New York: United Nations Development Programme)

⁶ Rosenberg, M., Mangal, F. (2014)

⁷ Ruttig, T. (2013), *Some Things Got Better – How Much Got Good? A review of 12 years of international intervention in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Analysts Network

⁸ UNAMA (2014), p. 1

systematically recording civilian casualties in 2009.⁹ The 2014 rise is largely attributed to increased ground engagement across the country, with anti-government forces being responsible for 72 per cent of all civilian casualties, and the Afghan security forces and the international forces being responsible for 12 per cent and 2 per cent respectively.¹⁰ While the RSM is mandated to conduct limited counterterrorism operations, media reports indicate that US forces in Afghanistan engaged in 52 air strikes in March 2015 alone.¹¹ As part of a renewed military offensive in 2015, the Taliban successfully took over the northern city of Kunduz in September – the first major city to come under its control since 2001. The ANSF eventually managed to retake it, with NATO support, but serious concerns remain about the government forces' ability to defeat the Taliban militarily. The emergency deployment of US and UK special forces and advisers in response to Taliban successes in Helmand Province in December 2015 underscores these concerns. The US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence described the Taliban in 2013 as “diminished in some areas of Afghanistan but remain[ing] resilient and capable of challenging US and international goals”¹²

For the last 40 years, Afghanistan has experienced violent and destructive contests for control of the state (see conflict timeline summary in the table below)¹³ and foreign power meddling.

Conflict timeline summary

Time Period	Events
Phase 1 (1978–89)	Saur revolution brings to power the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA); subsequent war of the mujahidin against Soviet-backed government; withdrawal of Soviet Army (1989)
Phase 2 (1992–96)	Defeat of Communist Government (1992); ensuing civil war and chaos in many parts of the country
Phase 3 (1996–2000)	Taliban enter conflict (1994) making advances and conquest by 1995, finally seizing control of Kabul in 1996; harsh Taliban rule follows
Phase 4 (2001–2)	Post-9/11 bombing and international intervention; Northern Alliance takes Kabul
Phase 5 (2002–6)	Bonn Peace Agreement; transitional authority; new government
Phase 6 (2007–14)	Government increasingly loses legitimacy; anti-government forces resurge; violence on the rise
Phase 7 (2015)	International drawdown; National Unity Government; ongoing military conflict between the Taliban and Afghanistan's security forces; Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA); Pakistan/China-brokered peace talks; Taliban's leader Mullah Omar dies, succeeded by Mullah Mansour

This has given rise to interconnected and mutually fuelling conflicts and divisions at all levels – community, provincial, national, regional and international. The conflict that started in 2001 when the Taliban were toppled by international intervention is the latest phase in this unstable history.

⁹ UNAMA (2015), p. 1

¹⁰ UNAMA (2015), p. 2

¹¹ Ahmed A, Goldstein J (29 April 2015), ‘Taliban Gains Pull U.S. Units Back Into Fight in Afghanistan’, in *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/world/asia/more-aggressive-role-by-us-military-is-seen-in-afghanistan.html?_r=0

¹² Clapper, J. R. (2013), p. 17

¹³ Revised from Safi M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), p. 10–11. For a more detailed timeline see the BBC Website: www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253

1.1 Social and identity divisions

The ethnic and social diversity of Afghan society has often been used as a means for political manipulation, sometimes causing conflict. Decades of migration (sometimes forced) and phases of conflict- and disaster-related displacements have contributed to social fault lines by changing social and power structures and negatively impacting on people's access to resources.

Afghans belong to about 55 different¹⁴ ethnic groups, many of which span the borders into neighbouring states. The most numerous group is the Pashtun, with Tajiks being the second-largest. Other groups include Uzbeks, Hazara and Turkmen. The Pashtuns have traditionally lived in southern and eastern parts of the country, and into Pakistan, with a smaller presence in some northern states as a result of various phases of migration.¹⁵ Within the Pashtun, there are strong tribes and clans, often with different interests and agendas. Traditionally, the Pashtun has been the strongest political force in the country and most analysts would agree that an Afghan government without Pashtun support would not be viable.¹⁶ The Tajiks do not have a tribal structure similar to the Pashtuns, while of the remaining ethnic groups, some have tribal structures and others are organised more around the family and local community.

Pashtuns constitute the core of the Taliban, while the Northern Alliance was dominated by non-Pashtun groups, notably Tajiks, Hazara and Uzbeks, with a small number of Pashtuns.¹⁷ Some therefore saw ethnicity as a major driving factor for the Northern Alliance-Taliban conflict,¹⁸ reinforced by the ethnic dimensions of regional politics.¹⁹ This politicisation of ethnicity aggravated deep rifts within Afghan society and complicated reconciliation efforts.²⁰ The role of ethnicity in mobilising support for the Taliban is less clear. Pashtuns constitute the majority of Taliban leaders and fighters, and the movement has roots in the refugee camps in Pakistan, where most recruits were also Pashtun, as well as in the tribal areas on both sides of the Durand Line. Most of the Afghan students in Pakistani *madrassas* (religious schools) are equally of Pashtun origin. However, since 2006 the Taliban have systematically expanded their mobilisation efforts to non-Pashtuns as well. In northern Afghanistan, some Pashtuns appear to support the Taliban as part of localised conflicts with Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara militias.²¹

The **tribes** in Afghanistan have long played a strong governance role at the local and national levels. The existence of multiple power centres necessitates negotiation and maintenance of alliances, while preventing the emergence of competing power bases at central or community levels.²² As such, the system is vulnerable to internal fluctuations and shifting alliances, as well as to external meddling. While there have been cases of violent anti-state resistance from within tribal groups (notably from the Pashtun belt), traditionally, tribal groups have sought to co-opt and manipulate state institutions to achieve their own ends. Some rulers have used tribal networks to achieve political or economic aims, while others have sought to minimise these influences when it did not serve their interests.²³

Islam has an established history in Afghanistan, particularly among rural communities, and Islamic social values and 'traditional' Afghan values, particularly those of the Pashtun community, largely overlap. Afghan Islam historically regarded the 'nation' as the *umma* (religious community), with the expectation that the central authority needs to defend this community against infidels. Rulers have used Islam as a way to

¹⁴ Holmberg, B. et al (2012), p. 51

¹⁵ Holmberg, B. et al (2012), p. 51

¹⁶ Sedra, M. (2008), p. 7, footnote 3

¹⁷ Vigier, C. (2009), p. 28

¹⁸ Waldman, M. (2008), *Community Peacebuilding in Afghanistan* (London: Oxfam International, 2008), p. 10

¹⁹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), *Thirty years of conflict: Drivers of anti-government mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978–2011*, AREU, p. 20

²⁰ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), 'Try Again Fail Again, Fail Better? War, the State, and the Post-Conflict Challenge in Afghanistan', *Development and Change*, 33(5), pp. 885–909, pp. 901–902

²¹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 22, 58–59

²² Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 7

²³ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), pp. 901–902

obtain legitimacy and overcome the divisions caused by tribalism, ethnic rivalry and clan/family loyalties. In times of crisis, *jihad* (holy war) has been used as the ‘mobilising ideology by rulers and revolutionaries’. Religious leaders traditionally functioned somewhere between the state and the tribes, and charismatic individuals successfully mobilised tribal or ethnic communities against common enemies, whether foreign or Afghan.²⁴

Communist attempts at secularisation in the 1960s led to resistance by Islamic students, who represented a more political form of Islam. Political parties and the mujahidin connected to this political Islam attracted a lot of Western aid, but lost influence again after the mujahidin failed to establish a functioning Islamic state.²⁵ The Taliban used their brand of ‘neo-fundamentalist’ political Islam as a means to consolidate power.²⁶ In 2002–2003 almost all of the key leaders in the Taliban had a religious, neo-fundamentalist, education. However, not all religious leaders at all levels supported the Taliban. Pro-government *ulama* were assassinated by the Taliban in the early years of the conflict and ‘folk’ or more grassroots Islam declined.²⁷ Senior religious leaders in the Taliban appear to play a more political role – focusing on proselytising, recruiting and preaching – while the religious young people who joined since 2002 have mostly been students, recruited from the *madrassas* in Pakistan. Some Afghan clerics have also received funding – suspected to be from Gulf states – to teach the same fundamentalist ideology in Afghan *madrassas*.²⁸

It is difficult however, to know how many of the Taliban fighters are motivated purely by religion or ideology. Some say they are a small but influential minority.²⁹ Many young men from the villages and with a secular education have also joined the Taliban, apparently out of sympathy for the political aims of the rebellion, frustration at government inefficiencies, personal status of belonging to an armed group, and attraction to the remuneration provided by the Taliban.³⁰ The Taliban have also increasingly recruited boys and young men from outside the *madrassas*, including from high schools.³¹ Afghanistan’s youth demographics make it particularly prone to this dynamic since, in 2013–2014, 46.1 per cent of the population was younger than 15 years³² and yet economic opportunities for them are scarce. In addition, the merging of Afghan culture and Islamic values may have contributed to public resistance to the presence of international forces and the principles their interventions promote, including with regard to women’s rights.³³

Historically, Afghan society was conservative regarding women’s rights, but women obtained the vote in 1964.³⁴ When the Taliban took power in 1990, the position of women became a political and conflict issue as the Taliban brutally enforced harsh restrictions on women’s personal freedoms. The Taliban have kept the issue of women’s rights on the agenda for the current peace talks.

Post-2001, significant progress has been made for gender equality in the country, including a constitution that enshrines equality for men and women, and important increases in girls attending school, and women in parliament and other public and professional positions.³⁵ Notably, the 2009 Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women was considered a success story of Afghan and international lobbying. In reality,

²⁴ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 902

²⁵ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 902

²⁶ Roy, O. (2001), ‘The transnational dimension of radical Islamic movements’, in CPN *Talibanisation: Extremism and regional instability in South and Central Asia*, pp. 75–88. Brussels: CPN and Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

²⁷ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 51–52

²⁸ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 54

²⁹ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), *No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan*, London: Chatham House, p. 13

³⁰ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 55–56

³¹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 56

³² According to the Government of Afghanistan’s Central Statistics Office, cited in Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), pp. 19–20

³³ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 904

³⁴ Action Aid (2011), *A just peace? The legacy of war for the women of Afghanistan*, (September), London/Johannesburg: Action Aid, p. 4

³⁵ Action Aid (2011), p. 4

however, the improvements in women's lives are much more prevalent in Kabul and other big cities than in rural areas where most Afghan women live. Moreover, shifts in attitudes have been slow. A 2013 survey found that 94 per cent of men in Afghanistan still believe wives should always obey their husbands; only 30 per cent support equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and only 30 per cent believe that women should choose whether to wear a veil outside the home.³⁶ Women and girls are still being imprisoned for the 'moral crimes' of fleeing from domestic abuse or having sex outside of marriage: in 2012, 400 women and girls were in prison and juvenile detention for such crimes.³⁷

The conflict also increasingly impacts on women: deaths and injuries have reportedly increased from 123 in 2009 to 559 by mid-2015.³⁸ This is partly because more women are caught up in Taliban attacks against government offices, such as the May 2015 attack on the Ministry of Justice in Kabul that killed four women prosecutors.³⁹ Such incidents can be used to restrict women's freedoms again under the guise of protecting them.

Afghan public support for equal access to education between women and men has strengthened significantly (measuring 83.2 per cent in 2013).⁴⁰ However, it is strongest for lower levels of education and weakest for post-graduate education or if women need to leave their home area or province.⁴¹

The **urban-rural divide** in Afghanistan was already noticeable in the late 1960s, with an urban elite "dependent on an externally-funded state sector" while the majority rural population was largely illiterate and practising subsistence agriculture.⁴² As access to media in the rural areas has changed, some say the role of the elders in communities has changed in the face of broader access to information. There are also different opinions about the extent to which elders still hold authority for young people, especially those who grew up outside the country.⁴³

Aside from contests for political power, many conflicts in Afghanistan are about **access to resources and livelihoods**, aggravated by persistent insecurity, poverty and unemployment. At the local level, people may resort to theft, growing poppies or joining armed groups out of desperation.⁴⁴ Community conflicts are most frequently about land, property and water.⁴⁵ Land conflicts emerge due to a number of factors, including: "multiple systems of land ownership, incoherent attempts at land reform, the seizure of private and public land by successive power holders, the destruction of legal records, population expansion, forced migrations, and waves of displacement and returnees".⁴⁶ Illegal acquisition or sale of land is also a key area of government-associated corruption, while warlords and their militia often confiscate land unless paid off.⁴⁷ Land conflicts are further aggravated by frequent droughts and floods that have reduced the available agricultural land,⁴⁸ and heightened competition for both arable land and water. Furthermore, weaknesses in natural resource management systems and the remoteness of many communities seriously aggravate the impact of natural disasters on community livelihoods.⁴⁹ The use and ownership of land are also closely associated with the identities of many Afghan groups, meaning that conflicts over land often feed into broader ethnic or identity-based conflicts.⁵⁰

³⁶ Pew Research Centre (2013), *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, pp. 92–95

³⁷ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2013: Afghanistan Country Summary*, p. 2, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/afghanistan_5.pdf

³⁸ UNAMA (2015), p. 16

³⁹ UNAMA (2015), p. 17

⁴⁰ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 133

⁴¹ The Asia Foundation (2014), pp. 133–134

⁴² Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 901

⁴³ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 37–38

⁴⁴ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 9

⁴⁵ Waldman, M. (2008), pp. 9–10; The Asia Foundation (2014) p. 97 (previous surveys from 2006 and 2007 indicate this trend has been ongoing for some years)

⁴⁶ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 10; also Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012) pp. 376, 382–383

⁴⁷ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), pp. 377, 380–381

⁴⁸ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 10; UNEP (2013), p. 15

⁴⁹ UNEP (2013), p. 23

⁵⁰ Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), p. 23

The ability of the government and communities to cope with disasters such as droughts varies greatly across areas,⁵¹ but the difficult security conditions, repeated displacements and ongoing poverty have all put tremendous strain on people's resilience. Once community conflicts have started, they are difficult to stop, and the Afghan government has not been able to resolve such conflicts productively. Multiple local-level conflicts have provided space to local warlords, Taliban commanders or government strongmen to mobilise communities behind them in pursuing political and economic aims. This has fuelled a significant war economy, particularly in poppy-growing and resource-rich areas and gave rise to groups with an interest in maintaining instability, like drug dealers, smugglers, human traffickers, and mercenaries.⁵²

1.2 Violent contestation for the state and multiple centres of power

In 2001, the Taliban were running a repressive and abusive state and the Northern Alliance controlled a small area of the country. The Alliance was a coalition of mujahidin leaders, who defeated the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime in 1992. Shortly after coming to power, they descended into internal power struggles and drew local tribal structures and leaders into large-scale violence and destruction.⁵³ The Taliban movement therefore enjoyed initial popular support when they dislodged the warlords and took power in 1996. Within their conservative interpretation of Islam, the Taliban in government imposed a degree of security with very harsh punishments, including amputations and executions. With support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, they made territorial gains against the Northern Alliance and assassinated a key Alliance leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, on 9 September 2001.⁵⁴ Two days later, the World Trade Centre in New York was attacked, prompting an international response to the threat of more attacks from al-Qaeda and associated groups.

The US-led invasion in Afghanistan started in October 2001, after the Taliban refused to close down al-Qaeda operations in Afghanistan and hand over Osama bin Laden for prosecution in the US. The Taliban were removed from power relatively quickly and an interim government that excluded the Taliban and *Hizb-i-Islami* was established at the Bonn Conference in December 2001. With President Hamid Karzai at the helm, a political process was set in motion to build a stable and peaceful state while defeating remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.⁵⁵

But Afghanistan's history is full of examples of failed attempts to establish a centralised state with full control over the entire country and the ability to deliver core services.⁵⁶ The strength of tribe, clan and family relationships in Afghan society has traditionally afforded local leaders a large degree of legitimacy and some level of control over local political, economic and social issues. Stability has thus depended on rulers' ability to construct alliances with, and appropriately reward, strong local stakeholders.⁵⁷ This multi-level network has consisted of the local elites: mostly rural *khans* (big landowners), *maliks* (village headmen) and the so-called 'whitebeards' or elders; and central elites who are mostly urban, educated and, in more recent years, technocratic.

Local leaders have played an important role in community life, but were significantly weakened during the decades of conflict⁵⁸ due to the militarisation that the wars entailed and the ascendancy of warlords in local areas. The leaders have also tended to be traditionalist, keen to preserve traditional Afghan culture and values, which have intersected and overlapped over time with Islamic values.

⁵¹ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 10

⁵² Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 41

⁵³ Barakat, S. and Strand, A. (1995), 'Rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan: a challenge for Afghans, NGOs and the UN', *Disaster Prevention and Management*, 4:1, p. 22

⁵⁴ Sedra, M. (2008)

⁵⁵ Sedra, M. (2008)

⁵⁶ Barfield T, Nojumi N, Thier A (2006), pp. 5–6; Wimmer A. and Schetter, C. (2002), pp. 8–9

⁵⁷ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 7–8.

⁵⁸ Barakat, S. et al (2008), p. 14; Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), p. 14

The former mujahidin ‘warlords’ who formed the bulk of the Northern Alliance, gained power and influence during the anti-Soviet conflict and increasingly turned into a military class that became more removed from communities, as community structures weakened in the face of violence.⁵⁹ These warlords were mostly Sunni Muslim and made up of Tajik and other smaller groups, although they later also included some Pashtuns. They received support from the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan [through the latter’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)] to defeat the Soviet forces.⁶⁰ A smaller, less prominent group of mujahidin parties were Shia Muslims, supported by Iran.⁶¹ Most of these groups also set up political parties.⁶² While in power, the mujahidin groups competed for political power and economic resources – notably the ability to extract taxes and sustain patronage. Under Taliban rule, some of them continued their armed resistance,⁶³ and when the Karzai government came to power in 2002, it included many of these warlords.⁶⁴ They retained a significant amount of power and the ability to mobilise militias, and some of them have played a dual role of being part of the state structures while sustaining regionally based mini-fiefdoms.⁶⁵

The term ‘warlords’ is often also used to describe criminal leaders and local-level leaders that have their own militias, and individuals with a strong following within the Afghan army or police. While many of the former mujahidin warlords remained connected to the state, warlords at other levels have also been strong power holders, able to mobilise violence and extract resources illegally, and function almost independently at the sub-national levels.⁶⁶ Sometimes local warlords have sought legitimacy from communities, but often not. They have also tended to exploit tribal alliances for their own ends,⁶⁷ further contributing to dividing society at all levels. Coupled with significant proliferation of weapons and active support from regional powers to particular armed groups and warlords, violent centres of power have multiplied.

Religious leaders or *mullahs* have equally played an important governance role.⁶⁸ *Mullahs* range from highly educated *ulema* (doctors of the law) to part-time or village-level *imams* who may have little or no formal education.⁶⁹ Persecuted during the Soviet-Afghan wars in the 1980s, many *mullahs* ended up in the refugee camps in Pakistan or elsewhere in the region.⁷⁰ While religion and tradition had always been closely intertwined in Afghanistan, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the face of an abusive state initially gave the *mullahs* a more prominent community leadership role in the camps.⁷¹ Over time, education in the refugee camps in Pakistan and later in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan became dominated by *madrassas* and strengthened particular interpretations of Islam, which in turn supported recruitment for the Taliban.⁷² Under Taliban rule, the *mullahs* had an influential institutionalised political role, but this has now become more informal.⁷³ The *mullahs* retain a role in providing information and advising communities on social and political issues, although their influence seems to be stronger in areas with low literacy levels.⁷⁴ As access to media and communications has changed in the last decade, the role of the *mullahs* may also be changing.

⁵⁹ Barakat, S. and Strand, A. (1995), pp. 22–23

⁶⁰ Tchalakov, M. (2013), *The Northern Alliance prepares for Afghan elections in 2014*, Afghanistan Report 10, Institute for the Study of War (ISW), pp. 11–12

⁶¹ Ruttig (undated), p. 10

⁶² Ruttig (undated), p. 10

⁶³ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 22

⁶⁴ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), ‘Crime and war in Afghanistan, Part I: The Hobbesian solution’, in *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 53, Issue 2, p. 186

⁶⁵ Barakat, S. et al (2008), p. 23

⁶⁶ Barakat, S. and Strand, A. (1995), p. 23

⁶⁷ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 10

⁶⁸ Vigier, C. (2009), p. 77

⁶⁹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 52

⁷⁰ Kaplan, R. (1998)

⁷¹ Kaplan, R. (1998)

⁷² Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 54

⁷³ Wardak, M., Zaman, I. and Nawabi, K. (2007), p. 21

⁷⁴ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 51–54

The seeds for further state-centred conflict were inadvertently sown by the Bonn Agreement of 2001. The complex negotiations excluded the Taliban while including key strongmen so as to neutralise those who could undermine peace.⁷⁵ The resulting political settlement was not fully representative of all the conflicting parties, and ultimately weakened non-military leaders and political forces, including the 2002 Emergency *Loya Jirga*.⁷⁶ Warlords became prominent members of President Karzai's subsequent governments, thereby rewarding those who had previously perpetrated violence, while entrenching their power and ability to use the state – and the international community – to extract resources for their patronage networks.⁷⁷ It also meant supporting the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance and the Pashtun tribes associated with them, thereby feeding into ethnic dimensions of the conflict dynamics.⁷⁸ Some former mujahidin warlords who were not included in government turned their attention to other ways of ensuring revenue, for example, through the drugs trade or other illegal taxation and activities.⁷⁹ This thriving war economy (see sections 2.5, 4.2 and 4.3) weakened incentives for the strongmen inside and outside government to sue for peace. Additionally, many of the patronage networks receive support from, or are connected to, outside powers like Pakistan, Iran, Russia, China and Central Asian neighbours.⁸⁰

The post-2001 state exhibited significant shortcomings, and by 2008, the resurgence of the Taliban was supported at least in part by the emergence of the new “overly centralised, corrupt and illegitimate state”⁸¹ A governance crisis also developed at the local level, with abuse of power and ineffective institutions causing instability and reducing the scope for effective delivery of services.⁸² Corruption at all levels of government has ballooned since 2001 and has consistently been referred to as a key source of public discontent with the government and a reason for supporting the Taliban or other armed groups.⁸³ The 2014 Asia Foundation public survey records that 53.3 per cent of Afghans see corruption as a major problem in their neighbourhood and 75.7 per cent in Afghanistan as a whole, profoundly affecting people's everyday lives.⁸⁴ In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Afghanistan received the lowest ranking in the world in 2012 and 2013, and improved slightly in 2014 to third from the bottom.⁸⁵ The sheer volumes of aid and a thriving illegal economy enabled strongmen at all levels to sustain their patronage networks and militias instead of investing in state governance institutions.⁸⁶ Nepotism within state institutions has also increased to a level not seen as acceptable in Afghan society.⁸⁷

The 2014 presidential elections saw a peaceful transition from President Karzai to President Ashraf Ghani, but only after months of wrangling about election fraud allegations. A UN-led audit of the votes enabled a political agreement for Ghani to become president and his closest rival, Abdullah Abdullah, to become his Chief Executive Officer – a newly created position to be confirmed by a constitutional change within two years. Narrowly avoiding plunging the country into chaos, the post-election mood seems cautiously optimistic – the 2014 Asia Foundation Survey finds that 54.7 per cent of Afghans consider their country to be moving in the right

⁷⁵ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), “Rethinking liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and transition in Afghanistan: an introduction”, *Central Asian Survey*, 32(3), p. 240

⁷⁶ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 25

⁷⁷ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 25; Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), ‘Slip-Sliding on a Yellow Brick Road: Stabilization Efforts in Afghanistan’, in *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 1, p. 6; Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 247

⁷⁸ Edwards, L. M. (2010), “State-Building in Afghanistan: A Case of Showing the Limits?”, *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, pp. 967–991, pp. 975–976

⁷⁹ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 900

⁸⁰ Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), pp. 28–29

⁸¹ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), “Rethinking liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and transition in Afghanistan: an introduction”, *Central Asian Survey*, 32(3), p. 243

⁸² Waldman, M. (2008), p. 11

⁸³ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 5; CPAU (2005), *Conflict Analysis Afghanistan* (Kabul: Friedrich Ebert Foundation); Barakat, S. et al. (2008), p. 12

⁸⁴ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 5

⁸⁵ Transparency International UK (2015), p. 21

⁸⁶ Transparency International UK (2015), p. 16

⁸⁷ Transparency International UK (2015), p. 23

direction.⁸⁸ Key reasons cited for optimism include reconstruction (36.4 per cent) and good security (32.8 per cent), which have been the two most-cited reasons since 2006. However, key reasons for pessimism include insecurity (38.3 per cent), corruption (in general, and administrative corruption in particular) (24.2 per cent), and unemployment (22.6 per cent). There was significant geographical variance about fears for personal safety, with those in the south-east and west reporting most negatively.⁸⁹ This correlates with where clashes between the Afghan security forces and armed opposition groups have been most frequent.⁹⁰

The nature of the central state and the quality of governance have therefore continued to drive conflict and insecurity – not only by creating general dissatisfaction with the government but also by causing some groups to align themselves with the Taliban.

1.3 Poor social service delivery and access to justice

Successive Afghan governments have largely failed to provide access to justice and effectively deliver social services to its population. Frustration about an inefficient and corrupt state justice system appears to be an important underlying driver of grievance and conflict in the country and has in some circumstances increased support for the Taliban.⁹¹ Overall, most rural Afghans still prefer the local, non-state, mechanisms of *jirga/shura* to resolve community-level and social disputes.⁹² But the Taliban have had some success in areas under their control as well: despite their strict application of Sharia law, they are said to punish members who solicit bribes or otherwise abuse the population.⁹³ The sense of accountable justice delivery has been absent in most people's experience of the state justice system. However, some state institutions have been increasingly approached by Afghans. The most recent Asia Foundation Survey indicates that 28.9 per cent of respondents reported using the *Huquq* departments that are responsible for civil cases and present in all provinces and most districts; and 41.7 per cent reported using state courts. However, cases overlapped, and 42 per cent also or only used the *jirga/shura*.⁹⁴ The results varied widely across regions and between men and women, and did not include the extent to which the Taliban was approached. The state justice system therefore has some way to go in terms of addressing people's grievances.

The police are also widely mistrusted and the corruption and factionalism that had infiltrated the service have made most Afghans deeply suspicious of them, rendering the police ineffective at best and predatory at worst.⁹⁵

Broader service provision by the government remains challenging and contributes to people's grievances. In the first few years post-2001, education was rolled out quite quickly, but the standard was inconsistent. As a result, initial Afghan enthusiasm for the new education services started waning, perhaps making some more sympathetic to Taliban views on education. In southern parts of the country in particular, the Taliban launched campaigns against schools and teachers.⁹⁶ The gains made in education provision, especially to girls, therefore remain vulnerable to the prevailing insecurity and the Taliban's opposition to Western-backed secular curricula and the education of girls and women.

Health services were also expanded after 2001, most notably through the establishment of more health facilities that are closer to the population – increased from 496 in 2004

⁸⁸ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 5

⁸⁹ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 6

⁹⁰ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 32

⁹¹ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), pp. 4–5, 10

⁹² Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 187

⁹³ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 5; Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 187

⁹⁴ The Asia Foundation (2014), pp. 96–97

⁹⁵ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 187

⁹⁶ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 27

to 2,074 in 2012.⁹⁷ Where only 9 per cent of the population had a health facility within one hour's walk from their homes in 2001, by 2009 this was up to 57.4 per cent.⁹⁸ However, the quality of the health care available and the barriers for people to access it are still very challenging. A 2014 MSF report focusing on four provinces concludes that insecurity is a major obstacle to people reaching health facilities, but also that the majority did not attend their nearest (state-run) clinic as they did not have confidence in the quality or availability of care at the clinic.⁹⁹ While clearly the health system had therefore improved dramatically, at least in terms of infrastructure, issues of quality and access remain significant challenges for the population.

1.4 Insecurity and the involvement of external actors

Decades of conflict have caused an influx in arms, a serious landmines problem¹⁰⁰ and proliferation of groups willing and able to commit violence.¹⁰¹ Warlords and armed groups have been resourced through their connections to the state, a thriving war economy and external powers that have exploited and fuelled internal divisions.¹⁰²

The country has a history of armed **militias**. In the 1980s, the Afghan government used them to bolster state military capacity, and the mujahidin was comprised of multiple armed groups.¹⁰³ Typically, the militias operated more or less independently and were accountable to strong individual leaders and warlords.¹⁰⁴ Much of this militia infrastructure survived post-2001. The Karzai government, supported by the international community, tried to disarm and demobilise irregular armed groups or integrate some into the armed forces. However, these efforts were opposed by powerful vested interests in government and undermined by inconsistent government and international policies that variously supported disarmament and the establishment of militias in support of the ANSF.¹⁰⁵ This entailed collaborating with and rewarding warlords.

After 2001, militias were also created or reactivated to protect communities from the Taliban or address local insecurity and lawlessness. A relatively small proportion of these groups have formally signed up to the Taliban or other political groups, but they are easily manipulated. Many of them have engaged in predatory behaviour towards the population, or become co-opted into criminal gangs or smuggling networks.¹⁰⁶ In the face of ongoing conflict and insecurity, communities have been unwilling to disarm and have been mobilised to fight or tacitly support armed groups.¹⁰⁷ The Taliban have gained some support due to weaknesses in state structures and a narrative of mobilising people to act against the non-Muslim foreign invaders. As it became clear that the international presence would reduce, the Taliban adapted their narrative to focus on opposing the “puppets” or “ betrayers of Islam” in the government.¹⁰⁸ Local warlords and their militias sometimes do not represent communities in their support for the Taliban. Instead, they are often motivated by personal access to resources (including for instance control over smuggling routes), but also disappointment that some of the “old mujahidin” had been progressively side-lined since 2001.¹⁰⁹ The Taliban are thus much better understood as an umbrella group including strongmen or war-

⁹⁷ World Bank (2013), “Afghanistan: Better Health Outcomes for Women, Children, and the Poor: A decade of tremendous progress”, 18 April 2013, www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/04/18/afghanistan-better-health-outcomes-women-children-poor

⁹⁸ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (2014), *Between Rhetoric and Reality: The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan*, MSF, Belgium. February 2014, p. 28

⁹⁹ MSF (2014), p. 28; it also outlines other barriers including payment of irregular fees and cultural barriers.

¹⁰⁰ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), p. 381

¹⁰¹ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 10

¹⁰² Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 899

¹⁰³ Wimmer, A. and Schetter, C. (2002), p. 9

¹⁰⁴ Wimmer, A. and Schetter, C. (2002), p. 9

¹⁰⁵ HRW (September 2011), ‘Just Don't Call it a Militia’: Impunity, Militias, and the ‘Afghan Local Police’, New York: HRW, p. 8

¹⁰⁶ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 30, 57

¹⁰⁷ HRW (September 2011), p. 8

¹⁰⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG) (2014), *Afghanistan's Insurgency After the Taliban*, Brussels: ICG, pp. i–ii

¹⁰⁹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 56–57

lords who may agree in broad terms with the Taliban's ideology, but may also be more motivated by personal or local interests.

The 2001 **international intervention** was apparently welcomed to some degree as Afghans hoped the international community would enable peace in the country.¹¹⁰ While it is clear that resistance to the presence and actions of foreign forces increased over the course of the intervention, it is likely that this was only one of several factors that helped breathe life into the armed resistance. Civilian casualties caused by international private security contractors and international forces, and tactics such as house searches and arbitrary arrests and detentions, were against Afghan and Muslim traditions and probably contributed to anger and a sense of victimhood.¹¹¹ Perceptions that international intervention may tip the balance of power in favour of a rival community may also have motivated some groups to resist it – indeed there is some evidence of Afghan manipulation of international forces for settling local scores.¹¹² Sections of the population, who were unhappy with the government, resisted the international forces that supported it.¹¹³

Regionally, **Pakistan** plays a crucial role in Afghanistan in terms of its hosting of Afghan refugees, the shared Pashtun identity in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border areas, its relationship with the Taliban and its competition with India for influence.¹¹⁴ There is also a long-standing dispute between the two countries about the Durand border line. Pakistan (particularly through the ISI) is accused of actively supporting or at the very least turning a blind eye to Taliban – and particularly *Haqqani* network – activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Yet more recently it has also launched military campaigns against the *Haqqani* network's bases in Pakistan.¹¹⁵ This relates to its own domestic agenda of preventing Pashtun discontent on the Pakistan side of the border, but also sympathy within the Pakistani state and society for the Islamist cause. Pakistan is further concerned about its influence in Afghanistan vis-à-vis India and its access to oil and gas resources in the Central Asian states.¹¹⁶ Pakistan has derived considerable benefits from being the logistics hub for US supply routes into Afghanistan within a wider strategic partnership, involving significant military assistance and intelligence collaboration between the two countries.¹¹⁷ The US continued supporting the military leadership in Pakistan in order to maintain this collaboration, thereby legitimising the government and undermining efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights in the country. Some also argue that the international community's short-term focus on military defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban led Pakistan to conclude that the international presence was short-term and that they could essentially wait them out. This encouraged particularly the military leadership and the ISI to continue supporting the Taliban.

India for its part is keen to have a strong role in Afghanistan for trade and political purposes, therefore playing into the antagonistic India-Pakistan relationship.¹¹⁸ The developing Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) project indicates willingness from India and Pakistan to collaborate on a mutually beneficial natural gas pipeline, but it remains to be seen whether this will fundamentally improve the relationship.

In November 2014, President Ghani visited **Pakistan** to get its support for the peace process with the Taliban and address security issues. He made concessions leading

¹¹⁰ Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), p. 13

¹¹¹ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 6

¹¹² Investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill conducts interviews on UK involvement in Helmand in the documentary film *Dirty wars* (2013), available at: <http://dirtywars.org/>

¹¹³ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 41

¹¹⁴ Holmberg, B. et al (2012), pp. 17–18

¹¹⁵ UN Security Council (2015, 26 August), *Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2160 (2014) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan*, p. 8, www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/_2015_648.pdf

¹¹⁶ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 183

¹¹⁷ Holmberg, B. et al (2012), p. 18

¹¹⁸ Holmberg, B. et al (2012), p. 18

to increased diplomatic engagement, military and intelligence cooperation against *Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan* (TTP), dispatch of Afghan cadets for training to Pakistan, and the cancellation of a heavy weapons deal with India. Ghani has also reached out to China (his first state visit) and Saudi Arabia to support these efforts and positively influence Pakistan.¹¹⁹

Pakistan has reciprocated by stopping airstrikes into northern Afghanistan and cooperating on peace efforts.¹²⁰ But it has also put pressure on the almost one million unregistered Afghan refugees in its territory to return in response to the devastating December 2014 TTP attack on a public army school in Peshawar.¹²¹ The rapprochement with Islamabad has polarised political elites in Afghanistan. While some see cooperation with Pakistan as a precondition to a successful peace process, others, like former President Karzai, have voiced concerns about jeopardising Afghanistan's security and compromising its foreign policy.¹²² A concerted, multi-pronged approach would be needed to transform this crucial relationship effectively, and there would likely be a negative impact on other relationships, such as with India.

Iran focuses its attention in Afghanistan on preventing a Taliban return to power through supportive relations with the Afghan government. It is also keen to minimise Western influence and presence,¹²³ while stopping Sunni extremism in the region.¹²⁴ Iran has provided support to schools and mosques and has tried to maintain close ties to non-Pashtun groups while appearing willing to engage with the Taliban if the latter adopt a positive attitude towards Iran and Shia Muslims.¹²⁵ Afghanistan and Iran also compete for water resources, and there are occasional disputes over the large number of Afghan refugees in Iran – second only to the number in Pakistan.¹²⁶ **Saudi Arabia** on the other hand supports the Sunni factions and has a long history with the Taliban and other armed groups in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia was one of only three countries to formally recognise the Taliban regime pre-2001 and supported some *mujahidin* factions against the Soviets. By stating his support for the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen, President Ghani has a difficult balance to maintain between Saudi and Iranian interests and avoiding fuelling sectarian splits in his own country.¹²⁷

Russia is keen on curbing the poppy industry in Afghanistan and, together with Iran and India, opposes a Taliban return to power, viewing it as both a security threat and as Pakistan's proxy. The **northern Central Asian** neighbours are likely to follow Russia's lead in reacting to any deterioration in Afghanistan. Central Asian neighbours have specific security concerns as well, given that groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the East Turkestan Islam Movement (ETIM) have strong roots in Afghanistan and use it as a base against the Uzbekistan and Chinese governments respectively.¹²⁸ There are also increasing fears that links between the Taliban and these groups may strengthen criminal networks and ideologically violent forces in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Most of the Central Asian neighbours would benefit economically from increased trade with a stable Afghanistan, but also have interests in terms of shared ethnic groups across borders – although this does not appear to have played a major role in decision-making in the past decade.¹²⁹ Discussions have

¹¹⁹ Assey, T. (2014), 'Afghanistan's grand bargain with Pakistan: Will it pay off?', Spearhead Research, 6 March, http://spearheadresearch.org/SR_CMS/index.php/internationalaffairssecurity/afghanistans-grand-bargain-with-pakistan-will-it-pay-off-analysis

¹²⁰ Assey, T. (2014)

¹²¹ The attack killed 132 children and at least 9 adults. Roehrs, C. (2015), 'The Refugee Dilemma: Afghans in Pakistan between expulsion and failing aid schemes' (9 March), *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-refugee-dilemma-afghans-in-pakistan-between-expulsion-and-failing-aid-schemes>.

¹²² Assey, T. (2014)

¹²³ Safi, M. and Technical Liaison Office (TLO) (2015), p. 28

¹²⁴ Nader, A. et al (2014), p. vii

¹²⁵ Nader, A. et al (2014), pp. vii–viii

¹²⁶ Nader, A. et al (2014), pp. vii–viii

¹²⁷ Peikar, F. (2015), 'Afghanistan tries to strike balance in escalating Iran-Saudi rivalry', 22 April, *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/apr/21/afghanistan-iran-saudi-arabia-yemen-conflict

¹²⁸ Katzman, K. (2015), p. 18, 53.

¹²⁹ Bleuer, C. and Kazemi, S.R. (2014), 'Between cooperation and insulation: Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, p.59, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/20140608-Bleuer_Kazemi-Central_Asia.pdf

progressed on three major initiatives for cross-border electricity, railway and natural gas supply,¹³⁰ creating potential for future economic collaboration. At the moment, bilateral relationships seem to be more influential than common regional interests.¹³¹ As such, Afghanistan's future stability will likely depend on peace-promoting bilateral and regional relationships.

China is interested in investing in Afghanistan's natural resources, including oil and minerals,¹³² and has contributed significantly in aid and infrastructure development since 2001.¹³³ China is part of the Istanbul process and hosted its 2014 ministerial conference. The process aims to promote regional approaches to Afghanistan's security and prosperity.¹³⁴ Recent talks between Afghan government representatives and the Taliban have been hosted by China, in collaboration with Pakistan.¹³⁵ However, China is also a major destination for Afghan heroin and has its own security concerns: in addition to worries about ETIM, China is also keen to prevent support for the Muslim Uighur separatists from Xinjiang Province.¹³⁶

Perceptions of the role of regional powers¹³⁷

Elders and *shura* council members in the Qara Bagh district, interviewed for this study, highlighted the important negative role played by regional powers like Pakistan, India, Russia and China: "Our country is the centre of many foreign conflicts happening here, from Russia, China, US, India and Pakistan, and as long as they continue to fight their proxy wars here, we will not have peace. Only if foreign intelligences and their interferences are stopped can we put Afghanistan back together." They also felt that the UN was failing in its mandate to bring warring parties together: "The UN should have brought Iran, Pakistan, and other neighbours and asked them why they interfere in Afghanistan. The UN does not want peace in Afghanistan."

Warlords and the parties to the Afghan conflict continue to mobilise weapons, safe havens, motivation and outside support for their military campaigns. Many Afghans see the support from neighbouring countries (particularly Pakistan and Iran) as crucial to the rise of the armed resistance since 2001.¹³⁸ In 2002 the Taliban apparently received cash from *jihadist* networks in the Arab Gulf and elsewhere, in return for allowing Arab volunteers to gain fighting experience in Afghanistan.¹³⁹ Given the rise of the Islamic State (IS) and affiliated groups, the global jihad dynamic may come back to Afghanistan, fuel the conflict further, and spread across Afghanistan's neighbours.

1.5 A weak legal and strong shadow economy

Afghanistan has historically benefited from external resource transfers – from the British, Russia and the US in particular – while not raising significant internal revenue or building an accountable relationship with its citizens.¹⁴⁰ The Afghan state has retained this rentier aspect, with foreign aid and assistance from neighbouring countries still far outstripping internal revenue collection, and the illegal economy undermining the state economy as well as political and social cohesion.

Poverty and **unemployment** contribute to insecurity as desperate people may engage in criminality and armed violence. It also raises the stakes of inter-community conflicts over land and water upon which people's livelihoods depend.¹⁴¹ Afghanistan's economy

¹³⁰ Bleuer, C. and Kazemi, S.R. (2014)

¹³¹ Bleuer, C. and Kazemi, S.R. (2014)

¹³² Lamb, R. (2014), pp. 7–8

¹³³ Tiezzi, S. (2014), 'Can China Save Afghanistan?', *The Diplomat*, 31 October, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/can-china-save-afghanistan/>

¹³⁴ Tiezzi, S. (2014)

¹³⁵ Wong, E. and Mashal, M. (2015), 'Taliban and Afghan Peace Officials Have Secret Talks in China', (25 May), *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2015/05/26/world/asia/taliban-and-afghan-peace-officials-have-secret-talks-in-china.html?_r=0

¹³⁶ Katzman, K. (2015), p. 53

¹³⁷ Focus group discussion with village elders and shura council members in Qara Bagh district, 31 March 2015

¹³⁸ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 13

¹³⁹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 60–61

¹⁴⁰ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 894

¹⁴¹ Waldman, M. (2008), pp. 9–10

remains weak, with insufficient infrastructure, unemployment at 35 per cent¹⁴² and 80 per cent of people working as day labourers – many of those on short-term contracts.¹⁴³ The agricultural and service sectors have grown in the last decade, but the service sector is expected to shrink as international troops withdraw.¹⁴⁴ While the Afghan economy grew at an average of 9 per cent since 2001, the international drawdown and political uncertainty slowed down growth to 3.1 per cent in 2013 and a potential further slowing in 2014.¹⁴⁵ The Afghan government now earns about one-third of the national budget, mostly through taxation and customs duties, while international assistance accounts for the rest. The government hopes to be financially self-sufficient by 2025.¹⁴⁶

Economic reasons seem to play a strong role in motivations for joining the insurgency as well as among warlords,¹⁴⁷ and the Taliban are seen by some as having successfully gathered many strongmen under their umbrella because it could guarantee the continuation of their illegal economic activities.¹⁴⁸

The decades-old **war economy** has violently re-distributed wealth and assets, fuelled and expanded by the re-ignition of the Taliban rebellion. This redistribution aggravated poverty while strengthening strongmen, criminals (especially those involved in cross-border smuggling) and to a large degree, political leaders at different levels.¹⁴⁹ The continuation of conflict and significant aid flows provide an opportunity for formal state income as well as personal benefit for corrupt government officials. The Taliban tax all economic activities, including aid, in areas under their control,¹⁵⁰ amounting at some stage to an estimated \$70–100 million per year in revenue.¹⁵¹ Their taxation infrastructure appears to have strengthened significantly from 2006 onwards, allowing them to pay their fighters, and ban (and punish) predatory behaviour among them.¹⁵²

Despite efforts to eradicate the **opium trade**, it remains a major source of illegal income, with particular government officials, government-aligned strongmen and Taliban individuals all having been implicated in it.¹⁵³ Opium production increased by 30 per cent from 2012 to 2013 and constituted about 15 per cent of Afghanistan's GDP.¹⁵⁴ There are even suggestions that some communities are willing to support the Taliban because of fears that they will otherwise be affected by counter-narcotics operations.¹⁵⁵ Aggressive timetables to eradicate opium production and insufficient progress in providing viable alternative livelihood options can damage community cohesion, cause resentment and strengthen support for warlords.¹⁵⁶ The inherently violent nature of the competition to control the opium trade is not particular to conflict contexts, but in Afghanistan these dynamics interact with other drivers of insecurity and weak governance.¹⁵⁷

Foreign aid always runs the risk of aggravating conflict dynamics, and in Afghanistan has had positive and negative impacts. In some cases, a lack of understanding of the local contexts and power relationships has led to unfair advantage for some communities, bribes being extracted, and resources diverted for criminal purposes.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴² CIA (29 April 2015), citing a 2008 estimate

¹⁴³ Gannon, K. (2013)

¹⁴⁴ CIA (29 April 2015)

¹⁴⁵ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 55

¹⁴⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 55

¹⁴⁷ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 13

¹⁴⁸ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 25–26

¹⁴⁹ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 900

¹⁵⁰ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 39

¹⁵¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 18

¹⁵² Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), pp. 60–61

¹⁵³ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 39

¹⁵⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (SIGAR) (2014, January 15), *Future U.S. Counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan*, Testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, pp. 2, 4

¹⁵⁵ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 40

¹⁵⁶ Waldman, M. (2008), pp. 10–11

¹⁵⁷ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 13

¹⁵⁸ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 11

The Taliban have also taxed aid activities – some say by as much as 20–40 per cent.¹⁵⁹ An internal US Agency for International Development (USAID) report in 2009 confirmed that contractors were paying protection money.¹⁶⁰ By 2011, General David Petraeus's investigation put the amount of money ending up with the Taliban, criminals and powerbrokers with ties to both at up to \$360 million.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahimi, N. (2012), p. 40.

¹⁶⁰ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahimi, N. (2012), p. 40.

¹⁶¹ Riechmann and Lardner (2011)

2

Approaches of major international actors

THE US HAS PLAYED A DOMINANT ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN in terms of its bilateral engagement as well as within ISAF. The UK joined in the US's first air strikes, and then focused its contribution on the multi-lateral efforts under OEF and ISAF. Both the US and the UK sections that follow therefore refer to the NATO and ISAF interventions.

2.1 The United States

The US has been by far the most important international player in Afghanistan in the last 14 years, providing more than 40 per cent of the overall aid¹⁶² and spending an estimated \$647 billion (2002–2013).¹⁶³ Of this, about \$83 billion was non-combat assistance spending, but this included about \$51 billion to the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP).¹⁶⁴ The US strategy has been dominated by military aims around defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda and eliminating the terror threat to the West. It also evolved from the Bush administration's 'light footprint' approach in 2001 to a more comprehensive engagement encompassing military and statebuilding aims.

Initial political statements from the US in response to the 9/11 attacks were based on a twin-track narrative: that 9/11 was an attack against values of "freedom, pluralism and tolerance" and thus against all "civilizations";¹⁶⁵ and that the US and its allies will do everything in its power to "disrupt and defeat the global terror network", including through diplomatic, military, intelligence, financial and law enforcement means.¹⁶⁶

Military engagement, the Bonn Agreement and counter-insurgency

The US had engaged seriously with Afghanistan since the 1980s, beginning initially with funding to the mujahidin against the Soviet-backed government.¹⁶⁷ When the Taliban took power in 1996, and following the US Embassy attacks in East Africa in 1998, the US pressured the Taliban to stop providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. US and UN sanctions followed, and al-Qaeda training camps in eastern

¹⁶² Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), *The EU in Afghanistan: What Role After NATO's Withdrawal?*, Berlin: SWP, p. 2

¹⁶³ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 56

¹⁶⁴ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 56

¹⁶⁵ UK House of Commons Library (2001), *11 September 2001: The response*, (3 October), International Affairs and Defence Section Research Paper 01/72, p. 12, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/RP01-72#fullreport>

¹⁶⁶ UK House of Commons Library (2001), p. 11

¹⁶⁷ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 241

Afghanistan were attacked with cruise missiles in 1998, narrowly missing bin Laden himself.¹⁶⁸ However, there was limited US domestic or international appetite to oust the Taliban militarily at this time.¹⁶⁹ The first Bush administration continued economic and political pressure on the Taliban and attempted – but apparently failed – to dialogue with the Taliban, while also engaging with Pakistan about its support for the group.¹⁷⁰

In response to the 9/11 attacks, the US administration apparently debated whether to commit to an open-ended ‘global war on terror’ including militarily toppling regimes seen to harbour terrorists [favoured by the Department of Defense (DoD)]; or to adopt a more measured approach of building an international coalition and using only targeted military interventions (favoured by the State Department).¹⁷¹ The US gave the Taliban one last chance to surrender Bin Laden or face military action. When they refused, the Bush administration sought US Congress and UN approval for OEF.¹⁷²

The UN and US led the **2001 Bonn Peace Agreement** process, supported by European and other countries.¹⁷³ The agreement excluded the Taliban, but aimed to establish a transitional political settlement, with the potential to engage with the Taliban and others later on.¹⁷⁴ The Northern Alliance and individuals linked to pre-Taliban Afghan governments were included in this new government, thus creating a victor’s government in many respects. Taliban leaders were not subsequently invited to participate in the government, despite some of the leadership being willing to engage, but were instead targeted in ongoing combat operations.¹⁷⁵

The US gradually became convinced that sustaining the initial military victory over the Taliban would require strengthening a peaceful, democratic Afghan state and dismantling local security structures.¹⁷⁶ However, the military, statebuilding and peace-building objectives were difficult to reconcile and gave rise to competing priorities. From 2008 onwards, as the Taliban gained territory again, the US shifted more attention towards justice and governance – including framing military offensives as governance interventions¹⁷⁷ – and revisited the potential for building on local traditions and authorities.¹⁷⁸ The reality of the multiple challenges on the ground eventually led to a reduction in the ambition and timeline of the external reform agenda.¹⁷⁹

The **ISAF** was established in December 2001 as mandated in the Bonn Agreement and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386. The ISAF mission lead rotated among contributing members, until NATO took over the lead in 2003. The mission included contributions from all 28 NATO members, including the US and the UK, plus 22 other countries.¹⁸⁰ ISAF’s initial mandate was restricted to Kabul, and then extended by the UN Security Council to cover the whole country. It ended in 2014. The US handed over some of its areas of responsibility to ISAF in 2006 but continued to play a key role on the combat side. After the end of OEF in late 2003, US and Afghan forces continued to fight a low-level conflict in the south and east, but by 2006, major combat operations were deemed over and control was transferred to NATO/ISAF.¹⁸¹

However, a surge in violence in 2006 called into question whether the Taliban were in fact defeated. The NATO/ISAF forces intensified operations to clear key districts and prevent re-infiltration of anti-government fighters, including through “preemptive

¹⁶⁸ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 6

¹⁶⁹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 6

¹⁷⁰ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 7

¹⁷¹ UK House of Commons Library (2001), p. 89

¹⁷² Katzman, K. (2012), p. 8

¹⁷³ Notably Germany, who hosted the conference, but also Iran, Russia, Pakistan, India and other neighbouring countries

¹⁷⁴ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 25

¹⁷⁵ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 186

¹⁷⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 9; Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), pp. 239, 241

¹⁷⁷ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 26

¹⁷⁸ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 243

¹⁷⁹ Suhrke, A. (2012), p. 488

¹⁸⁰ Katzman, K. (2012), pp. 36–37

¹⁸¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 18

combat” and “increased development work” as a means to win over the population while targeting Taliban fighters.¹⁸² Yet this did not appear to halt the resurgence in violence, and troop contributions from both the US and its partners increased in response.

From 2007 onwards, there was increasing international attention on civilian casualties,¹⁸³ and the US recognised that some military tactics like night raids and clearing villages to provide ‘safe zones’ to US forward bases were causing resentment among the Afghan population.¹⁸⁴ Later use of drones incurred the same accusations.

In 2008, the first Obama administration and NATO both undertook reviews of their Afghanistan engagements. After some internal disagreements about the best way forward, President Obama announced a new **US troop surge and a comprehensive Counter-Insurgency (COIN) strategy** in December 2009. Troop numbers rose to 100,000 by mid-2011.¹⁸⁵ The surge aimed to reverse the Taliban’s gains and strengthen the capacity of the Afghan state and security forces.¹⁸⁶ The so-called ‘stabilisation operations’ were to be gradually handed over to the Afghanistan government, and US and NATO forces drawn down by 2014, with further US troop reductions and a reduced geographical remit after that. By 2017, only a few hundred US personnel would assist and advise Afghan ministries and administer arms sales.¹⁸⁷

Summarised as “clear, hold and build”, the COIN strategy focused on “protecting civilian populations, eliminating insurgent leaders and infrastructure and helping to establish a legitimate and accountable host-national government able to deliver essential human services”.¹⁸⁸ At its heart was a drive to convince the local population that they would be better off with the government than under the Taliban. In the security and governance context of Afghanistan, this goal of protecting the population was, however, very permissive and led to an overly broad range of interventions, both military and civilian. It also included ‘economic stabilisation’ projects, funded by the US Department of Defense.¹⁸⁹ During this time the US military also experimented with adding more expertise on cultural and social analysis by creating Human Terrain Teams (HTTs). These teams were controversial from the start with social scientists objecting to the morality of using social scientists to inform military strategy, while others saw the HTTs as an important tool in ensuring culturally appropriate interventions and helping to resolve conflicts. The HTTs programme also suffered from mismanagement and inefficiencies and after heavy use in Afghanistan and Iraq, the programme was closed down in 2014.¹⁹⁰

COIN could be seen as complementary to a ‘stabilisation process’¹⁹¹ – creating security in the short term and the space for long-term development and peacebuilding work. In practice, the US military had the lead on COIN strategy, and as they secured the country, civilian experts were to follow, providing analytical and development skills. Yet this ‘civilian surge’ was not implemented as envisaged, often leaving the military to undertake civilian tasks.¹⁹²

In 2015, after ISAF ended, the NATO-led non-combat **RSM** came into being, with contributions from the US, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Georgia, Australia and Romania. The RSM focuses on training, assisting and advising the Afghan government and security forces. The US contribution includes about 2,000 Special Operations Forces

¹⁸² Katzman, K. (2012), p. 18

¹⁸³ Dennys (2011), p. 8

¹⁸⁴ Suhrke, A. (2012), p. 489

¹⁸⁵ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 20

¹⁸⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 20

¹⁸⁷ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 20–21

¹⁸⁸ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013), referring to *US Field Manual 3-24* that sets out the US COIN strategy.

¹⁸⁹ This was within the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds, which built on the earlier QIPs first implemented by the PRTs from 2003 onwards. Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 11

¹⁹⁰ Kassel, W. (28 July 2015), ‘The Army Needs Anthropologists’, in *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/28/the-army-needs-anthropologists-iraq-afghanistan-human-terrain/>

¹⁹¹ UK Government Stabilisation Unit webpage on Counter-Insurgency, www.sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/thematic/counterinsurgency.html

¹⁹² Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

members, with almost half of them undertaking counterterrorism combat missions, and with a planned reduction in subsequent years.¹⁹³

Concerns remain, however, about the ability of the ANSF to retain the gains made against the Taliban and ultimately win the war. Senior US commanders are optimistic while others point to heavy ANSF losses against the Taliban in 2014 and evidence that some ANSF units have agreed local ceasefires with Taliban units in parts of the country, raising concerns about their willingness to fight.¹⁹⁴ Some also fear an Iraq-like scenario where the gains of the Islamic State (IS) can be at least partly attributed to the weaknesses of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) after international disengagement in 2011. Another fear is that warlords may mobilise on either the ANSF or Taliban side in an all-out war for power.¹⁹⁵

Despite the RSM's non-combat role, US forces post-2014 are mandated to engage in direct combat against "militants who threaten the U.S. forces or the Afghan government".¹⁹⁶ US air support (including drones) also remains active in support of Afghan forces after 2014. Media reports indicate that US forces in Afghanistan have engaged in active combat this year, including 52 air strikes in March 2015 alone.¹⁹⁷ President Obama and his administration are clearly keen for the ANSF to take full responsibility for peace and security in the country¹⁹⁸ and to reduce US troop presence to a level of normal security relations. However, amid concerns about ANSF capabilities and after an increase in Taliban successes against the ANSF, notably the takeover of Kunduz in September 2015, President Obama announced that US forces will now remain until 2017.¹⁹⁹

Security and access to justice

In 2002, there was no functioning national army in place, and the US and its partners focused on recruiting, training and equipping the **ANA**. In 2007 ISAF created a Trust Fund for the ANA, which had disbursed about \$900 million by October 2014.²⁰⁰ The US trained ANA forces, including the special commandos, supplied (primarily light) weapons, and supported indigenous weapons production capability. The Afghan Air Force also received equipment, including helicopters from Russia.²⁰¹

The US and its allies disagreed on the desired model of policing for Afghanistan, which undermined the overall coherence of the support provided.²⁰² The US favoured a more paramilitary approach, which mirrored the history of the Afghan police, while European countries argued for professional civilian policing.²⁰³ The Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) was established as a gendarmerie or more paramilitary force with a focus on counter-insurgency,²⁰⁴ but the civilian ANP force also retains a paramilitary character.

International support to the **ANP** focused on addressing systemic challenges, including high desertion rates, inadequate salaries and high illiteracy rates. Training was provided on human rights principles and democratic policing models, under a succession of programmes,²⁰⁵ overseen by the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) and the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A).²⁰⁶

¹⁹³ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 23

¹⁹⁴ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 24

¹⁹⁵ Katzman, K. (2012), pp. 24-25

¹⁹⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 25

¹⁹⁷ Ahmed, A. and Goldstein, J. (29 April 2015)

¹⁹⁸ Chambers, F. (24 March 2015)

¹⁹⁹ Rosenberg M, Shear M D (2015), 'In reversal, Obama says US soldiers will stay in Afghanistan to 2017', (15 October), *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/asia/obama-troop-withdrawal-afghanistan.html?_r=0

²⁰⁰ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 30

²⁰¹ Katzman, K. (2012), pp. 30-31

²⁰² Giustozzi, A. and Isaqzadeh, M. (2011), p. 2

²⁰³ Giustozzi, A. and Isaqzadeh, M. (2011), p. 2

²⁰⁴ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 32

²⁰⁵ These included the 2005 Auxiliary Police Program (APP) and the 2007-2011 Focused District Development Program.

²⁰⁶ Dennys (2011), p. 8

The Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) was established in 2006 under the management of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It supports salaries and operational costs of the ANP and the Ministry of Interior. Of the almost \$3 billion disbursed, the US contributed more than a third.²⁰⁷

Alongside the ANP and ANCOP, several programmes sought to develop a **locally focused** police service, eventually resulting in the creation of the Afghanistan Local Police (ALP). The ALP consisted of villagers, trained by US Special Operations Forces into armed neighbourhood watch groups.²⁰⁸ They were armed by the Afghan government, possibly using US funding.²⁰⁹ In theory the ALP units report to the district police chiefs and each recruit has to be “vetted by a local *shura* as well as Afghan intelligence”.²¹⁰ The programme grew to about 30,000 ALP members across the country.²¹¹ Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented serious human rights abuses by these units and violence committed against local communities.²¹² The US military investigated the claims and found many to be true.²¹³

Another local security option that was considered was whether to establish tribal militias, or *arbokai*, as formal security providers.²¹⁴ However, the *arbokai/arbaki* tradition is not universal across the country and some say that financially supporting it in the south-east – as the US has done – has undermined the legitimacy of such forces as voluntary forces, accountable to tribal leadership.²¹⁵

Since 2002, the international community has supported the Afghan government in two major **disarmament** programmes: the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme and the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme. The DDR programme followed the ‘traditional’ approach of collecting former combatants’ weapons and offering reintegration options, as well as targets for reducing the percentage of Tajiks in the Defence Ministry in order to make it more representative.²¹⁶ The DIAG programme was not as well-resourced, and focused on disbanding local armed groups based on persuasion, although some funding was offered by Japan to provide development projects in areas where groups agreed to disband.²¹⁷

The **justice sector** in Afghanistan is perceived to be among the most corrupt in the world: people regularly have to pay bribes for basic adjudications, while the wealthy pay judges to rule in their favour.²¹⁸ US military and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) officials supported anti-corruption efforts that had some successes in 2009–2010, but the Afghan Serious Crimes Task Force had to stop its investigations into high-level government officials after pressure from President Karzai and others.²¹⁹ ISAF officials claim that the successful prosecutions of 2009–2010 nevertheless had a positive impact on citizens’ willingness to use the formal courts instead of the Taliban. The justice system is also accused of being closely linked to the drugs trade through manipulating the deployment and activities of the ANA and ANP.²²⁰

US strategy in Afghanistan recognised the importance of the rule of law and the judicial system to effective Afghan governance.²²¹ US-supported interventions from 2010 onwards included strengthening institutions at the ministerial level through to

²⁰⁷ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 30

²⁰⁸ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 33

²⁰⁹ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 188

²¹⁰ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 33

²¹¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 33

²¹² HRW (September 2011)

²¹³ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 33

²¹⁴ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 34

²¹⁵ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 188

²¹⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 34

²¹⁷ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 34

²¹⁸ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), pp. 189–190

²¹⁹ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 190

²²⁰ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 191

²²¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 35

supporting local-level projects on access to justice and dispute resolution.²²² Several US Government departments are involved in rule of law programmes; the State Department focuses on justice sector and corrections system support; the USAID on formal and informal rule of law stabilisation; the Justice Department on providing legal mentoring and training to senior federal prosecutors, with State Department funding; and the Defense Department on providing operational support.²²³ This work has included supporting international and Afghan NGOs to strengthen local dispute resolution mechanisms, focusing on community leaders and *jirgas/shuras*. Capacity-building was undertaken for community elders on Afghan law and human rights, and alternative social practices were encouraged that have a more positive impact for women and children.²²⁴ Organisations like the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) also worked with local organisations to explore the links between the state and non-state justice systems,²²⁵ and USAID supported programmes in this area of work.²²⁶

Diplomatic responses

The US was involved, since the late 1990s, in supporting a series of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions imposing sanctions on Afghanistan. The sanctions focused on cutting off arms supplies and financial support (including the narcotics trade and criminal activities providing income), and on denying flight capacity to al-Qaeda, the Taliban and associated groups, and a designated list of key individuals associated with terrorist groups and activities.²²⁷ It also imposed travel bans on these individuals. In 2011 the sanctions regimes were split between one focusing on al-Qaeda and one focusing on Afghanistan and the Taliban, with clear conditions set out regarding how Taliban and associated individuals could be delisted. The conditions included breaking all links with these groups, renouncing violence, and declaring commitment to the Afghan constitution, including the rights of women and minorities.²²⁸

The Obama administration also investigated Taliban funding sources from 2012 onwards, and identified two informal money transfer systems in Pakistan and Afghanistan used by the Taliban to shift money generated through the narcotics trade and other sources. Shutting these down was, however, difficult as it required the cooperation of other states.²²⁹

Reconstruction and development

From the beginning of international intervention, the US and others provided **development assistance**, initially as a “force multiplier … meant to support military operations”²³⁰ As the US strategy changed from a light footprint to a heavier one, development assistance took on a second aim of supporting statebuilding, but without giving up the force multiplier dimension (as evident in the COIN approach). The US particularly supported health and education contributing to a significant increase in the number of health facilities and a reduction in infant and maternal mortality rates.²³¹ The number of children enrolled in – mostly primary – schools increased

²²² Wyler, S. L. and Katzman, K. (9 Nov 2010), *Afghanistan: US Rule of Law and Justice Sector Assistance*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) report R41484, Summary. www.scribd.com/doc/80680264/CRS-Report-R41484-US-Rule-of-Law-and-Justice-Sector-Assistance-in-Afghanistan#scribd

²²³ *Ibid*

²²⁴ Mirahmadi, M., Ziad, W. and Farooq, M. (2014), p. 31

²²⁵ Dempsey, J. and Coburn, N. (2010), *Traditional Dispute Resolution and Stability in Afghanistan*, USIP Peacebrief no. 10, Washington, D.C.: USIP, p. 4

²²⁶ Mirahmadi, M., Ziad, W. and Farooq, M. (2014), p. 31

²²⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1988 (2011), p. 5–6, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1988%20%282011%29

²²⁸ Homepage of the UN Security Council Subsidiary Organs, Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267>

²²⁹ Katzman, K. (2015), p. 22

²³⁰ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 247

²³¹ For more detailed spending figures, see Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), pp. 10–11

more than ten-fold. Some line ministries have demonstrated increased administrative capacity and in some districts, service delivery has improved.²³²

The US has also invested heavily in infrastructure programmes, particularly road building. This was intended to win over populations and contribute to resolving the conflict by stimulating longer-term economic development and trade opportunities, better access to services, improved security and connections between remote communities and the rest of the country.²³³

Part of the US – and international – stabilisation and reconstruction strategy was to encourage stronger **regional collaboration** and economic integration between Afghanistan and its northern Central Asian neighbours.²³⁴ While most of the transport needs for the international mission were fulfilled through Pakistan, these routes were vulnerable to insurgents. The US reorganised its regional departments and assistance in 2005 in order to support greater integration with northern neighbours' infrastructure and trade routes.²³⁵ It also established an 'Iran Watch' diplomatic position at its consulate in Herat to monitor Iran's activities in Afghanistan.²³⁶

Peacebuilding and conflict resolution

From 2001, peacebuilding in Afghanistan had been part of the agenda, although more strongly emphasised by the UN and international NGOs than the US. During the course of the next 14 years, the peacebuilding aims and security aims were often perceived to be, and presented as, complementary. At its most basic, this was because most actors agreed that peace and the fulfilment of rights would be impossible with the Taliban in control, and to some extent, most agreed that military action against the Taliban was a necessary part of the response.²³⁷

The US always appeared to favour military responses more than non-military ones, bolstered by the early successes of the US military in Afghanistan, and shifting between stabilisation and combat objectives. But as set out above, at various points the US recognised that more attention needed to be paid to non-military support, such as bolstering the police and justice systems, DDR and providing development assistance. The DDR process was perhaps the earliest and most consistent area where emphasis was placed on non-military and direct engagement with insurgents. In 2010, the Peace *Loya Jirga* reintegration plan set out an approach on supporting the surrender and reintegration of insurgents at the local levels.²³⁸

The course of the war influenced the US position in this regard. Particularly from 2005 onwards, the momentum of the Taliban and the inability of the US strategy of targeting individual insurgents to keep up with Taliban expansion, led to increased US willingness to engage with the Taliban as a group, but to do so while continuing combat operations. Initially, efforts to dialogue with the Taliban were Afghan government-led and US-supported, but during the course of 2011 when these initiatives seemed to stall, the US reached out to the Taliban directly.²³⁹ From then on, talks with the Taliban became increasingly prominent as part of the US strategy, with a particular emphasis on attempting to get at the "core" of the Taliban, not "dividing various insurgent groups operating under [its] umbrella".²⁴⁰ The second Bonn Conference in December 2011 appeared to set out a clear agenda by the US and its allies to "construct a peace process which the Taliban would be encouraged to join".²⁴¹

²³² Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 11

²³³ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), pp. 375–376

²³⁴ Gleason, G. and Krambs, T. A. (2012), p. 1

²³⁵ Gleason, G. and Krambs, T. A. (2012), p. 1

²³⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 46

²³⁷ Suhrke, A. (2012), pp. 478–485

²³⁸ Katzman, K. (2012), pp. 37–38

²³⁹ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 32

²⁴⁰ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 34

²⁴¹ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 34

The US, UK and EU all contributed to civil society and community-focused programmes aimed at peacebuilding, governance, human rights and development at the local level. One example is the National Solidarity Programme (NSP; 2003–2015), one of the biggest initiatives in Afghanistan. Managed by the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the NSP aimed to promote rural and local-level development and governance, by setting up democratically elected Community Development Councils (CDCs), providing block grants for community-led development and governance initiatives, and connecting CDCs with NGOs and others who could assist in providing services to the area. USAID also supported civil society strengthening programmes, including with a focus on women's participation.²⁴²

2.2 United Kingdom

The UK has a colonial history in Afghanistan and fought three wars there in the 19th and 20th centuries. The UK's post-2001 involvement in Afghanistan was, however, very much as a key ally to the US, and in many respects following the US's lead. The UK has been the second-largest contributor to the war,²⁴³ and spending on the Afghanistan operations (excluding core salaries and training of deployed troops) is estimated at around £21 billion over the period 2001–2013.²⁴⁴ The UK contributed troops and combat functions to OEF in 2001. The Blair government lobbied for multi-lateral action in the shape of ISAF, backed by UN Security Council resolutions. Britain led the first ISAF contingent in Kabul – although reportedly the UK military were reluctant and only agreed when assured of close US operational support and that the mission would be only three months.²⁴⁵ The UK also had the lead on counter-narcotics in the 2002 international division of labour strategy. The UK took responsibility for some of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs; see p. 26), designed as a mechanism to "manage the transition from combat to stabilization" and from 2006 onwards took the lead in Helmand Province as part of the response to the increasing conflict in the south.²⁴⁶

In policy terms, the Blair government positioned itself as an ally to the US from the start and echoed the narrative of defending liberal democracy, including through military means. Setting out the UK's response to the 9/11 attacks, the prime minister outlined priorities relating to: bringing to justice those responsible for the attacks; forming an anti-terrorism alliance and acting in solidarity; and thinking more strategically about the scale and nature of global action needed to combat global terrorism effectively.²⁴⁷ He also mentioned the role of the EU, the G8 and other international bodies in this respect and immediately engaged in EU diplomacy on the matter.²⁴⁸ The UK policy approach could therefore be argued to have been more multi-lateral from the start than that of the US.

In the early years of the UK's intervention in Afghanistan, Blair set out British objectives as defeating international terrorism, providing humanitarian assistance and supporting the Afghan people to establish a safer, more prosperous society.²⁴⁹ Over the course of the intervention, the UK mission's aims expanded, and by 2007 the objectives included: "(i) reduce the insurgency on both sides of the Durand line, (ii) ensure that core al-Qaeda does not return to Afghanistan, (iii) ensure that Afghanistan remains a legitimate state, becomes more effective and able to handle its own security, and increase the pace of economic development, (iv) contain and reduce the drug trade,

²⁴² Initiative to Promote Afghanistan Civil Society (I-PACS) programme; Mirahmadi, M., Ziad, W. and Faroog, M. (2014), pp. 26–27

²⁴³ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 28

²⁴⁴ ICAI (2014), p. 5

²⁴⁵ Suhrke, A. (2012), p. 484

²⁴⁶ Suhrke (2011), p. 6, 8

²⁴⁷ UK House of Commons Library (2001), p. 19

²⁴⁸ UK House of Commons Library (2001), pp. 19–20

²⁴⁹ Suhrke (2011), p. 15

(v) provide long-term sustainable support for the Afghan Compact goals [adopted at the London conference in 2006] on governance, rule of law, human rights and social/economic development, and (vi) keep allies engaged.”²⁵⁰

The aims around combating terrorism therefore remained at the heart of British strategy, even though the agenda had – in broad keeping with the ambitions of the overall international intervention – become much more ambitious. This was evidenced by the adoption by NATO/ISAF, and by the UK inter-departmentally, of a ‘Comprehensive Approach’ that aimed to achieve progress in the security, governance and development spheres, and across international and local actors.²⁵¹ However, concerns about overall security and stability arguably continued to weigh more heavily politically than the well-being of the Afghan people.

Military engagement

Britain played a key role in ISAF, despite serious reservations from both British and US militaries about the establishment of a multinational force.²⁵² The UK initially took on the PRTs in the north of the country. Consistent with British comprehensive or all-of-government approaches, and the establishment of what was to become the Stabilisation Unit, the PRTs fitted well into British policy thinking of making gains in the development-security nexus in the immediate post-conflict environment. The ‘British model’ involved the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on the political side, the Department for International Development (DFID) on the development side, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on the military side. These early PRTs aimed to “establish trust, extend the authority of the central government, monitor events, create some quick impact projects and, in some cases, help to demobilize the Afghan militias.”²⁵³

In 2006 the US appealed to its allies to take over PRTs in the south of Afghanistan and eventually to play more active combat roles as the Taliban returned and successfully mobilised communities to take up arms again. No other NATO ally was willing to step in, and the UK took on Helmand Province. Some saw this decision as controversial given that the British suffered major defeats there in the second Anglo-Afghan war in 1880 and their engagement could thus be seen by local people as revenge for old defeats.²⁵⁴

The context in Helmand was far more complex and unstable than in the north, and fighting escalated dramatically when the British contingent deployed amidst a large US military operation against the Taliban. The province had a fractious local political context, a resurgent Taliban, the opium trade and a number of local-level conflicts over other resources, including land. The ISAF mandate of extending state authority also forced the British to respond to requests from the Governor of Helmand to regain control of strategic facilities and areas from the Taliban, causing more direct military confrontations with the Taliban.²⁵⁵ The British did not anticipate this level of insecurity and initially deployed with only a small number of troops, divided across several key areas that were to serve as ‘ink-bLOTS’,²⁵⁶ or stable areas in which development can be undertaken and progress made into more unstable areas. The increase in fighting meant, however, that conditions were not right for this approach and the British suffered heavy casualties.²⁵⁷

As security deteriorated in Helmand and across the south, the US announced its troop surge in 2009, and NATO allies, including the UK, also adopted the US COIN strategy.

²⁵⁰ Suhrke (2011), p. 15

²⁵¹ Barakat et al (2008), p. 51

²⁵² Suhrke (2011), p. 6

²⁵³ Suhrke (2011), p. 7

²⁵⁴ Suhrke (2011), p. 9

²⁵⁵ Farrell, T. and Gordon, S. (2009), ‘COIN MACHINE: The British military in Afghanistan’, *The RUSI Journal*, 154:3, p. 20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071840903097597>

²⁵⁶ Barakat et al (2008), p. 52

²⁵⁷ Suhrke (2011), pp. 10–11

From a policy perspective, the main tenets of the counter-insurgency strategy (outlined in the US section above) were broadly in line with the aims of the UK's policy on stabilisation.²⁵⁸ UK troops also increased during this period, expanding the Helmand Task Force from 3,100 troops in 2006, to almost 10,000 by 2010.²⁵⁹ The insecure situation in Helmand made the work of the PRTs practically impossible and even the less ambitious quick impact projects (QIPs) were barely implementable. During the course of the fighting, British forces also called in significant air support, leading to serious destruction of civilian infrastructure and increasing civilian casualties.²⁶⁰

Between 2012 and 2014, the UK withdrew its troops in accordance with the NATO drawdown plan. The UK has committed to continue supporting the RSM with almost 500 British personnel,²⁶¹ mainly focused on supporting training of the ANA.²⁶²

Security and access to justice

The initial mandate for both ISAF and UNAMA on security sector reform (SSR) was to support reform of the ANP, the establishment of the ANA, the implementation of DDR, controlling opium production and reforming the justice sector.²⁶³ As noted, the UK led on counter-narcotics, although the US continued to play an important role. The UK has been supporting the Afghanistan government – through the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics – to implement its national counter-narcotics strategy. This is a multi-faceted strategy including elements of building government and law enforcement capacity, targeted eradication programmes, and support to developing alternative livelihoods.²⁶⁴ The UK has also contributed to counter-narcotics programmes run by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to governor-led poppy eradication campaigns, parliamentary monitoring of the implementation of the national counter-narcotics strategy, and public information campaigns against planting of poppies.²⁶⁵

Reconstruction, development and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

The international intervention in Afghanistan occurred in a context of increased recognition that development cannot take place without security, and security cannot be sustained without development. Alongside this, recognition of the dangers of 'ungoverned spaces' like Afghanistan and Somalia to international security came to the fore.²⁶⁶ The thinking was that while military intervention was important to establishing a certain level of security, this would not be sustainable in the medium to long term unless parallel progress was also made on good governance, justice and the rule of law, development and reconstruction. The Afghanistan Compact of 2006 reflected this commitment²⁶⁷ and in practice, the PRTs were the joint civil-military units assigned the task of implementing the 'comprehensive approach'.²⁶⁸

The first PRTs were created by the US in 2002–2003, with the goals of improving security by supporting reconstruction and development, and increasing the reach of the central government.²⁶⁹ By 2004 there were 19 PRTs, and over the next six years, three dominant models of PRTs emerged. The US PRTs were under military leadership

²⁵⁸ UK Government, www.sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/thematic/counterinsurgency.html

²⁵⁹ Farrell and Gordon (2009), p. 21; Suhre (2011), p. 13

²⁶⁰ Suhre (2011), p. 10

²⁶¹ NATO website, *Resolute Support Mission: Key facts and figures*, www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_05/20150508_1505-RSM-Placemat.pdf

²⁶² www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22800.aspx

²⁶³ Dennys (2011), p. 7

²⁶⁴ UK Government (FCO) (2012), *Policy Paper on Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter-Narcotics' National Drug Control Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-ministry-of-counter-narcotics-national-drug-control-strategy>

²⁶⁵ EU (2009), *Second Implementation Report to the Council on the Plan for Strengthening EU Action in Afghanistan*, Brussels: EU, p. 12

²⁶⁶ Williams (2011), p. 64

²⁶⁷ Williams (2011), p. 64

²⁶⁸ Williams (2011), p. 65

²⁶⁹ Williams (2011), p. 68; www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22802.aspx

and were deployed in more hostile areas. They consisted of about 80 members, which included about three to five civilians and an infantry force providing security and medical care. US PRTs were charged with delivering QIPs. British PRTs had about 100 personnel with a civilian component of about 30, and led by a civilian. While they also operated in hostile areas, they were more inclined to capacity building rather than implementing projects themselves. German PRTs were bigger (up to about 400 people of which about 20 would be civilians) and deployed under a joint civilian and military command to mostly permissive areas. Their focus was on longer-term development.²⁷⁰ Norway also had a PRT in Faryab Province, which maintained a strict distinction between civilian and military objectives and supported the Afghan government instead of implementing anything itself.²⁷¹

One analyst describes the UK PRT model as follows: “The civilian side of a PRT generally includes political advisers and development specialists. The PRT will usually have a headquarters, a civil-military relations team, as well as engineers, security personnel, a medical team, linguists, military observer teams and interpreters.”²⁷² PRTs with civilian leads, such as the British ones, reported to their capitals and not to the ISAF command structure.

Development assistance to Afghanistan increased over the last decade, from about £100 million in 2006 to about £180 million in 2013,²⁷³ and finally a commitment under the Tokyo Framework to sustain an annual contribution of £178 million until 2017.²⁷⁴ While a significant spending commitment, aid allocations were consistently lower than military spend.

The key objectives for DFID in Afghanistan are to increase stability and reduce poverty through: improving security and political stability; stimulating the economy; and helping the Afghan government deliver basic services.²⁷⁵ Within these objectives, the majority of DFID spending in Afghanistan has focused on growth and livelihoods, with almost half of overall assistance between 2006 and 2014 going to the World Bank-led Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), supporting the Government of Afghanistan’s budget as well as priority national projects.²⁷⁶

Peacebuilding and conflict resolution

The UK and the US both invested heavily in military responses in Afghanistan. But as pointed out above, the willingness to defend democracy and freedom militarily against the terrorist threat went hand in hand with a commitment to improve security and development simultaneously in Afghanistan through the comprehensive approach. As such, the UK sought to develop models for achieving security and development goals through both PRTs and bilateral development assistance.

At various points, British and American intelligence agencies reached out to the Taliban to explore options for direct political dialogue, though initially without any success.²⁷⁷ From 2009 onwards, discussions increased about where the political strategy for Afghanistan was going and the potential need to engage with the Taliban. The UK started strongly advocating for direct talks, referencing the experiences with the Northern Ireland peace process,²⁷⁸ but did not take a lead role in making this happen.

²⁷⁰ Williams (2011), p. 68

²⁷¹ For more detail on this, see Gompelman, G. (2011), *Winning hearts and minds? Examining the relationship between aid and security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province*, Feinstein International Center.

²⁷² Williams (2011), p. 68

²⁷³ ICAI (2014), p. 5

²⁷⁴ UK Government (2015). The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) provides the current framework for international transition commitments for Afghanistan.

²⁷⁵ UK Government (2015)

²⁷⁶ ICAI (2014), p. 6

²⁷⁷ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 24

²⁷⁸ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 28

The UK also lobbied hard for the Taliban to be removed from the UN sanctions regime in order to facilitate peace talks.²⁷⁹

The UK has undertaken some interesting innovations at the local level, for instance when it negotiated a local-level ceasefire and mutual withdrawal of British and Taliban forces from Musa Qala in Helmand Province, leaving security in the hands of the local elders.²⁸⁰ This appears to have resulted in stability in the town for a number of months, but was criticised by the US as surrender and ultimately the temporary peace was shattered by US pursuance of Taliban fighters into the town.²⁸¹ The potential for this type of local-level initiative was therefore never fully explored.

In addition, the UK has supported international and local NGOs in a range of work on peacebuilding, development, governance and human rights initiatives, including the NSP (see section on the US). The UK also supported a multi-donor initiative called *Tawanmandi* (with Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland) that focused on institutional capacity-building and funding support for Afghan civil society.²⁸²

2.3 The EU and Member States

All of the EU's assistance is non-military since it is the Member States who participated in the ISAF mission. Counter-terror and statebuilding are high on the EU external action agenda. Member States have the primary responsibility for combating terrorism, but EU institutions also undertake various initiatives through the instruments, mechanisms and processes at their disposal. These include political and rule of law engagements, statebuilding, support to governance and democracy, and broader development and humanitarian aid.

EU Member States have been active in Afghanistan in the military, development and humanitarian spheres. Member States have at times contributed more than half of the troops to the NATO-led ISAF mission²⁸³ and the EU and Member States (including the UK) combined have contributed up to 15 per cent of total assistance to the country.²⁸⁴

Having been present in the country since the 1980s,²⁸⁵ the EU has a comparative advantage in terms of long-term presence. It has been a relatively small player in comparison to the US and the UK, but still significant in size and ambition. Following the 9/11 attacks and the international intervention in Afghanistan, the EU and Member States' focus shifted to statebuilding, counterterrorism and long-term development. The EU and Member States supported the transition process set out in the Bonn Agreement, notably in developing effective parliamentary institutions, designing and implementing justice sector reform, building up the national police and border police force and driving forward counter-narcotics efforts.

In December 2001, the EU appointed an EU Special Representative for Afghanistan to promote EU policies and interests and play an active role in political processes. In the early years, the EU was seen as the international actor with the best political analysis and country expertise.²⁸⁶

In 2005, in recognition of the completion of the political transition, the EU and Afghanistan committed to a new partnership to support the establishment of democratic and accountable government institutions, the reform of the security and justice sectors, counter-narcotics efforts, and development and reconstruction. As part of

²⁷⁹ Oxfam (2014), *Behind closed doors: The risk of denying women a voice in determining Afghanistan's future*, Briefing Paper, p. 18, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp200-behind-doors-afghan-women-rights-241114-en.pdf

²⁸⁰ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 24

²⁸¹ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 24

²⁸² Mirahmadi, M., Ziad, W. and Farooq, M. (2014), p. 27; website: www.tawanmandi.org.af/

²⁸³ Burke, E. (2014), *Game Over? The EU's legacy in Afghanistan*, Madrid: FRIDE, p. 4

²⁸⁴ Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), p. 2

²⁸⁵ European Union Council Secretariat (January 2010), *Factsheet: EU Engagement in Afghanistan*, Brussels: EU, p. 1

²⁸⁶ Burke, E. (2014), p. 4

this commitment, the EU launched the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) in 2007 to “contribute to the establishment of sustainable and effective policing arrangements that will ensure appropriate interaction with the wider criminal justice system under Afghan ownership.”²⁸⁷ The EU’s engagement in Afghanistan has also progressed in the last decade from “efforts to generate internal stability towards a greater focus on sustainable development”.²⁸⁸ In particular, EUPOL has been a significant engagement.

The EU strategy for Afghanistan for 2014–2016 reiterates its commitment to support the development of a state that can better control its territory, reduce the threat posed by terrorism, and address the needs and fulfil the rights of its people. It also sets out the following priority areas of engagement:

- Promoting peace, security and regional stability;
- Reinforcing democracy;
- Encouraging economic and human development;
- Fostering the rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women.²⁸⁹

In July 2015 the EU and Afghanistan launched a contractual framework governing their bilateral cooperation in these areas.²⁹⁰

The relationship between the US, the EU and Member States also fluctuated. As the US became focused on Iraq in 2003, it put pressure on the EU and Member States to do more and to spend more in Afghanistan – particularly on civilian stabilisation efforts. But this never quite happened, and the US continued to spend more funding on areas that other countries led on, than the lead countries themselves, including the UK on counter-narcotics and Germany (later EUPOL) on policing.²⁹¹ This gave rise to an unhealthy tendency to base policy and strategy towards Afghanistan on spending increases, leading the EU to assume that this would also lead to greater political clout.²⁹² The tendency of the UK to follow US policy rather than the EU also contributed to frustrations in Brussels and made it harder to influence the US on policy issues of importance to the EU, such as the vetting of those responsible for human rights abuses.²⁹³ Cooperation on counterterrorism efforts between Europeans and North Americans remained modest and mostly occurred within the NATO framework.²⁹⁴

Security and access to justice

In 2002, Germany led a police reform programme for the ANP, drawing on its experience of supporting the Afghan police in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹⁵ The German programme focused on restructuring and training the ANP, and set up a police training academy in Kabul that others have since also supported.²⁹⁶ Germany had a long-term approach to police training and reform, as well as an emphasis on civilian policing. This meant, however, that progress was slow in getting big numbers of recruits trained and deployed. The US added more short-term training programmes, delivered by contractors, to fulfil its vision for the ANP as active in counter-insurgency combat.²⁹⁷

²⁸⁷ Council of the European Union (16 November 2005), ‘EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration – Committing to a new Strategic Partnership’, Strasbourg, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?i=EN&f=ST%2014519%202005%20INIT>

²⁸⁸ Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), p. 1

²⁸⁹ ‘EU relations with Afghanistan’, http://eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/index_en.htm

²⁹⁰ European External Action Service (2 July 2015), ‘The EU and Afghanistan initial Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development’, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150702_04_en.htm

²⁹¹ Burke, E. (2014), pp. 4–5

²⁹² Burke, E. (2014), p. 5

²⁹³ Burke, E. (2014), pp. 5–6

²⁹⁴ Renard, T. (January 2014), *Confidential partnerships? The EU, its strategic partners and international terrorism*, Working Paper 4, European Strategic Partnerships Observatory (ESPO) / FRIDE / Egmont Institute, www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/WP4_Confidential_partnerships.pdf, p. 17

²⁹⁵ Larivé, Maxime H. A. (2012), ‘From speeches to actions: EU involvement in the war in Afghanistan through the EUPOL Afghanistan Mission’, *European Security*, 21(2), pp. 185–201, p. 189

²⁹⁶ Larivé, Maxime H. A. (2012), pp. 189–190

²⁹⁷ Larivé, Maxime H. A. (2012), p. 190

In 2007 the EUPOL Afghanistan mission was established, with the purpose of providing training, advice and mentoring to detectives, prosecutors, anti-corruption units, senior leaders of the ANP and the Ministry of Interior (MoI).²⁹⁸ The overall goal was to establish “sustainable and effective policing arrangements” that interact effectively with the broader criminal justice system, all under Afghan ownership.²⁹⁹ The mission focused on three pillars: institutional reform of the MoI; professionalisation of the ANP; and connecting the police to justice reform. EUPOL Afghanistan has included 350 international police and 200 local officials, with a budget of €108 million for the period 2011–2013, and has trained about 5,000 police officers.³⁰⁰ A 2015 evaluation of the mission found that it was mostly successful in its training role, but less so on advising and mentoring. It also found that EUPOL’s focus on a strategic engagement and linking policing to the broader justice sector was appropriate for the context, and that its presence improved coordination on the ground with EU Member States, even though it did not formally establish a common European framework on police support.³⁰¹ EUPOL should come to an end in 2016.

The establishment of EUPOL within the overall SSR response to Afghanistan was intended to bring a greater emphasis on rights, governance and justice issues alongside the overall NATO Training Mission. However, some analysts see EUPOL’s impact as dwarfed by the sheer size of the NATO mission.³⁰² The EUPOL mission was also supposed to work on anti-corruption as a key objective, but lacked political information on the MoI and therefore did not understand who was involved in corruption.³⁰³

For a long time, the EU was the largest funder of the LOTFA.³⁰⁴ In 2007, the EU also took over the lead in justice reform from Italy, recognising that this was an under-performing area and that there were contradictions in the types of legal reforms introduced and its connection to the broader criminal justice system.³⁰⁵

The EU Delegation and some EU Member States (including the UK, Finland, Germany and Denmark) have also provided support to counter-narcotics programmes implemented by UNODC, such as the TARCET II programme, and have supported the sharing of intelligence on drug trafficking flows between Afghanistan and its neighbours.³⁰⁶

Reconstruction and development

Immediately after the fall of the Taliban, the EU provided humanitarian and development assistance to the country, a commitment that continued to the tune of €2.5 billion between 2002 and 2011.³⁰⁷ From 2002 to 2009, the Commission provided funding for reconstruction of \$1.8 billion and it contributed €35 million to the UN fund that supported preparation for the 2009 elections while also supporting the 2005 elections.³⁰⁸

The European Commission Country Strategy 2007–2013³⁰⁹ committed assistance to a number of focal and non-focal areas where the Commission has expertise or where there are gaps. The ‘focal areas’ specified in the strategy are rural development, governance and health. ‘Non-focal areas’ are social protection, landmine clearance and regional cooperation, while ‘cross-cutting’ issues are human rights and civil society (including gender and media issues), and environmental concerns.

²⁹⁸ Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), p. 1

²⁹⁹ European Union Council Secretariat (January 2010), pp. 2–3

³⁰⁰ Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), p. 1

³⁰¹ European Court of Auditors (ECA) (2015), *The EU police mission in Afghanistan: mixed results*, Special Report, www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_07/SR_EUPOL_AFGHANISTAN_EN.pdf, pp. 7–8

³⁰² Sedra, M. (2013), “The hollowing-out of the liberal peace project in Afghanistan: the case of security sector reform”, *Central Asian Survey*, 32(3), pp. 371–387, p. 378

³⁰³ Burke, E. (2014), p. 14

³⁰⁴ European Union Council Secretariat (January 2010), pp. 2–3

³⁰⁵ Burke, E. (2014), p. 11

³⁰⁶ EU (2009), p. 12

³⁰⁷ Holtje, M. and Kempin, R. (2013), p. 1

³⁰⁸ Burke, E. (2014), p. 7

³⁰⁹ European Commission, *Country Strategy Paper Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2007–2013*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/csp-afghanistan-2007-2013_en.pdf

On the health front, some notable successes were achieved in the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) programme, which rolled out basic health care provision in ten provinces.³¹⁰ The EU also supported sub-national governance through a UNDP-led programme and support to the capacity of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) and contributed, through the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), to rural agricultural programmes.³¹¹

In its 2014–2020 strategy,³¹² the European Commission committed €1.4 billion to agriculture and rural development; health; policing and the rule of law; democratisation; and an ‘incentive component’, to be paid depending on achievement of progress under the Tokyo Framework. This makes Afghanistan the EU’s biggest country programme.

Under its work on human rights, the EU supports NGOs to work on women’s political participation in particular, and aims to build an active civil society in Afghanistan more generally. There is also assistance to the Human Rights Support Unit at the Ministry of Justice, while the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) is supported by four EU Member States.

Peacebuilding and conflict resolution

In terms of support particularly focused on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the EU contributed to the National Consultative Peace *Jirga* of June 2010, in particular enabling broad participation, including from women.³¹³ The Peace *Jirga* endorsed the proposed reintegration plan of the Afghan government and the formation of the High Peace Council (HPC). The HPC was to investigate options for engaging in talks with the Taliban and associated groups and to make it easier for Taliban leaders to participate in such a process by removing them from the UN’s international ‘blacklist’.³¹⁴ Part of the thinking behind the COIN strategy was to incentivise the Taliban to engage in peace through a combination of economic and reconciliation opportunities.³¹⁵ In support of this vision, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) was initiated in 2010, led by the Afghan government and supported by five EU Member States, Japan and South Korea. The HPC was to implement the strategy and programme, which was endorsed by a Consultative Peace *Jirga*. The APRP aimed to reach out to insurgents and create the space for resolving grievances and stimulate development at the community level.³¹⁶ The APRP claims to have supported the reintegration of more than 9500 ex-combatants,³¹⁷ but these numbers are disputed.

The EU has also continued supporting civil society, on the one hand to strengthen engagements on human rights and women’s rights issues, but also to enable civil society participation in reconciliation and conflict resolution processes.³¹⁸ EU Member States have continued bilateral support to civil society. For instance, Germany supported the media and NGOs working on peacebuilding as part of its civil peace service programme.³¹⁹

³¹⁰ Burke, E. (2014), p. 8, 10

³¹¹ Burke, E. (2014), p. 10

³¹² European External Action Service/European Commission/Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2014), *Multi-annual indicative programme 2014–2020*, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/documents/content/multi-annual-indicative-programme-2014-2020_en.pdf

³¹³ EU (2009), p. 10

³¹⁴ EU (2009), p. 10

³¹⁵ Quie, M. (2012), ‘Peace-building and democracy promotion in Afghanistan: the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme and reconciliation with the Taliban’, *Democratization*, 19(3), pp. 553–574, p. 559

³¹⁶ Quie, M. (2012), pp. 559–560

³¹⁷ AREU (2015), *The A to Z Guide to Assistance in Afghanistan*, (13th edition), Kabul: AREU, p. 10

³¹⁸ EU (2009), p. 23

³¹⁹ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 20

3

Peace and conflict impacts of international actors

THE 2001–2013 INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION was not the first in Afghanistan's history and some of the mistakes of the past were repeated. After the end of Soviet involvement, international assistance under the UN also flooded in, creating perverse incentives and undermining community participation in programmes by funding short-term and prescriptive programmes. Some organisations used warlords to provide security for their work while others implemented programmes that fuelled ethnic tensions within communities. Civil society mobilised to establish coordination mechanisms and point out how these dynamics undermined peace. They called for more accountable, inclusive, long-term and conflict-sensitive assistance and highlighted opportunities for peacebuilding.³²⁰

Yet the 2001–2014 intervention seems not to have brought those lessons home. Objectives around supporting Afghanistan to become a more peaceful and prosperous country really grew from the narrow security aim of closing down the space for international terrorists to operate. As a result, the selected approaches, while having some successes in different sectors and in different parts of the country, have also had serious negative implications for the prospects for long-term peace.

3.1 Implications of a military- led strategy: “hammering the bread and the nail”³²¹

“(W)ar should be waged only in pursuit of clear political goals – ones informed by military advice but decided on by responsible civilian leaders.”

Genl. Karl W. Eikenberry³²²

The international intervention in Afghanistan gave rise to an inconsistent strategy of “waging war while building peace”.³²³ The initial dominance of short-term military aims ultimately undermined long-term peacebuilding aims. International support enabled the creation and survival of an ultimately unrepresentative and unaccountable

³²⁰ Barakat, S. and Strand, A. (1995)

³²¹ An Afghan proverb meaning they try to bring peace while they are fighting a war, used in reference to the international community by village elders and shura council members in a focus group discussion in Qara Bagh district, 31 March 2015

³²² Former Commanding General of the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (2005–2007) and former US Ambassador to Afghanistan (2009 to 2011). Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³²³ Suhreke, A. (2012), p. 478

government. International assistance at some point accounted for up to 90 per cent of Afghan public expenditures.³²⁴ This money was not perceived to benefit ordinary Afghans,³²⁵ but rather unaccountable elites at the centre, who forged alliances within ethnic groups, with armed militias or with sections of the police or armed forces, strengthening impunity for corruption and human rights abuses.³²⁶ International interveners also came to be seen by Afghans as biased in favour of the mostly Tajik warlords and their (often criminal) networks, thus feeding into ethnic divisions.³²⁷ Efforts were made to mitigate this, including by setting targets for the MoI to ensure broader ethnic representation in the armed forces and by doing work on anti-corruption and anti-narcotics.³²⁸ However, the perception persists that the warlords were brought back to power and enabled to enrich themselves at the expense of the population by the US and its allies.

Having a military-led strategy so closely intertwining counter-insurgency objectives with development and reconstruction ones resulted in a number of negative impacts. Communities in northern Afghanistan resented the fact that those in the south benefited most from reconstruction support, effectively rewarding them for violence.³²⁹ Combining military and non-military interventions, including within the context of the PRTs, in many cases meant that development assistance was delivered by military actors. This led to unsustainable interventions while simultaneously compromising the space for independent development and humanitarian work, potentially making aid actors military targets.³³⁰ It also had a negative impact on the Afghan population's views of the non-military aspects of the intervention.

“One incident in Ghazni province in 2004 saw PRT officials offering to build a well for villagers just weeks after they had fired rockets into the very same village killing nine children. Unsurprisingly, residents were hardly consoled and Afghan goodwill for the PRTs was quickly eroded.”³³¹

Challenges and successes of the PRTs also varied widely, depending on where they were deployed and their different reporting structures.³³² The PRTs operated differently in practice with it not always being clear what the role of the civilians should be. Whereas US military personnel were mostly deployed without much preparation to work with civilians, British personnel appeared to have better understood – and prepared for – achieving both civilian and military goals.³³³ Early British PRTs in northern Afghanistan were able to operate in ways that became impossible in more unstable contexts like Helmand later on. Where PRTs had large civilian components and operated without troop presence or with lightly armed military patrols, more positive relationships were fostered with local populations.³³⁴ Some also consider the British PRTs as the best illustration of how the concept of the comprehensive approach could work in practice. Yet the approach did not work in more insecure contexts and there were challenges both in planning and implementing joint strategies in Afghanistan and in reconciling policy directives from London with pressures and analysis on the ground.³³⁵

³²⁴ Eikenberry, Karl W., ‘The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: The Other Side of the COIN’, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2013. www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139645/karl-w-eikenberry/the-limits-of-counterinsurgencydoctrine-in-afghanistan

³²⁵ Schmeidl, S. and Karokhail, M. (2009), ‘Pret-a-Porter States: How the McDonaldization of State-Building misses the Mark in Afghanistan’, in M Fischer, B Schmelze (eds) *Building Peace in the Absence of States: Challenging the Discourse on State Failure* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center), pp. 67–79, www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue8_schmeidl_karokhail_comm.pdf

³²⁶ Saikal, A. (2005), ‘Afghanistan’s Weak State and Strong Society’ in S Chesterman, M Ignatieff, R Thakur (eds) *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance* (Tokyo: United Nations University), pp. 193–209; Barfield T (2010), *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

³²⁷ Edwards, L. M. (2010), pp. 975–976

³²⁸ Barakat et al (2008), p. 48

³²⁹ Barakat et al (2008), p. 48

³³⁰ Williams (2011), pp. 69–70

³³¹ Jackson (2014), p. 2

³³² Williams (2011), pp. 68–69

³³³ Williams (2011), p. 69

³³⁴ Jakobsen, P. V. (2005–6), *PRTs in Afghanistan. Successful but Not Sufficient*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Studies, p. 21, https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/DIIS_DNK_-_PRTs_in_Afghanistan_-_successful_but_not_sufficient_2005_06.pdf

³³⁵ Williams (2011), pp. 71–75

The initial military campaign expected to defeat the Taliban quickly by killing Taliban leaders and key fighters, leaving a safe space for longer-term development, statebuilding and peacebuilding work to take place. Instead, the list of targets to kill or arrest kept expanding. The dominance of military thinking in overall US strategy also meant that important decisions were made that ran counter to civilian analysis of the conflict issues in Afghanistan.³³⁶ The adoption of the COIN strategy in 2009 aimed to strengthen the civilian component of the military-led campaign. But civilian resources were never deployed as planned. Instead, young and inexperienced soldiers – with short 6- to 12-month contract rotations – led activities on the ground, and senior US army officials were providing civilian leadership mentoring to Afghan officials.³³⁷ While the COIN work generated some very innovative ideas, it also created some unsustainable interventions like buying expensive generators for Kandahar city that no future civilian authority would be able to afford.³³⁸ The military also found civilian capacity-building very challenging.³³⁹

The COIN strategy created the potential for an ever-expanding mandate and an endless timeline but without providing guidance on how to achieve a political solution. In the words of General Eikenberry, it was assumed that “a grab bag of ‘doctrinally sound’ military actions would somehow add up to a strategic win”³⁴⁰ Furthermore, COIN strategies are based on defending the government in power. But the Afghan government had not yet won over the population and was seen to be corrupt and acting in elite interests. It was also premised on important assumptions that increased international support would have a positive impact on Afghan institutions, that the population could be effectively protected in this way, and that the government was on board with the approach. All three assumptions turned out to be “spectacularly incorrect, which, in turn, made the counterinsurgency campaign increasingly incoherent and difficult to prosecute.”³⁴¹

The ambiguities of this military-led approach contributed to a sense of suspicion among the Afghan population about the motives of the US, and tainted the Afghan government by association.³⁴² By 2010, US Army studies and other research indicated that the majority of the population in combat areas saw the foreign forces as ‘occupiers’, thus weakening support for the Karzai regime.³⁴³

Public perceptions of international impact on peace³⁴⁴

Elders and *shura* council members in the Qara Bagh district, interviewed for this study, saw the involvement of the international community (led by the US) as causing conflict: “Foreign countries should help us instead of causing conflict in our country[.] [T]hen peace will [come] naturally.” Another elder stated: “If the international community [really] wanted to do so, they could bring security to Afghanistan in one month.” One elder even went as far as questioning whether the US was not in fact supporting the Taliban, since they seem to have become stronger at a time when foreign troop presence was so large: “We also have an army, but the Taliban are everywhere; this means that the US helps and arms not only our army but also the Taliban. They support the Taliban, otherwise where would they get their arms and ammunition from?” Another pointed to the fact that the international community has made money from the Afghan conflict in the form of high salaries, compounds for their security, bodyguards, vehicles and other resources required to operate in Afghanistan.

³³⁶ Cf Eikenberry, K. W. (2013) (no page numbers available)

³³⁷ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³³⁸ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³³⁹ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³⁴⁰ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³⁴¹ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³⁴² Interview with Prof Mohammad Mansoor Ehsan, lecturer and Chairperson of the Centre for Law and Political Science at Rana University, 10 April 2015

³⁴³ Dorronsoro, G. (2010), *Afghanistan: Searching for Political Agreement*, Washington, D.C.: CEIP, p. 10

³⁴⁴ Focus group discussion with village elders and shura council members in Qara Bagh district, 31 March 2015

3.2 Statebuilding and setting a bad example

The current Afghan government appears to be promising in terms of its legitimacy and the public support it enjoys, and the early indications of the policies it wants to pursue. The international community can take some credit for this. At the same time, over the past 14 years, the international intervention also appears to have inadvertently undermined key tenets of building a stable and accountable state. Perhaps this was overly ambitious, especially in a difficult context like Afghanistan. In 2001, Cramer and Goodhand set out three challenges for an Afghan government to overcome: “a) a monopoly of violence; b) a trajectory of development that provided wealth and welfare for its citizens; and c) credible forms of representation and legitimacy.”³⁴⁵ Post-2001 Afghan governments and their international allies have largely failed to overcome these challenges.

In terms of the **monopoly of violence and establishing the rule of law**, the international community invested massively in establishing and strengthening the ANSF and some important progress has certainly been made. Yet there are still serious questions about how effective both the army and the police are in providing security and upholding the rule of law for all citizens. Issues of systemic corruption, human rights abuses by the ANA, the ANP and the ALP, and factionalism within the ANA and ANP (with respect to loyalties to particular government-connected warlords) have undermined stability and the effective reach of the state. There are even allegations that many members of the armed forces are drug addicts and only join in order to access heroin more easily when deployed to poppy-growing areas.³⁴⁶

The ANP is still seen by many to be corrupt and engage in predatory behaviour towards the population, delegitimising them and undermining the state.³⁴⁷ Corruption within the police also undermined the morale of police officers and sabotaged international mentoring efforts to police leadership.³⁴⁸ The establishment of the police training academy and the continued focus by the EU on leadership training within the ANP has been credited as one of the successes in the police reform efforts.³⁴⁹ But international assistance was arguably too small in the early years, and then scaled up too fast and to too great amounts in later years. This contributed to problems of absorptive capacity and funds diversion by powerful individuals within the police and government.³⁵⁰ Equipment provided to the police has allegedly been sold and the money pocketed by individuals.³⁵¹

EUPOL’s mandate continues to the end of 2016 to provide strategic advice to the MoI, support the professionalisation of the ANP and better connect the police to justice reform processes.³⁵² But there is still no coherent approach among international actors for supporting the police and addressing civilian policing needs.³⁵³

The establishment and arming of other groups like local militias, the ALP and the *arkokai* strengthened warlords and undermined earlier DDR efforts and the potential for the Afghan state to establish monopoly over the use of force across the country.³⁵⁴ Intended to supplement ANA and ANP capacity, some of these militias are connected to warlords and contribute to insecurity. The DDR programmes have also faced difficulties regarding the quality of weapons collected, weapons control measures

³⁴⁵ Goodhand, J. and Cramer, C. (2002), p. 898

³⁴⁶ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 191

³⁴⁷ Sedra, M. (2013), p. 374; Giustozzi, A. and Isaqzadeh, M. (2011), pp. 16, 24–26

³⁴⁸ Giustozzi, A. and Isaqzadeh, M. (2011), p. 17

³⁴⁹ Burke, E. (2014), p. 16

³⁵⁰ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), pp. 187–188

³⁵¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 32

³⁵² EU External Action Common Security and Defence Policy (2015), ‘EU Police mission in Afghanistan: Fact Sheet’, (July), www.eupol-afg.eu/sites/default/files/EU%20Afghanistan_Factsheet%20_2015_3.pdf

³⁵³ Hughes, M. (2014), *The Afghan National Police in 2015 and beyond*, (May), Special Report 346, United States Institute of Peace, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR346_The_Afghan_National_Police_in_2015_and_Beyond.pdf

³⁵⁴ Suhre, A. (2013), “Statebuilding in Afghanistan: a contradictory engagement”, *Central Asian Survey*, 32(3), pp. 271–286, p. 279

and the targeting of reintegration packages.³⁵⁵ Most importantly, DDR processes were undermined by vested interests within government, subsequent rearment of groups, and persistent insecurity as conflict and criminality escalated again, which made communities and armed groups unwilling to disarm.³⁵⁶

Village elders interviewed for this study recommended that they be allowed to take responsibility to undo “the power of the gun,” and blamed the international community for mobilising militias.³⁵⁷

The US, UK and allies have been much criticised for insufficient progress on important elements of SSR: corruption, human rights and financial sustainability of the reforms. The emphasis on addressing the security situation in the immediate term undermined a long-term approach to institutional change.³⁵⁸ With the end of the ISAF mission, it remains to be seen to what extent the ANSF can provide security and extend a state monopoly on violence across its territory. A 2014 survey showed that most Afghans were cautiously optimistic about the future and the ability of the National Unity Government (NUG) to take the country in the right direction, despite their key concern remaining insecurity.³⁵⁹

The justice system has also faced many challenges and suffered from a lack of an Afghan “vision” for the state justice system and insufficient coordination between national institutions and international actors.³⁶⁰ International support to police and justice reform areas were not well-integrated as a result of stove-piping of different sectors, particularly security and rule of law, both within EUROPOL and between various international actors and their counterpart Afghan ministries.³⁶¹ The judiciary has also suffered from corruption and lack of professionalism.³⁶² Yet, as already noted, there is an increase in people’s use of the *Huquq* and state courts, while the majority of cases are still heard by the local *jirgas* and *shuras*.

The behaviour of the interveners also undermined the rule of law they were trying to support by engaging in military solutions to the conflict, thereby potentially legitimising decades of violent contests for political power, and pursuing a policy of targeted assassinations of Taliban insurgents rather than arresting and handing them over for prosecution. The US can also be seen to set a bad example in terms of accountability: the BSA provides complete indemnity from Afghan prosecution to American soldiers and personnel operating in Afghanistan. Early tactics like night raids and home searches, alongside high civilian casualty numbers caused a lot of resentment among the Afghan population. As a result, the US abandoned some of these tactics and paid more attention to minimising civilian casualties. Drones came increasingly into use, but this has been equally problematic from an international law perspective and still results in civilian casualties. Detaining insurgents without trial and allowing torture and extraordinary rendition³⁶³ further undermined the rule of law and delegitimised the interveners as preaching one thing and practising another.³⁶⁴ There is some evidence that these tactics, also used in Iraq, contributed to resentment towards the US and the West, and to anti-Western militancy. For example the Islamic State (IS) movement has drawn some of its key personnel from US prisons associated with the wars in

³⁵⁵ For more on the DDR programme, see Dennys, C. (6 June 2005), *Disarmament, Demobilization and Rearmament? The effects of disarmament in Afghanistan*. Japan Afghan NGO Network (JANN), www.ngo-jvc.net/jann/Documents/Disarmament%20demobilization%20rearmament.pdf.

³⁵⁶ HRW (September 2011), p. 8.

³⁵⁷ Focus group discussion with village elders and shura council members in Qara Bagh district, 31 March 2015

³⁵⁸ Sedra, M. (2013), p. 374, 377, 381; Sahrke, A. (2012), p. 486

³⁵⁹ The Asia Foundation (2014), p. 15

³⁶⁰ Wardak, A. and Hamidzada, H. (2012), “The Search for Legitimate Rule, Justice and a Durable Peace: Hybrid Models of Governance in Afghanistan”, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 7(2), pp. 79–88, pp. 81–82

³⁶¹ Burke, E. (2014), pp. 11–12

³⁶² Wardak, A. and Hamidzada, H. (2012), pp. 81–82

³⁶³ United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Dec 2012, partly declassified Dec 2014), *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program*, www.intelligence.senate.gov/press/committee-releases-study-cias-detention-and-interrogation-program

³⁶⁴ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2012), p. 192

Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁶⁵ This completely contradicts the original aims of reducing the global terror threat.

With regard to supporting a trajectory of **development that provides wealth and welfare to Afghan citizens**, as mentioned above, some impressive progress has been made in infrastructure, education and health. Afghan GDP growth increased significantly and was estimated at 11.8 per cent by 2012/13, due to an exceptional harvest.³⁶⁶ Mobile phone access extended to more than 60 per cent of the population and Afghan government domestic revenues (notably from customs) increased by almost 20 per cent per year since 2002.³⁶⁷ However, these gains were not without controversy. The road-building programmes did not sufficiently consider the complexities and conflicts related to land tenure and access.³⁶⁸ Despite the 2007 National Land Policy recognising problems of competing tenure systems, the lack of government control over the entire country and official corruption at all levels have meant that violent manipulation of land systems continued.³⁶⁹ The roads also facilitated the movement of international and Afghan security forces and became important targets for the Taliban, causing more civilians to abandon cultivation.³⁷⁰

“As a local resident of Darae-Pachaye in Kabul’s Paghman District noted, ‘foreign forces came to our village and said they want[ed] to asphalt the road but we said no. We know the road is good but we also know that an asphalted road brings ISAF patrols and with them come suicide and roadside attacks.’”³⁷¹

Poverty levels in Afghanistan remain high. Despite heavily supported campaigns to eradicate opium production and stop smuggling activities, Afghanistan remains one of the top three global providers of opium³⁷² and only 53 per cent of Afghans see the trade as unacceptable.³⁷³ A recent parliamentary assessment of the UK counter-narcotics strategy found that it has largely failed.³⁷⁴ Opium production fell a number of times in the last decade, but is now at its highest since 2002, despite significant investments from the UK and US to combat this and provide alternative livelihoods support.³⁷⁵ As the ANSF take over security, livelihoods, political and criminal incentives to continue the trade pose a significant challenge. The ongoing opium trade is likely to continue having very serious implications on the governance, security and development situation.³⁷⁶

For districts close to urban centres, the benefits of international intervention are probably more tangible than for rural districts that have experienced significant insecurity.³⁷⁷ The urban-rural divide was recognised during the international intervention, with 15 per cent of international spending between 2001 and 2009 being targeted at agriculture and rural development.³⁷⁸ Yet economic stabilisation projects tended to be short-term and focused on providing basic income opportunities as a means to prevent Afghans, especially young men, from supporting the insurgents.³⁷⁹ A 2011 SIGAR audit in Laghman Province found that 92 per cent (or \$49.2 million) of funds allocated to projects were “at risk or have questionable outcomes”. Funds were not managed in accordance with standard operating procedures and none of the

³⁶⁵ Chulov M (2014), ‘ISIS: The inside story’, (11 December), *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/sp-isis-the-inside-story (accessed on 4 November 2015)

³⁶⁶ Ghanizada (24 May 2014), ‘The significance and achievements of ISAF mission in Afghanistan’, *Khaama Press*, www.khaama.com/the-significance-and-achievements-of-isaf-mission-in-afghanistan-8137

³⁶⁷ Ghanizada (24 May 2014)

³⁶⁸ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), p. 378

³⁶⁹ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), p. 377

³⁷⁰ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), pp. 378–379

³⁷¹ Unruh, J. and Shalaby, M. (2012), p. 379, citing IRIN (2010)

³⁷² UNODC (2015), *World Drug Report 2015*, United Nations: New York, https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

³⁷³ ASCOR and Langer Research Associates (2015), p. 5

³⁷⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee (2014), p. 2

³⁷⁵ SIGAR (2014), p. 3

³⁷⁶ See for more detail Mansfield, D. and Fishstein, P. (2013)

³⁷⁷ Village elders and shura council members in Qara Bagh district said that basic services had improved for them and enabled them to continue agricultural work (focus group discussion, 31 March 2015)

³⁷⁸ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 38

³⁷⁹ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 11

69 projects had sufficient documentation to track outcomes. The audit also found the Afghan government unable to take over PRT projects.³⁸⁰ Insufficient attention was given to developing long-term structural elements that would enable more sustainable improvements in the agricultural economy.³⁸¹ The EU's assistance through the MRRD seemed to have had a positive impact on rural agricultural production levels³⁸² and lessons can perhaps be learnt from this.

Apart from the benefits in the sectors outlined above, the way in which development assistance was undertaken in Afghanistan therefore seems to have at least in part generated further alienation of the population from both the international community and the government. In fact, some research indicates that public perceptions of international development assistance – particularly that provided by the PRTs – were overwhelmingly negative.³⁸³ The Afghan population would therefore be forgiven for thinking that the international intervention enriched a small elite while bringing variable levels of benefit to the population at large.

Establishing credible forms of representation and legitimacy has been a major challenge for pre- and post-2001 Afghan governments. The inherent contradictions in the international approach (short-term vs long-term; hurried 'stabilisation' vs long-term SSR; waging war against the insurgents vs building peace) "have re-affirmed a dysfunctional, sovereignty-based, person-centred, Kabul-centred and kin-based political culture to the exclusion of more inclusive governance."³⁸⁴ Former United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy for Afghanistan, Frances Vendrell, explained it as follows: "Some of us argued for a heavy footprint ... convinced that, after years of conflict and misrule, the Afghan people were ready for a strong international role that would do away with both warlord and Taliban rule ... But we were overruled by those favouring a 'light footprint' ... [which] in practice ensured that the process would be led not by genuine representatives of the Afghan people, but by a group of mostly rapacious individuals. Afghans saw the international community's support for transferring power to the worst villains in their country and drew the natural conclusions."³⁸⁵

The 'light footprint' international engagement evolved eventually into a multi-billion dollar endeavour over the course of 13 years. Large aid volumes overwhelmed local absorptive capacity and sustained a rentier state, further aggravated by proceeds of the illegal drugs economy.³⁸⁶ Strongmen at all levels were able to sustain their patronage networks and militias instead of investing in state governance institutions.³⁸⁷ In order to manage the vast amount of resources, technical experts, NGOs and others were put in charge of administering funds, creating "the backbone of a virtual parallel administration".³⁸⁸ While this resolved the short-term problems of administering the funds, it did little to strengthen state capacity or legitimacy in the longer term. Short-term results were often prioritised over long-term, and slower, transformation processes.³⁸⁹

Systemic corruption took hold at all levels of the Afghan government, despite various public financial management and anti-corruption efforts. In addition, channelling money outside of the national budget indirectly undermined the accountability role of the parliament and its potential to monitor corruption. Many Afghans now regard corruption as among the priority threats the country faces. As corruption increased, more fiduciary controls were introduced and fund disbursement slowed; which led to more consultants being brought in to manage yet more aid in order to achieve results.³⁹⁰ This trend peaked in 2010, in an approach of 'more is more' – a rationale that

³⁸⁰ Jackson (2014), pp. 2–3

³⁸¹ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 11

³⁸² Burke, E. (2014), p. 10

³⁸³ Gordon (2011), p. 5

³⁸⁴ Burke, E. (2014), p. 10

³⁸⁵ Vendrell, F. (2011), pp. 54–55.

³⁸⁶ Suhrke, A. (2013), pp. 273–274

³⁸⁷ Transparency International UK (2015), p. 16

³⁸⁸ Suhrke, A. (2013), pp. 274, 276

³⁸⁹ Dorronsoro, G. (2010), p. 2

³⁹⁰ Suhrke, A. (2013), p. 275

large investments were crucial in the immediate post-war timeframe to stabilise the situation before engaging in long-term work.³⁹¹

The influx of aid funds and the competition over the illegal economy strengthened predatory and opportunistic elites that the US and its allies tried to reform, but feared to remove lest their removal undermine security.³⁹² Any potential legitimacy of the political elites in the eyes of the population was further eroded and the US and its allies were increasingly seen as propping up an unaccountable and predatory regime, rather than as ‘protectors’ of the Afghan people.³⁹³ Corruption also undermined the enormous investments made in reforming the security services, when these are seen to be corrupt and working on behalf of an illegitimate government.³⁹⁴

Working with the warlords and local strongmen may have been useful in terms of achieving short-term military goals, but undermined the space for a more legitimate and acceptable governance system to come into being. It also created the perception among Afghans that the international interveners were complicit in abuses and crimes perpetrated by their ‘allies’, for example by contracting abusive militias to provide security for international activities.³⁹⁵

Within this “exogenous statebuilding project”,³⁹⁶ the international community did not sufficiently understand how Afghan society works, and yet sometimes used aspects of Afghan culture or history to achieve their objectives,³⁹⁷ for instance replicating the *arbokai* model. In its engagement in Helmand, for instance, the UK did not appear to understand the complex realities on the ground and initially had almost no staff able to speak Pashto.³⁹⁸ Most Afghan citizens ended up feeling alienated from the national government, frustrated with the lack of government service delivery, and resentful of the corruption and abuse of power that had become the norm.³⁹⁹

Statebuilding can be a conflict-generating process as it essentially sets out to institutionalise individual and group power relationships. In Afghanistan, this was happening in a context where no state had ever been truly functional and where an active armed conflict was underway. Some analysts say that the international interveners had a poor understanding of the “central pillars of social order – patronage, mediation and brokering”,⁴⁰⁰ which led to incorrect assumptions about the type of state and the types of support strategies that would be successful in Afghanistan.

3.3 Warlordism and civilian leadership

International actors face numerous challenges in terms of who to engage with in Afghanistan. Supporting the Northern Alliance against the Taliban meant choosing sides and in effect empowering former warlords to become the government, with the Taliban as the enemy. For instance, the ministries of Interior, Defence, Foreign Affairs and the National Directorate of Security were all given to known warlords in the first two post-Taliban administrations.⁴⁰¹ They staffed the ministries with their followers, which institutionalised patronage networks and corruption.⁴⁰²

By excluding the Taliban from the Bonn process, moderate elements within the group were left with the choice of either staying with the Taliban or establishing their own

³⁹¹ Sahrke 2010 memorial lecture, p. III; She also sets out a number of important reasons relating to the role of the military and aid organisations in making the “more is more” argument for Afghanistan.

³⁹² Sahrke, A. (2012), p. 486

³⁹³ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³⁹⁴ Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

³⁹⁵ Carter, S. and Clark, K. (2010), p. 28

³⁹⁶ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 248

³⁹⁷ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 248

³⁹⁸ Sahrke (2011), p. 12

³⁹⁹ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 5

⁴⁰⁰ Goodhand, J. and Sedra, M., (2013), p. 248; also Sedra, M. (2013), p. 376

⁴⁰¹ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 186

⁴⁰² Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 186

strongman constituencies. In some ways, this strengthened the threat from a more determined and possibly radical Taliban while proliferating local strongmen looking for alliances to further their own interests.

Yet Western powers had tried to engage the Taliban pre-2001 with very little success. And not engaging with the Northern Alliance would have risked them continuing violence. The limited success of diplomatic efforts to reduce the Taliban's operational capacities prove how challenging this can be. UN sanctions since the late 1990s seems to have had little impact on the Taliban, with the possible exception of the targeting of key Taliban leaders as designated individuals associated with terrorist groups. The removal of key Taliban leaders from this list has been a key demand of the Taliban as a precondition to peace talks and some prominent Taliban members who have been delisted are now part of the HPC.⁴⁰³ Despite the sanctions regime, the Taliban continue to be adept at financing their operations through the narcotics trade and an expanding illegal trade in resources like gold, lapis lazuli and marble.⁴⁰⁴ They also continue to gain an income from a range of criminal activities from kidnapping for ransom, extortion, fraud and 'taxing' of populations and business in areas under their control.⁴⁰⁵ The Taliban therefore remain able to obtain weapons, ammunitions and explosives, seemingly from neighbouring countries, in contravention of the sanctions regime.⁴⁰⁶ Diplomatic efforts continue through the Istanbul process to try and convince these countries to stop supplies.

Following the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omar and the announcement of Mullah Mansour as his successor, an internal power struggle seems to have been narrowly avoided, centred around different opinions on whether to engage in peace talks or not, and the role of Pakistan in this process.⁴⁰⁷ The presence of the Islamic State (IS) in the country⁴⁰⁸ poses another security threat with the potential to draw in foreign fighters and further fracture Taliban-allied forces. The *Hezb-e-Islami* group has already announced its support for IS⁴⁰⁹ while the Taliban have allegedly warned that they "[do] not consider the multiplicity of jihadi ranks beneficial either for jihad or for Muslims" and would be "forced to react" if IS continued operations in the country.⁴¹⁰ IS's ultra-violent techniques could infuse a different dynamic into the conflict and further divisions within the Taliban movement would complicate peace talks.

Throughout the intervention, the combination of complex alliances and networks, funded by illegal activities, also posed challenges at the provincial and community levels. For instance, the UK deployment to Helmand initially worked with a governor who was close to Karzai and fairly adept at maintaining sufficient alliances and accommodations with different tribes. However, he also had links with the poppy industry and was implicated in the drugs trade and broader corruption. The UK therefore insisted that he be removed, but this led to a weaker provincial government which in turn gave the Taliban the space to reposition themselves.⁴¹¹

At the same time, the international military strategy in particular empowered local warlords and their militias in order to make military gains. This eventually reduced the central state's ability to bring the wide range of sub-national actors under control,

⁴⁰³ Katzman, K. (2015), pp. 40–41

⁴⁰⁴ UN Security Council (2015, 26 August), pp. 14–16

⁴⁰⁵ UN Security Council (2015, 2 February), *Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team on specific cases of cooperation between organized crime syndicates and individuals, groups, undertakings and entities eligible for listing under paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2160 (2014)*, pp. 13–16, <https://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/SpecialReports/20150209%202160-l-p-special-report.pdf>

⁴⁰⁶ UN Security Council (2015, 26 August), p. 16

⁴⁰⁷ Ruttig, T. (2015), *From Mullah Omar to Mansur: Change at the Taliban's top leadership*, (31 July), Afghan Analysts Network, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/from-mullah-omar-to-mansur-change-at-the-taleban-s-top-leadership/>

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 73–74

⁴⁰⁹ Pandey, A. (2015), 'Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami Announces Support For ISIS In Afghanistan To Combat Taliban', (6 July), *International Business Times*, www.ibtimes.com/gulbuddin-hekmatyars-hezb-eislami-announces-support-isis-afghanistan-combat-taliban-1996462

⁴¹⁰ AFP and dpa (2015), 'Taliban warns IS leader to stay out of Afghanistan', (16 June), *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, www.rferl.org/content/afghanistan-taliban-warns-is-leader/27075813.html

⁴¹¹ Suhreke, A. (2011), pp. 11–12

forcing the government to negotiate and find accommodation with local warlords who were often unaccountable and abusive.⁴¹²

While there were attempts to engage with alternative local power holders, these were ad hoc and complex in a context where the years of war (including the international intervention itself) had changed the nature of local structures and where many traditional leaders were replaced by unaccountable and illegitimate warlords.⁴¹³ Yet some would say that the structures created by the NSP programme showed promise in terms of creating locally legitimate and accountable governance arrangements.

In the security sector, the focus on short-term tactical objectives similarly challenged the potential for sustainable and long-term change by engaging with the warlords and “Western-oriented technocrats”, who are not representative of Afghan society, and by imposing SSR activities rather than building political consensus and broader ownership.⁴¹⁴

3.4 Impact on people

The security situation in Afghanistan has fluctuated over the last decade, but is again deteriorating despite the international intervention. Some Afghans blame insecurity on the international intervention,⁴¹⁵ and express frustration that state security services are unable to protect the population. Some analysts contend that international military engagement fuelled militancy by providing more targets and enabling a recruitment rhetoric around defeating the invading foreigners.⁴¹⁶ In some cases communities allied themselves with the Taliban as a means to protect their interests, for instance in the face of poppy eradication programmes.⁴¹⁷ Support for the Taliban may also have been a way to get the attention of Kabul, for leaders who felt their concerns were not being heard, or to seek protection against local rivals.⁴¹⁸

High levels of corruption and leaders’ accumulation of wealth in a context of extreme poverty have undermined people’s faith in the state and their leaders’ commitment to working for the public good.⁴¹⁹ The return of the warlords also meant an upsurge in local-level violence and criminality.⁴²⁰ With police performance being at best poor and at worst predatory, and with the state judicial service being inefficient and corrupt as well, the Taliban are seen in some areas to provide a better alternative. For instance, the Taliban are said to have an ombudsman to which people can complain about any of the shadow services provided, including the courts. There are also reports that Taliban members who suddenly acquire wealth are investigated and punished if found guilty of kidnapping or eliciting bribes.⁴²¹ This is not to argue that the Taliban provide a perfect justice system, but given the dysfunctionality of the state in a context of unfettered corruption and criminality, it is possible to understand why some Afghans may prefer the Taliban.

As long as the state fails to provide basic services, security, and political representation to significant numbers of its people, the Taliban will have the opportunity to present themselves as a principled alternative.

In terms of international assistance, a series of studies on public perceptions in Helmand, Paktia, Uruzgan, Faryab and Balkh provinces showed that public perceptions

⁴¹² Schmeidl, S. (2009), p. 72

⁴¹³ Schmeidl, S. (2009), p. 71

⁴¹⁴ Sedra, M. (2013), p. 376

⁴¹⁵ Gordon, S. (2011), p. 6

⁴¹⁶ Suhrke, A. (2012), p. 485

⁴¹⁷ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahimi, N. (2012), p. 45

⁴¹⁸ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahimi, N. (2012), p. 46

⁴¹⁹ Suhrke, A. (2013), p. 277

⁴²⁰ Edwards, L. M. (2010), p. 977

⁴²¹ Braithwaite, J. and Wardak, A. (2013), p. 187

of international development assistance were predominantly negative.⁴²² In Helmand Province, the tensions between the QIPs and long-term structural changes that were needed, and the implementation of these projects in an insecure context, further undermined people's willingness to engage.⁴²³ Economic programmes may also have created public expectations for continued handouts from the government and international donors, without really improving local economic systems or enabling people to engage with them more effectively.⁴²⁴ An interesting indicator of the public perception of where the country was going is to look at the number of people seeking asylum abroad: between 2001 and 2005, the numbers fell drastically, but after 2005 when it became clear that the conflict was not over and that the old elite would remain in power, the figures increased again.⁴²⁵

3.5 Regional impact

The NATO drawdown in Afghanistan opens the door for more intense competition among regional powers for influence in Afghanistan. As an early indication of this, Pakistan demanded early in 2013 that Afghanistan scale back its relations with India and instead sign a strategic agreement with Pakistan that would include training for the ANSF from Pakistan.⁴²⁶ Pakistan-India relations remain tense with each trying to block the other from progressing on trade and development objectives (with the possible exception of the TAPI project) and from using these initiatives to acquire political influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan also accuses India of using its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan to recruit anti-Pakistan insurgents, while India believes that its interests in Afghanistan are vulnerable to attack.⁴²⁷

The key influencing relationship from a regional perspective has however, probably been the one between Pakistan and the US. On the one hand, the US considers Pakistan an ally in regional stability, and has used Pakistani territory for logistical supply lines for the international efforts in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the questionable commitment of Pakistan's military leaders and ISI in particular to end all support for al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and prevent extremist ideologies being preached to Afghan refugees and Pakistanis in *madrassas* in its territory, has complicated the relationship. Pakistan has also vacillated in its position on the desirability of talks with the Taliban, sometimes balking at the idea of encouraging talks and at other times calling for them.⁴²⁸ The US has responded by trying to re-route some of the logistical supply lines through other Central Asian countries, and by launching drone strikes on al-Qaeda targets in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area.⁴²⁹ Famously, the US also captured and killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistani territory. These actions have apparently been quite effective in eliminating al-Qaeda leaders, but have also caused civilian casualties, damaged relationships between Pakistan and the US, and alienated the Pakistani public from the US.⁴³⁰

While perhaps less directly influential than Pakistan, Iran's position with regard to Afghanistan is also important. Iran is keen to avoid the US using Afghanistan as a base from which to put pressure on (or attack) Iran.⁴³¹

⁴²² Case studies were produced by the Feinstein Centre at Tufts University, Gordon, S. (2011) is the one on Helmand. The others can be found at: <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds-examining-the-relationship-between-aid-and-security-in-afghanistan/>; <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds-2/>; <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds-3/>

⁴²³ Gordon, S. (2011), p. 5

⁴²⁴ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 11

⁴²⁵ Barakat, S. (2012), 'Post-conflict development in Afghanistan: Kicking in or fading out?', paper delivered at The National Press Club, Canberra, 29 November 2012, PRDU/York University

⁴²⁶ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 44

⁴²⁷ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 44, 48

⁴²⁸ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 36

⁴²⁹ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 13

⁴³⁰ Felbab-Brown, V. (2012), p. 13

⁴³¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 46

The US and its allies have put a lot of effort into connecting Afghanistan more with its Central Asian neighbours, especially in terms of expanding infrastructure links and trade.⁴³² It remains to be seen whether this will translate not only into closer relationships but also peace-enforcing ones.

⁴³² Gleason, G. and Krambs, T. A. (2012), p. 3

4

Lessons and potential constructive alternatives

“Fragile and failing states will continue to endanger U.S. and international security, and the choice of responses is not limited to doing nothing or deploying massive numbers of troops and civilians who must march in lockstep to the beat of Field Manual 3-24.”

General Karl W. Eikenberry⁴³³

4.1 Be clear about the consequences of a military-led strategy – and consider alternatives

International intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was but the next phase of international involvement in the country, following on from a history of British colonialism and Cold War-motivated US support to the mujahidin against the Soviet-backed regime. In 2001 there was arguably wide recognition that Afghanistan posed security risks to its neighbours and internationally because of the ongoing instability and the Taliban’s permissive attitude towards al-Qaeda and other violent groups operating from Afghan territory. The tendency to conflate the Taliban with al-Qaeda was also unhelpful in terms of closing down avenues for dialogue and undermining potential conflict resolution options.

The early strategic focus of the intervention in Afghanistan on the **military defeat** of the Taliban and the elimination of the al-Qaeda threat meant that insufficient emphasis was placed on addressing the issues that had fuelled political conflict in the country for decades. The Bonn Agreement and the support to the Emergency *Loya Jirga* in 2002 envisaged a solid framework for political transition, but this was undermined by the fact that warlords with histories of violence dominated the new transitional government. At the same time, the Taliban and *Hizb-e-Islami* were outside the Bonn process and had significant power to disrupt any transition process. The dilemma was balancing the need to include those who have the power to disrupt peaceful transition (such as both the Northern Alliance and Taliban leaders), with a process that allows for more democratic and representative leaders to emerge.

The military defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban meant that two main policy choices were available. On the one hand, the international community could have stopped its engagement after the Bonn Agreement was signed, leaving Afghanistan to work out its own governance arrangements. This would likely have resulted in an unrepresentative

⁴³³ Former Commanding General of the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (2005–2007) and former US Ambassador to Afghanistan (2009 to 2011). Eikenberry, K. W. (2013)

government and some continued instability and crime – notably linked to the opium trade. But it may have resulted in a less complex situation where al-Qaeda may not have resurfaced and where the Taliban may not have become so intertwined with al-Qaeda. On the other hand, the international community could have chosen to remain engaged in support of a political transition. In the end, the second option was chosen, but with an emphasis on the military defeat of remaining Taliban elements rather than switching to a diplomatic engagement with them while supporting inclusive internal reform processes. Given the challenge of identifying truly democratic actors, a politically focused strategy would have had to emphasise non-military engagement from the start in order to maximise the window of opportunity for peaceful transition that existed in 2001. A more realistic timeframe towards elections may also have helped create space for democratic institutions to develop and truly democratic actors to emerge by fostering dialogue and consultation at all levels of society. A less military strategy may also have allowed for stronger rule of law responses to ensure local grievances are addressed and criminality is tackled.

Stabilisation and peacebuilding approaches often assume that **development assistance** is crucial in helping to address underlying conflict causes and turning people away from joining an armed rebellion. In Afghanistan, the ongoing military efforts and the inability to defeat the Taliban meant that development assistance was difficult to deliver in a sustainable way in many parts of the country. Any gains made could be quickly reversed when infrastructure was destroyed or populations displaced because of insecurity. This translated into a lot of resources going into assistance across the country, but much of it being short-term, uncoordinated or unsustainable. In addition, NGOs and international actors were constrained by the lack of infrastructure to enable access to especially remote parts of the country, particularly during the winter.⁴³⁴ Alongside the assistance provided through central government structures, international assistance was therefore also provided as an integrated part of the overall (military-led) strategy, looking for ‘quick impacts’ that would win over the hearts and minds of the population as they would be able to envision an alternative future to one of conflict and instability. In reality though, the situation on the ground meant that – even when the PRT mechanism was created and implemented – the access civilian personnel had to communities was very restricted in the most insecure provinces. The military personnel had to take on tasks that they were ill-equipped for and were forced to behave in contradictory ways, for instance attacking a village one day and coming to offer a QIP the next. The international assistance therefore struggled to add up to an ambitious reconstruction effort. Added to the increasingly corrupt and unaccountable behaviour of the internationally supported central government, the Afghan population became increasingly negative and distrustful of international motives.

While international efforts gradually included more support for statebuilding and non-military interventions, this was done in parallel to military objectives rather than as a coherent strategy, trapping the international community in a strategy of **‘waging war while building peace’**. Instead of rescuing the transition process, aid contributed to its failings and could not prevent armed resistance by the Taliban from re-emerging.

2008 saw an eventual shift in favour of **peace talks with the Taliban**.⁴³⁵ But by then the Taliban had recovered from their defeat in 2001, were strengthening militarily and therefore perhaps more convinced that they could wait out the international engagement and still win the war. Some local-level experimental dialogues were attempted as a means of creating operating space for humanitarian interventions.⁴³⁶ But it was unclear whether international actors understood the difference between talking to low-level Taliban members as part of a counter-insurgency strategy and negotiating with high-level leaders as a new political strategy.⁴³⁷ It is perhaps understandable that

⁴³⁴ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 27

⁴³⁵ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 28

⁴³⁶ Dorronsoro, G. (2010), p. 18

⁴³⁷ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 26

international actors, particularly the US, would have been sceptical about talks with the Taliban in the early years, given that diplomatic engagements and sanctions from 1996 had not delivered much progress and had led the US to launch limited air strikes on al-Qaeda training camps in eastern Afghanistan.⁴³⁸

Dynamics within the Taliban probably further complicated opportunities for dialogue. The military focus on targeting and killing Taliban leaders made it difficult for those pragmatically interested in talks to reach out: senior Taliban leaders in favour of dialogue were allegedly warned by the Pakistani ISI that their whereabouts would be disclosed to the US, making them military targets.⁴³⁹ Motivations for mid-level commanders would have been influenced by diverse local and personal motivations, ranging from those who were genuinely committed to a religious war, to those who felt aggrieved about civilian casualties or the lack of economic opportunities.⁴⁴⁰

After 2009, a minority within the US administration questioned whether the remaining years in Afghanistan should focus on successful (military) completion of the counter-insurgency effort. Instead, they encouraged talks with the Taliban to be prioritised. However, the dominant narrative remained commitment to continued fighting, which resulted in a ‘talk-fight’ strategy⁴⁴¹ from the US: opening communication channels with the Taliban while putting military pressure on them to negotiate. Other allies, such as the UK, became increasingly vocal advocates for talks,⁴⁴² but equally continued prioritising military engagement in practice. As the counter-insurgency campaign failed to achieve a decisive military victory and the deadline for international troop withdrawal neared, the strategy moved away from an emphasis on ‘preconditions’ that the Taliban had to fulfil in order for talks to occur, and more towards ‘outcomes’ that may be achieved through talking to the Taliban.⁴⁴³ This inconsistent approach undermined the potential for a credible negotiated settlement process to emerge. Subsequent efforts by other states, including Qatar, to facilitate talks have shown some promise, although sensitivities about how talks are perceived and who is involved always have the potential to undermine progress.

Later efforts to support **reconciliation** through the HPC-led APRP aimed to reach out to Taliban fighters, create space for resolving grievances and stimulate community-level development.⁴⁴⁴ The APRP claims to have supported the reintegration of more than 9500 ex-combatants,⁴⁴⁵ but this number is disputed. Since 2014, President Ghani has taken a strong lead on this agenda, while the HPC has appeared relatively weak. He has pushed for a focus on national reconciliation and dialogue with the Taliban and other armed groups, and reintegrating these forces.⁴⁴⁶ This process offers opportunities for future dialogue and reconciliation, but also faces challenges. The fact that the HPC is externally funded is used by the Taliban to discredit the process as foreign-driven. The Afghan government and international actors also disagree about the best model for preventing former combatants from supporting violent jihadism in future.⁴⁴⁷

A key obstacle to reconciliation is the inability of current access to justice mechanisms to resolve grievances, enforce the law and avoid abandoning inmates in prison where they are susceptible to recruitment into violent groups.

There is furthermore a real danger that women’s rights could be sacrificed in order to secure a power-sharing agreement. The HPC has only 9 women among its 79 members⁴⁴⁸

⁴³⁸ Katzman, K. (2012), pp. 5–6

⁴³⁹ Wardak, A. and Braithwaite, J. (2013), ‘Crime and war in Afghanistan, Part II: A Jeffersonian Alternative?’, in *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 53, pp. 197–214, p. 205

⁴⁴⁰ Wardak, A. and Braithwaite, J. (2013), p. 205

⁴⁴¹ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), pp. 27–28

⁴⁴² Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 28

⁴⁴³ Bew, J., Evans, R., Frampton, M., Neumann, P. and Porges, M. (2013), p. 31

⁴⁴⁴ Quie, M. (2012), pp. 559–560

⁴⁴⁵ AREU (2015), Kabul: AREU, p. 10

⁴⁴⁶ UNDP, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme homepage, www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/operations/projects/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/aprp.html (accessed on 3 November 2015)

⁴⁴⁷ Quie, M. (2012), p. 569

⁴⁴⁸ Action Aid (2011), p. 6

and very small numbers of women have been involved in informal talks.⁴⁴⁹ No red lines have been laid down on protecting women's rights and constitutional guarantees for all human rights, although the US and UN support this.⁴⁵⁰ Despite a vocal Afghan lobby for women's and human rights, including within the constitution and legal frameworks, and an overall increase in public support for women's rights, a 2015 survey found that 50 to 60 per cent of Afghan men and women would accept circumscribed women's rights in exchange for a peace deal with the Taliban.⁴⁵¹ This issue will therefore continue to be contentious in the transition period.

The impact of the international strategy of dealing with the Taliban has arguably made it more difficult to achieve peace, and increased the risk that negotiations conducted with them now may end up undermining hard-won freedoms and rights. International actors should prioritise supporting the government and relevant institutions in the reconciliation agenda, and carefully analyse how their continued support to military operations impacts on the broader political transition and reconciliation process.

4.2 Understand complexities and that societal change requires long-term processes

The initial international focus on short-term, military objectives meant that insufficient analysis and long-term thinking was done at the start in terms of what a long-term peacebuilding process and accountable governance structures could look like. This led to decisions that missed peacebuilding opportunities, and in some cases fuelled conflict dynamics.

Successful support for an inclusive transition would require a more nuanced political approach, based on identifying and supporting politically legitimate actors at all levels and monitoring changes in legitimacy over time.⁴⁵² In the early intervention years, relatively little attention was paid to addressing governance challenges beyond setting up the national government. No central state has ever really successfully controlled Afghanistan's entire territory and a mix of governance structures have co-habited for centuries. A further complication was the role of regional actors – at best unhelpful, at worst actively undermining peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts. International actors seeking to support a functional, centralised state took on an ambitious project, perhaps over-estimating their ability to influence local and regional dynamics.

A more decentralised governance model that draws on local governance traditions – with human rights norms defended and promoted in locally owned and appropriate ways – may have been a more stabilising model than a centralised one. However, the alternative, more local-level governance systems did not generally function in line with **international human rights standards**. Processes of decision-making by *jirgas*/*shuras* were not usually encoded, and decisions discriminated against certain groups, notably women. The structures were also sometimes manipulated by local strongmen.⁴⁵³ The legitimacy and fairness of these local structures was therefore initially a key impediment to international engagement,⁴⁵⁴ although innovative approaches were later adopted to make them more accountable to the formal justice system and human rights norms.

Thorough and timely conflict analysis and creative thinking are required to support effective state institutions and functions while empowering societies to have a stake in shaping them. Such an approach needs to be long term and interveners need to accept that the impacts of their support may be intangible and slow to emerge. It is also

⁴⁴⁹ Oxfam (2014), *Behind closed doors: The risk of denying women a voice in determining Afghanistan's future*, Briefing Paper, pp. 16–17, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp200-behind-doors-afghan-women-rights-241114-en.pdf; UNSCR 1988 (2011), p. 2, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1988%20%282011%29

⁴⁵⁰ Katzman, K. (2015), p. 39

⁴⁵¹ ASCOR and Langer Research Associates (2015), p. 9

⁴⁵² Edwards, L. M. (2010), p. 985

⁴⁵³ Dempsey, J. and Coburn, N. (2010), p. 2

⁴⁵⁴ Wardak, A. and Hamidzada, H. (2012), p. 84

premised on the availability of actors at local and national level that are genuinely committed to peace and accountable governance. In Afghanistan, it proved very difficult to identify such actors. This resulted in international support to processes and actors that did not really translate into a genuinely inclusive political settlement. A key lesson is that searching for actors to channel resources through at all costs can do more harm than good.

Moving forward, it is important that international actors adopt a long-term view and recognise the slow progress likely in supporting Afghanistan's process towards an inclusive political settlement. This is particularly important in view of the pressure for more short-term, military actions that will likely emerge as IS and similar groups are reportedly stepping up their presence in the country. Additionally, efforts need to continue to support a wide variety of local-level actors, religious leaders and civil society to contribute to the national transition processes in locally appropriate ways and to allow for genuinely accountable leaders to emerge.

4.3 Abusive and unaccountable allies fuel conflicts

The empowerment of former warlords ended up fuelling the conflict in three important ways. First, the Afghan public had previously experienced abuse at the hands of the warlords, who were now brought back to power. This created a challenge in terms of winning public trust for the new political settlement and establishing a representative government.

Second, the continued existence of militias and armed groups with links to local- and national-level government officials, criminals and warlords remains a serious threat to peace and security in the country.

Third, the inclusion of warlords in the 2001 government entrenched abusive and undemocratic actors and their networks within the state system and gave them control of public resources. They were then in a position to resist any efforts that could threaten their interests, including eradication of the drugs trade and combating corruption.⁴⁵⁵ At the same time, the high volume of international assistance overwhelmed local capacity and oiled the machinery of corrupt and criminal networks, thus undermining the potential for establishing an accountable and effective state. The Petraeus report of 2011 estimated that about \$360 million of the US's assistance in Afghanistan had ended up in the hands of the Taliban and criminals, or political elites with ties to them.⁴⁵⁶ International actors were also let down by the corruption attached to contractors, who paid up to \$5.2 million in protection money to the Taliban.⁴⁵⁷ Despite some later anti-corruption and public financial management efforts, the massive increase in government-linked corruption during the international intervention became a major grievance for Afghan citizens, and international actors inadvertently fuelled this dynamic.

An alternative approach may have been to stop, or at the very least not to increase, military and development assistance when it became clear how much was being lost to corruption and protection payments. At the same time, investing in leadership capacity as early as possible can make an important difference in terms of increasing the pool of individuals playing constructive roles in government. Lessons have to be learnt from these approaches for future support to Afghanistan.

⁴⁵⁵ Waldman, M. (2008), p. 26

⁴⁵⁶ Riechmann, D. and Lardner, R. (2011), 'US \$360M lost to corruption in Afghanistan', *Army Times/Associated Press*, 16 August, www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2011/08/18/360m_lost_to_insurgents_criminals_in_afghanistan/

⁴⁵⁷ Giustozzi, A. with Ibrahim, N. (2012), p. 40

4.4 Supporting the emergence of peace actors is a complex and long-term task

Afghanistan's long history of conflict means that a reconciliation process is crucial to allow for peace actors to emerge. The emphasis on a military-led strategy did not leave much space for reconciliation, since the parties were effectively still at war. Regional and ethnic-based conflicts thus still thrive, fuelled by national politics and the way in which former warlords have reclaimed political power post-2001.

The international community supported the *Loya Jirgas* at the time of the Bonn negotiations in 2001 and again 10 years later, and this was one way of getting input from a broader representation of society. Yet truly inclusive peace processes need to reach beyond tribal leaders into marginalised constituencies, including women, but also young people, diaspora and religious leaders. Negotiating with and resourcing corrupt elites in effect excludes other social forces from emerging and asserting a voice and vision for the future. Investigating the options for engaging with local *shura/jirgas* earlier on may have generated quick impacts on local conflict and justice issues and opened up space for conversations about the future. At the same time, early interventions on strengthening the rural economy and agriculture may have been helpful in shifting dynamics on the ground by improving people's livelihoods and giving them a stake in peaceful development.

Many peace meetings and peace consultations were eventually supported but it is unclear to what extent these enabled progress towards an inclusive national peace dialogue at all relevant levels. Many efforts to support civil society, particularly on peacebuilding and women's rights issues, appeared to be tokenistic, failing to sustain important civil society voices and connecting them to government policy-making. The transition period is an opportunity to review the successes and challenges of these activities and design support to the next phase of engagement on reconciliation and conflict transformation. Future engagement needs to focus on initiatives that bring civil society in all its forms into the government-led peace process, for instance the Afghanistan Civil Society Organisations Network for Peace (ACSONP) initiative to develop a civil society peace strategy, with broad community endorsement and a lead role played by women's organisations. While not a legal document, the strategy is supported by some female MPs and the HPC.⁴⁵⁸ UNAMA also supported eleven Afghan civil society networks and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to conduct countrywide consultations on peace priorities, develop local road maps for peace and a ten-point national agenda for peace (see box below).⁴⁵⁹

The Afghan People's Dialogue for Peace's 10-point plan for sustainable peace

1. Promote responsive state institutions and tackle corruption
2. Strengthen security institutions and curb violations by them
3. Disarm and disempower illegal armed groups and other pro-government militias
4. Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity
5. Promote women's rights and their role in peacebuilding
6. Enable youth through fostering job creation and strengthening the education system
7. Realise equitable social and economic development
8. Ensure inclusivity in the peace process
9. Strengthen community-based dispute resolution mechanisms
10. Neutralise spoilers of peace (including neighbouring states)

Another area for strategic focus is to ensure that micro-level peacebuilding initiatives are connected to macro-level ones in order to have a greater overall impact.

⁴⁵⁸ Oxfam (2014), *Women and inclusive peacebuilding in Afghanistan*, (October), p. 6

⁴⁵⁹ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and 11 civil society networks (2014), *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace: Building the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process, Local Road Maps for Peace*, (June), p. 1–2. http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/Eng_%20Report%20-%20Afghan%20Peoples%20Dialogues.pdf

4.5

International policies and actions can further fuel conflicts

At various points during the course of the international intervention, there was recognition that some international approaches were fuelling grievances, and attempts were made to address these. For instance, the night raids and house searches of the early years were officially stopped as they caused much resentment among the population. It is possible, however, that covert operations still employ these techniques. Culturally inappropriate behaviour created mistrust and resentment in the early years of the intervention. US military programmes later on tried to address this through providing basic language and cultural awareness training.⁴⁶⁰ NATO also made concerted efforts to monitor and reduce civilian casualties caused by international forces, resulting in a significant reduction over the course of the intervention.

The presence of large numbers of foreign troops was used by the Taliban and their allies to encourage popular resistance to the international intervention and recruit fighters. The 2008 US Afghanistan review seemingly took this into account,⁴⁶¹ although the 2014 exit plan was probably mostly motivated by an unwillingness to make an open-ended troop commitment rather than in response to Taliban propaganda. Drones were increasingly used, which may have been seen by some to be a less invasive and more targeted way of eliminating Taliban and al-Qaeda targets. However, civilian casualties still occur during drone strikes and the international troop numbers did not reduce alongside the increase in drone attacks. Ultimately, the international forces still engaged in military combat, which in itself caused resentment among sections of the population. Although most international troops have been withdrawn, the remaining US troops still have a combat function within their overall mandate and need to mitigate negative impacts and perceptions of their continued presence.

4.6 Regional allies can fuel conflict or play dual roles

At the regional level, the US's strategic relationship with Pakistan has been a constant contradiction in the strategy as well. While elements within the Pakistani state have clearly been playing a negative role, sheltering the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and allowing recruitment in the refugee camps, the government also shared intelligence and provided logistics and supply routes for the international intervention. For this, they have received significant military and development assistance from the US and other Western actors. Not only does this dual role create problems for Pakistan's own internal security, but it enables the continued destabilisation of Afghanistan and undermines what the US and its allies have been trying to achieve. International actors have tried to apply pressure as well as incentivise different behaviours in Pakistan, but the continued willingness to accept and legitimise past military governments in Islamabad has arguably fuelled extremism in Afghanistan and globally.

Some argue that Pakistani policymakers – in particular its military leaders and the ISI – did not believe that the US and its allies would commit to a large-scale and long-term intervention in Afghanistan. They were therefore content with playing this dual role and waiting for the international forces to leave. A clear long-term commitment to Afghanistan from the international community early on – combined with greater pressure on Islamabad to tackle militants in rights-respecting but effective ways – may have changed this calculation.

Ultimately, Pakistan needs to be reassured that its interests in Afghanistan and domestically will not be compromised by India's influence in Afghanistan. Supporting President Ghani's efforts at rapprochement could be one way to achieve this, while working with China, Russia, other Central Asian countries and Gulf country allies may also provide opportunities to shift Pakistani incentives. Alongside this, encouraging

⁴⁶⁰ Mirahmadi, M., Ziad, W. and Farooq, M. (2014), p. 28

⁴⁶¹ Katzman, K. (2012), p. 19

civilian oversight of the Pakistani military and engaging with the Pakistan government on its internal political and security challenges and the ways in which this is expressed in its foreign policy, remains crucial.

Conclusion

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY now has an opportunity to learn from the past and support Afghanistan's transition to a more peaceful future. Achieving this will require prioritising locally led processes that aim to include all sections of society and forge a common agenda for the country's future. The scale-down of international investment in Afghanistan presents an opportunity for a long-term, thoughtful and coordinated engagement that is realistic about the expected pace of change, the absorptive capacity of Afghan institutions and the risks of fuelling unhelpful dynamics like corruption and militarism. In particular, the international community should:

- Provide political support to the current government in its engagement in peace talks with the Taliban and in improving the relationship with important neighbouring countries like Pakistan.
- Support reconciliation initiatives among Afghans with a view to improving community-level relationships and linking up micro-level impacts to a national dialogue on a peaceful vision for the future.
- Work with the government and civil society to promote long-term development objectives, taking care not to fuel corruption, and re-directing funding if it is proven to fuel corrupt networks.
- Support the Afghanistan National Police and state justice institutions to provide civilian policing and effectively resolve grievances at the local level, within a national framework that allows for checks and balances across the system.
- Support traditional justice mechanisms and civil society to strengthen human and women's rights in their adjudication processes in locally appropriate ways.

Most importantly, the lessons from Afghanistan need to be learnt. The Taliban have not been defeated militarily and other groups like the Islamic State (IS) operate in Afghanistan. The heart of the international engagement in this context needs to be supporting local actors working towards an inclusive political settlement in the country and making progress on development aims. Any new military responses need to be subservient to the overall political strategy. Otherwise, the international community would risk contributing to further social and political fragmentation, renewed violence and weakened civilian governance. Not only would that be a disaster for Afghanistan, but it would also increase the threat of terrorism and insecurity, in Afghanistan, the region and further afield.

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Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

In recent years Western actors including the US, UK, and the EU have put responses to terrorism, violent extremism and instability among their foremost priorities. Yet, despite the investment of huge resources – primarily military, but also financial, human and political – by Western actors, the results of this action have been mixed at best.

There has not been sufficiently full and frank public debate about the lessons of past engagement in countries where a global terror threat has been identified, nor about how future engagement could be improved in the interests of building lasting peace founded on the fulfilment of human rights. However, failure to recognise and pursue effective peacebuilding alternatives to these approaches could condemn Western actors and their partners to a vicious circle that they can ill afford: multiplying instability wherever they attempt to reduce it, and in response becoming ever more belligerent in the face of renewed threats, while compromising their commitments to democracy, justice and human rights. In the discussion paper *Dilemmas of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding*, Saferworld provided a review of global evidence on the impacts of existing approaches, and suggested a number of constructive directions for improved policy.

This report on Afghanistan is accompanied by two other reports on Somalia and Yemen. Together, they explore the issues identified in the initial discussion paper through detailed examination of specific country contexts from a peacebuilding perspective – in order to stimulate further debate on the lessons learnt.

COVER PHOTO: A member of the Afghan National Police (ANP) patrols through a poppy field in Mian Poshteh, a major trading centre for opium and weapons that supplied the Taliban, in Helmand province. © KATE HOLT/IRIN



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