

# TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY INTERVENTIONS TO LONG-TERM COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICY

The case of Afghanistan (2001 - 2016)

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# Map of Afghanistan



Map No. 3958 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS  
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## Preface

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This report is part of a research project that assesses how military interventions can best prepare the ground for an effective long-term counter-terrorism policy. Three different cases have been studied, and they have each provided the input for the policy relevant recommendations that are presented in this report. The case studies concern the military intervention and transition in Afghanistan (2001), Libya (2011) and Mali (2013). The primary objectives of this research were:

- To identify key success factors and best practices to be able to transform a broad military intervention, whether using a counter-insurgency or comprehensive approach, into a more limited, both in size and scope, counter-terrorism policy.
- To identify elements for a longer-term counter-terrorism policy that would focus on alleviating the threat from terrorist groups, reinforcing host nation capacity and addressing some of the causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

This project was conducted by Leiden University, the Australian National University (ANU) and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). An initial workshop was organised to help formulate the research questions and structure the reports. Subsequently, for each case study a draft report formed the setting for a one day, high-level expert meeting. A mix of around thirty policy-makers (including several serving or retired generals), politicians (including two former Ministers of Defence) and international academics from different backgrounds attended the seminars and provided extremely valuable feedback on the draft reports.

The high-level expert meetings were organised as follows:

- Initial workshop to determine the framework study, held on 4 February 2015, Brussels, Belgium
- Libya, held on 29 June 2015, The Hague, The Netherlands
- Afghanistan, held on 10 September 2015, Brussels, Belgium
- Mali, held on 7 December 2015, Lille, France

The project has been made possible by NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme.

# Policy Recommendations

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## A. Pre-intervention phase: improving decision-making by governments

- 1. Prevention is better than intervention** A dearth of political will has notoriously thwarted attempts at preventing outbreaks of major conflict through binding decisions of the UN Security Council, but a range of other tools are available. These include measures to address factors such as the sponsorship of disruptive actors by states, looting of state resources by corrupt political leaders, and the spread of organised criminal activity.
- 2. Knowledge networks** When capacity is not in-house, a knowledge-network could ensure that relevant cultural, historical and linguistic knowledge is quickly made available and accessible when necessary. Trust, however, ‘has a face’ and networks need to be actively maintained. Furthermore, conflict situations are invariably complex, and it may be necessary to access a range of different kinds of expertise – political, economic, legal and anthropological – in order to secure a balanced picture.
- 3. Early warning and Intelligence** The world is full of potential conflicts and budding crises. There will always be surprises, but an early warning methodology can ensure that governments are not caught wholly unprepared. Good intelligence on potentially unstable regions and countries is indispensable to support decision-making during crisis-situations. While intelligence agencies naturally focus on identified and potential adversaries, a risk management approach necessitates capacity with respect to areas that may seem stable and benign, but are not. Whether within intelligence, Defence or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, knowledge centres of specific crisis prone-regions should be nurtured. Making better use of existing early-warning networks and knowledge centres may be a low-cost way of accessing relevant information.
- 4. Meaning making** Once a crisis or conflict has erupted, it is important to discern what it is about and what is at stake. Through an in depth analysis of the drivers of conflict, organisations can take stock of the potential local, regional and international implications. A thorough answer to “what is happening and why is it important?” leads to a better preparation for the question “what should we

do?” that is invariably posed by politicians and decision-makers. Meaning-making frames the situation and is vital for garnering national and international support for an active policy on the issue.

- 5. International support** Obtaining support from regional actors is very important in the pre-intervention phase, although some regions, such as Southwest Asia, lack strong regional organizations. A broad support base can translate to a strong UN mandate for action. Nonetheless, the views of neighbouring countries can also be instructive. It is important also to note that support can dwindle over time; one way to minimise this risk is to have in place mechanisms of on-going engagement with regional actors.
- 6. Mapping local partners** An intervening force will be judged at least in part by the company it chooses to keep. As a crisis develops and a military intervention becomes possible, local stakeholders and partners will need to be mapped. Some of these may prove to be reliable primary sources, possessing a situational awareness that national decision-makers and policy officers often lack. Others should best be avoided. International actors can end up inadvertently furthering the interests of unappetising local actors; this happened frequently in Afghanistan after 2001.
- 7. Legal mandate** A precise legal mandate at the outset is vital to minimise the risk of subsequent disputes over exactly what actions a mission can properly involve. This is important in maintaining support for an intervention in intervening states. Furthermore, public disputes over the purpose of an intervention risk emboldening those whose activities the intervention is designed to disrupt.
- 8. Establishing a strategic narrative** Framing and bias in the media coverage of events can affect public support for or against an intervention and can prevent decision-makers from receiving a balanced overview of the situation in theatre. This can be offset by clear and coherent strategic narratives articulated by state leaders and the spokespersons of alliances and international organizations. This was arguably lacking in Afghanistan until at least 2008-2009, in part because the invasion of Iraq in 2003 forced NATO countries to improvise in the Afghanistan theatre. It is therefore vital that any intervention be accompanied by appropriate strategies for the dissemination of information that can show how an intervention will serve the interests of the audience at home. In the host-nation state, the intervening powers will have to counter in a nuanced and sophisticated fashion the narratives being disseminated by opponents of the intervention. Too often, international actors focus simply on the spreading of images themselves



doing what they think is good, rather than identifying the concerns of locals and responding to them.

**9. Contingency planning** Early contingency planning by the relevant government ministries, including Foreign Affairs and Defence, is a precondition for effective eventual deployment of military assets. While this might not seem politically opportune at the time, and send an escalatory signal if made public, militaries need a minimum time-frame to mobilize technically and prepare forces for deployment. In Libya, NATO had weeks to plan and prepare for the intervention, and this proved just enough to launch the attack when the executive ordered it. The case of Mali illustrated how different planning scenarios developed by the French Ministry of Defence proved instrumental in allowing a rapid military response to a surprise jihadist attack on Southern Mali.

**10. Action over inaction** When the spectre of impending massacres (framed as a ‘Rwanda’ or ‘Srebrenica’) raises its head, politicians prefer action over inaction. The lack of available information, or uncertainty pertaining to the long-term consequences of intervention, are of secondary consequence, just as a fire-fighter is not concerned by water damage. The Libyan intervention was in response to what was perceived to be an impending massacre at Benghazi, and the subsequent defeat of the rebels. While it inadvertently detracted from the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, future crises could again test its underlying validity.

**11. Long-term implications** With fast news cycles and short term politics demanding rapid decisions, bureaucracies must reserve time and capacity to analyse the potential long-term implications of intervention or non-intervention. While ministerial departments exist to support the political course and line, a red-team construction or devil’s advocate office could offer an impartial dissenting opinion. Scenario planning would be an ideal instrument for high-level policy makers to illustrate possible outcomes or ‘end states’ of active involvement, and it is important to include non-military angles.

## **B. Entry phase: the military intervention**

**1. Clear political objective** An intervention should have a clear overarching political objective. Operation Serval in Mali serves as an example of a clear objective and mission. In response to the Malian government’s cry for help, the French military intervened to stop the Salafi-Jihadist attack on the South. The objective was to restore national territorial integrity, by reconquering the north from the three ‘occupying’ terrorist groups. NATO’s intervention in Libya was

less clear-cut. It was mandated to impose a no-fly zone to protect civilians. The US, France and the UK were at pains to deny that ‘regime change’ was the objective, but emphasised that there could be no solution with Gaddafi remaining in power. This considerably complicated the military operation and the strategic narrative.

2. **Speed of decision-making** For escalating international conflict situations and crises, assuming that the intervening power works with a clear political objective and plans well, the faster an intervention is deployed, the greater its chances of success. Paradoxically, crises often have to attain a certain level of severity before enough political support in the intervening state can be mustered for active involvement. Appropriate contingency planning is essential if an intervention is to occur expeditiously.
3. **Military tactics subservient to political strategy** Once combat has started, Ministries of Defence tend to dominate policy on an intervention, often overshadowing Ministries of Foreign Affairs or the Cabinet Office. This risks an excessive focus on tactical military objectives, to the detriment of overarching strategic (political) goals. Joint planning for the transition is required from the moment the intervention starts, with appropriate input from interested parties such as police and the NGO sector.
4. **Light versus heavy footprint** A ‘light footprint’ with no boots on the ground will minimize risks of entanglement and maximize local ownership, but similarly limit the ability of the international community to provide security during the transition. A strong and decisive host nation government can compensate for this, but post-intervention Libya has illustrated how insecurity tends to be self-perpetuating, and Afghanistan suffered greatly from the failure to expand ISAF beyond Kabul in early 2002. Without a basic level of human security, attempts at state-building, basic humanitarian programmes or economic development will be stifled.
5. **End date or end state** A mission can be mandated for a fixed period of time or made conditional on certain achievements or criteria. The choice is an important one and determines the leeway for the political debate on an eventual prolongation of the mission. An ‘end-date’ mission provides a fixed timetable to exit and necessitates a renegotiation of the mandate if any kind of further involvement is deemed desirable, while an ‘end state’ mission offers more room for manoeuvre to adapt the mission to domestic or local circumstances. An ‘end-date’ model, if it proves overly-optimistic, can create real dilemmas over how properly to respond to unanticipated threats to an orderly transition.

- 6. Collateral damage** Precise targeting to avoid collateral damage and civilian casualties is *a conditio sine qua non* for military interventions. This is not only dictated by humanitarian law (*ius in bello*); it is also essential for retaining public support. While civilian infrastructure such as power stations and media centres can in certain cases form legitimate military targets, their destruction will complicate later phases. During Operation Unified Protector in Libya, the oil and gas sector were wisely spared destruction and would provide the state, when not threatened by non-state actors, with essential income.
- 7. Structuring intelligence cooperation** Sharing of intelligence is based on trust. The Five Eyes intelligence community has institutionalized sharing to a large extent, and during NATO's mission in Afghanistan much effort was devoted to changing mentalities from 'need to know' to 'need to share'. Intelligence sharing within NATO but outside the Five Eyes is often still *ad hoc*, and much can be gained by setting up a new intelligence hub at the start of the mission. While the Dutch were temporarily admitted to the Five Eyes community during their tenure as lead nation for Uruzgan (Afghanistan), French requests to accede during the Libya operation were rebuffed. Once the decision has been taken by a coalition to intervene, direct covenants and agreements between participating intelligence entities would greatly facilitate the exchange of data and information. Fusion cells and a focus that is not solely limited to 'enemy forces' would greatly increase the value of intelligence for decision-makers.
- 8. Arming rebels** Arming factions on the ground, even when part of a seemingly secular opposition to a regime in Africa/the Middle East, entails both short and long-term risks. The choice for a light footprint intervention, such as the initial American overthrow of the Taliban regime and NATO's campaign in Libya, implies that local rebel forces must do the fighting and need arms and ammunition to succeed. In Libya, different rebel factions were armed covertly in order to avoid directly contravening the international arms embargo that had been imposed at the start of the conflict. Most importantly, the weapons – whether classified as 'light' or not – can end up in the wrong hands, or be turned on the wrong people as allied rebels become Islamist opponents.
- 9. Addressing critical shortages** Since NATO's 1999 Operation Allied Force (Kosovo), several critical shortfalls in capacity, specifically on the European side, have been identified. These include Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) platforms and capacity, aerial refuelling, precision munitions and strategic transport. These shortages have still not been alleviated. France's Operation Serval illustrated how national combat capacity proved sufficient to tackle the jihadist groups in Mali; but it was

completely dependent on Allied logistical support to enable the operations. Addressing the shortages in Allied capacity will reduce the fragile foundations of intervention capacity, and allow for more efficient military operations.

- 10. Analysing regional fallout** Before the intervention and during the transition, implications for the wider region need to be analysed. This can best be done through intra-interdepartmental task forces in Ministries of Foreign Affairs, that transcend organisational divides such as the MENA and Sub-Saharan categorizations. Interconnected relationship between countries, ethnic groups/tribes and regions need to be considered. The possible responses of regional ‘spoilers’ need to be taken very seriously: the continuing availability of operating sanctuaries in Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban gravely complicated efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

### **C. Transition phase: towards local ownership**

- 1. Maintain momentum** After the successful entry phase, high-level decision-makers can easily be distracted by other crises and lose interest in the slow process of transition. Libya provides the textbook example of a united front organising an intervention, and dissolving the moment that the military objective was met, with multiple problems left unsolved that could potentially prove very damaging to the interests of the coalition’s members.
- 2. Ensuring the provision of security** Once the main combat phase is over, the authorities are expected to facilitate a quick return to normalcy and provide a modicum of security. A state that cannot manage this risks losing legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Without assistance from intervening powers, or an international security force, this can be an insurmountable challenge for the incoming government, as the case study of Libya illustrated. The stated NATO objective of protecting civilians effectively ceased once Gaddafi was killed, and while both the intervening powers and the host-nation state were adamant in not wanting ‘foreign’ boots on the ground, the security situation nosedived as a result.
- 3. Do not hasten elections** The international community has indicated a strong preference for rapidly organising national elections in the host-nation state after the military intervention. This is to confer legitimacy on their new governmental partners, and to fulfil essential criteria allowing the transfer of aid and donor money. It is, however, folly to expect an inexperienced government, devoid of a functioning bureaucracy or a capable security force, to perform even elementary governmental functions in a complex post-conflict situation. While the newly

elected might enjoy international legitimacy, they will have none at home if they cannot provide basic security and state services to the local population. In hindsight, the elections in Libya were held too early, with the government lacking essential capacity even to have a chance of success. Elections are divisive activities that create losers as well as winners; and they are rule-governed activities that lose all credibility if the key rules on candidature, voting and scrutiny cannot be dispassionately enforced.

- 4. Whole of government approach** During the Libya intervention, the United Kingdom dispatched an “International Stabilisation Response Team” (ISRT) to the country, consisting of different experts in the fields of security, economy and justice. This concept of sending a multi-disciplinary team to take stock of the local situation, meet stakeholders and set out a transition plan deserves follow-up in future crises. Ideally the focus would not just be on the short term and there would have to be some follow-up. Integrating the approaches of diplomacy, development and defence (3D) combines the necessary skills-sets and ensures policy is aligned between the involved government departments. Such a comprehensive approach, which the Netherlands and Canada sought to follow in Afghanistan, is not a panacea, but it can improve the quality of performance on the ground.
- 5. Counter-terrorism versus counterinsurgency** It is important to distinguish between insurgents, terrorists and criminals, as the designated label channels a policy reaction that is anchored in the very different fields of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency (COIN) or law enforcement, each centred around its own principles, dogmas and common practices. The COIN approach as conducted in Afghanistan became very military-centric, and more sequential (shape, clear, hold and build) than for instance the comprehensive approach, which could see simultaneous efforts of diplomats, aid workers and the military. A counter-terrorism approach that focuses on removing the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism would ideally be civilian-led.
- 6. Focus on good governance** In the long run, good governance probably matters more than infrastructural development, although it may be much harder to deliver. To the extent that international actors have any capacity to influence the form that governance takes in the aftermath of an intervention, they will need to show their hands early. There is typically only one chance to get things right, and if the structure and functioning of government prove dysfunctional, there are likely to be plenty of beneficiaries of the dysfunctional system who will fight hard to retain it. Afghanistan after 2001 provides an unhappily clear example of this.

- 7. Security Sector Reform** It is important to start early and commit for the long run where SSR is concerned, building partnerships with key institutions and figures. An inclusive approach through a national dialogue campaign is essential. Failure on this front is likely to blight endeavours on many others, as the case of Libya clearly illustrates. Effort should focus not just on the technical capacity of the soldier or police officer, but also the organisation behind him or her. Without a sound HR-policy, a clear command and control structure and effective administrative and logistical procedures, trained units cannot be deployed or sustained.
- 8. Strengthen human security not just state security** Much capacity building in the security sector is state-centric and focused on institutions and security organisations. In many conflict areas, including areas in Afghanistan and Mali, the police and military are the cause of insecurity and are distrusted by parts of the population. This needs to be recognised as a problem, since misbehaviour by agencies of the state will ultimately contaminate the state's reputation and legitimacy. The intervening powers will need to be aware of power structures and networks within the politico-security establishment, to prevent vested interests trumping human security in the country.
- 9. Bottom up approach** In deeply tribal societies, once institutional deadlock has occurred, a top-down approach will not resolve the problem. Local stakeholders will need to be stimulated to cooperate and contribute to conflict resolution at the micro-level. To the extent that they can, international actors should resist the temptation to see a strong central state as 'the' solution to a country's problems. In any transition, there are troubling questions to be asked about the appropriate scope, strength, and structure of the state for the future. Rather than rushing discussion of these questions, it is better if possible to address them through inclusive dialogue between many different social forces, with special attention to groups that might otherwise be marginalised, including women and ethnic minorities.
- 10. Beware of militias** Militias can provide local security where government capacity is lacking, but the solution is short term. Militias are only accountable to the local strong-man, their interests do not align with those of the national government and their *modus operandi* often entails violation of basic human rights. In Libya, the militias refused the government's instruction to disarm, and there was no capacity or political will to enforce the order. They were subsequently integrated into the security structures, initially formalising their position and strengthening their capacity, and later causing the fracturing of the security apparatus along factional lines. In Afghanistan, some similar problems

were encountered, partly because international actors were not particularly skilled at distinguishing local power holders with some degree of legitimacy from local power holders who were mainly coercive and extractive.

- 11. Provision of basic state services** A population in a conflict area does not judge the government on its counter-terrorism strategy, but on the provision of basic state services such as electricity, drinking water, health care and education. If these are non-existent or seriously lacking, government legitimacy will suffer. In the north of Mali, two years after the French intervention, the state is still struggling to deliver these basic services. As a result, certain elements of the population are developing some nostalgia for the time that the jihadists were in control, and actually managed to ensure more consistent electricity provision than the state.
- 12. Becoming a battlefield for regional powers** Weak states unwittingly invite strong neighbours to safeguard their own interests on their territory. This can take benign forms, but can also fuel local conflicts when foreign powers actively support their own proxies or allies. In Libya, both Qatar and Turkey have supported Islamist factions that oppose the elected government in Tobruk. In Afghanistan, Pakistan has played a nefarious role in consistently providing a safe-haven to the strategic leadership of the Taliban. While in the latter case, the US and NATO have deliberately chosen not to confront their ally, strong international diplomacy could have limited external involvement in Libya. Addressing this challenge can require frank and difficult conversations with close allies.
- 13. Metrics for progress** Quality data can be very useful for appraising aspects of a transition process, especially if they are gathered with sensitivity to local complexity, and can be analysed in a statistically-sophisticated fashion. At the same time, over reliance on rigidly-structured metrics, such as enemy killed in action or territory nominally under control of the government, risks neglecting important factors that may not lend themselves easily to quantification, such as patron-client relationships within elites. The best data are likely to be those gathered after careful consultation with specialists on the countries or areas under discussion. The right metrics need to be determined at the beginning of the deployment, as changing criteria will pollute databases and render comparisons difficult.
- 14. Military exit is not end of involvement** Public discourse revolves around ‘exit strategies’, ‘entanglement’ and ‘bringing the boys home’. This frame is misleading, as involvement in and engagement with the host-nation typically

does not end, but takes on a different, civilian shape. The earlier the civilian effort has been part of the intervention, the easier it will be to reduce the military element and maintain continuity. An integrated approach from the outset has more to offer than an attempt to mount a sudden ‘civilian surge’; appropriate personnel may not be available for the latter, and expectations of what can result may be unrealistically high.

**15. The problem of narcotics** The drug trade can play an enormous role in fuelling local conflict and increasing insecurity. Drugs, however, are not the most significant part in the revenue model of the Salafi-Jihadist groups in Mali (hostage ransoms), Afghanistan (funds from *awqaf* and wealthy donors in the Gulf) or Libya (crime and other traffic). Local governments play a more important role in the drug trade, often promoting or facilitating the traffic of drugs or preventing the prosecution of smugglers. Approaching the drug trade through the prism of counter-terrorism is therefore counterproductive, as the primary effort must be focused on reforming government institutions and cultures. The Afghanistan case suggests that at a certain point it can become very difficult to crack down on narcotics because of the risk that large numbers of small producers and labourers might be driven straight into the arms of the armed opposition.

**16. Managing expectations** Too often, interventions lead to unrealistically high expectations which are then disappointed. Rather than fuelling such expectations, it is better to try to create low expectations, and then exceed them. Interventions create their own momentum, and can result in unintended consequences that are greater than the envisaged ones. Avoiding rigidity, the intervening powers and host nation state will need to navigate crises while continuing to work towards a politically inclusive settlement. Both the tasks of rebuilding conflict-stricken societies and addressing the causes that contribute to terrorism are long-term efforts, requiring time, perseverance and a dose of good fortune.



# 1 Introduction

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Afghanistan is not a ‘post-conflict country’. It has been substantially disrupted ever since the overthrow of President Muhammad Daoud in a coup in April 1978. Nearly forty years on from those events, both military personnel and non-combatant civilians in Afghanistan continue to be attacked by the Taliban and groups associated with them. In late July 2015, it was reported that the casualty rate for the Afghan national security forces in the first six months of 2015 was 50 per cent higher than in the equivalent period of 2014, with 4100 soldiers and police killed, and 7800 wounded.<sup>1</sup> Civilian casualties for 2015 amounted to 11,002 people killed or injured, with 62 per cent of civilian casualties occurring at the hands of the armed opposition.<sup>2</sup> Deaths and injuries on this scale are much more what one would associate with an ongoing insurgency than with occasional or sporadic acts of terrorism, and raise doubts as to whether Afghanistan is yet at the point where one can talk about ‘transitioning’ to long-term counter-terrorism, as opposed to recognising terrorism as a challenge to be confronted in the future. Yet in July 2015, a Briefing Paper published in London by Chatham House quoted the eminent US academic Dr. Barnett R. Rubin as remarking that ‘a counter-terrorism strategy, rather than nation-building, *always* represented the core of the US engagement’ in Afghanistan from 2001.<sup>3</sup> In the light of these realities, any notion of a simple linear progression from intervention to counterinsurgency to counter-terrorism needs to be qualified at the outset where Afghanistan is concerned.

But that said, it can nonetheless be useful in a situation as fraught as Afghanistan’s to spend some time thinking ahead. The announcement in late July 2015 that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had died in April 2013 has the potential to trigger fragmentation of the movement, with ‘succession’ to his ‘leadership’ having been marked by tension between different factions.<sup>4</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Goldstein, ‘Casualties Up, Afghan Forces Try to Hang On’, *The New York Times*, 23 July 2015

<sup>2</sup>*Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* (Kabul: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, February 2016) p.1. The report also notes (at p.1) that for the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2015, some 21,323 civilians were killed and 37,413 injured.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara J. Stapleton and Michael Keating, *Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001-14: An Incoherent Approach* (London: Briefing, Afghanistan: Opportunity in Crisis Series No.10, Asia Programme, Chatham House, July 2015) p.2. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup>See Carlotta Gall, ‘Mullah Mohammad Omar, Enigmatic Leader of Afghan Taliban, Is Dead’, *The New York Times*, 31 July 2015; Joseph Goldstein and Taimoor Shah, ‘Death of Leader Exposes Festering Divisions within the Taliban’, *The New York Times*, 31 July 2015.

confirmation of Omar's demise, Kabul was struck by three major bombings on 7 August, and a further blast at the entrance to Hamid Karzai International Airport, which could reflect a desire on the part of elements of the Taliban, or their backers, to signal that they remain a force even as they are afflicted by leadership tensions. In an audio message, the new Taliban 'leader' Akhtar Muhammad Mansour stated uncompromisingly that 'We should not believe in [rumours] of peace talks ... This jihad will continue for advancing the word of Allah and until there is an Islamic system in the country'.<sup>5</sup> All this tends to suggest that countering the threat that terrorism poses for ordinary Afghans as they go about their daily lives is likely to be a priority for any Afghan government for quite some time to come.

One further point needs to be made at the outset, since it haunts much of the discussion since 2001 about how Afghanistan might best be stabilised. Dealing with the situation in Afghanistan is greatly complicated by the relationship that exists between the armed opposition (the Taliban, the 'Haqqani network', and sundry other groups) and elements of the Pakistani state.<sup>6</sup> As recently as 1 March 2016, the Pakistani Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz, admitted in a presentation to the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington DC that the 'leadership' of the Afghan Taliban 'is in Pakistan'.<sup>7</sup> How to handle this is a dilemma with which international actors had struggled for more than a decade with no great success. The United States in particular has been far from candid about this problem, although Admiral Michael G. Mullen, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, on one occasion referred to the Haqqani network as a 'veritable arm' of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI).<sup>8</sup>

Western powers have proved exceedingly reluctant to take a strong stand on this issue. Pakistan until recently provided a major transit route for supplies going to Western forces in Afghanistan; and in addition, ever since the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Kate Clark, *The Triple Attack in Kabul: A message? If so, to whom?* (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 August 2015).

<sup>6</sup>See Shaun Gregory, 'The ISI and the War on Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol.30, no.12, 2007, pp.1013-1031; Matt Waldman, *The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents* (London: Discussion Paper no.18, Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, June 2010); William Maley, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations', in Michael Clarke and Ashutosh Misra (eds), *Pakistan's Stability Paradox: Domestic, regional and international dimensions* (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp.121-136; Bruce Riedel, *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011); and C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>See <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/sartaj-aziz-pakistans-foreign-security-policy/p37592>.

<sup>8</sup>Elisabeth Bumiller and Jane Perlez, 'Pakistan's Spies Are Tied To Raid On U.S. Embassy', *The New York Times*, 23 September 2011. On the Haqqani network more broadly, see Vahid Brown and Don Ressler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

in 1998, the United States has been very wary about imposing pressure on Pakistan lest it result in regime collapse and the emergence of a fundamentalist regime with nuclear weapons (a fear on which Pakistani leaders have shrewdly played in order to maximise their own freedom of action).<sup>9</sup> The surreal consequence, however, is that the language of ‘terrorism’ has been fairly studiously avoided when describing the activities of the Afghan Taliban, even though the Taliban routinely use direct violence against non-combatants for political purposes with a view to creating a disproportionate psychological effect. Indeed, they have not even been officially designated by the US Secretary of State as a ‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’. Instead, some Western leaders have pressed Afghanistan to negotiate with the Taliban.<sup>10</sup> Ordinary Afghans could be forgiven for finding Western approaches to terrorism quite perplexing.

The case of Afghanistan, therefore, is distinct in the number of key ways from other cases with which this project is concerned. First, the current problems that Afghanistan faces in terms of coping with insurgency and terrorism stretch back much further in time than in cases such as Libya or Mali, where the triggers for strife were much more recent. Second, in Afghanistan there has not been a neat shift from counterinsurgency to counter-terrorism; rather, as we shall see, there has been a great deal of on-the-ground improvisation by individual military leaders because of a lack of clear strategic vision as to exactly the nature of Afghanistan’s problems, and as to how they should best be managed. Third, Afghanistan’s problems are not just internal, but transnational: they reflect the complexities of the wider region in which Afghanistan is nested.<sup>11</sup> This paper elaborates these points as a basis for exploring how, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a counter-terrorism policy that serves Afghan as well as international needs might best be pursued.

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<sup>9</sup>See C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, ‘An Unworthy Ally: Time for Washington to Cut Pakistan Loose’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol.94, no.5, September-October 2015, pp.160-170.

<sup>10</sup>See Karen DeYoung, ‘British official urges Afghanistan to negotiate with Taliban, other insurgents’, *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2010.

<sup>11</sup>See Barnett R. Rubin, Ashraf Ghani, William Maley, Ahmed Rashid and Olivier Roy *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Peacemaking in a Regional Framework* (Bern: KOFF Peacebuilding Reports 1/2001, Centre for Peacebuilding, Swiss Peace Foundation, 2001).

## 2 Country and conflict

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### 2.1 National context

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, with a population that is overwhelmingly Muslim, although divided between a Sunni majority and a Shi'ite minority. Researchers have identified more than 50 different ethnic groups within its territory, with the largest single group being the Pushtuns.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, identities in Afghanistan tend to be complex, and ordinary Afghans typically dwell simultaneously in a number of different social worlds. While stereotypical images of Afghans abound as a result of the country's colourful history since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, those earlier times do not necessarily provide much useful guidance about 21<sup>st</sup> century Afghanistan, where the population is notably young, and since 2001 has been exposed to forces of globalisation on a scale never before experienced in the country.<sup>13</sup>

As a territorial unit, Afghanistan took shape as a buffer state between the expanding Russian Empire and British India, but it was only in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century that key administrative features of the modern state, such as a standing army and the capacity to gather taxes in cash rather than in kind, began to appear.<sup>14</sup> This consolidated the control of the central monarchy, which existed in Afghanistan until a coup in July 1973 overthrew the last Afghan king, Zahir Shah, who had occupied the throne for nearly 40 years. In the last decade of his rule, Zahir Shah had presided over an attempt to introduce some more 'democratic' elements in the Afghan political system. The effects, however, were patchy, and actually created space for disgruntled political elements, including leftists associated with the so-called *Khalq* ('Masses') and *Parcham* ('Banner') factions, and young Islamists influenced by ideas originating in the Middle

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<sup>12</sup> See Erwin Orywal (ed.), *Die ethnischen Gruppen Afghanistans: Fallstudien zu Gruppenidentität und Intergruppenbeziehungen* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1986); Conrad Schetter, *Ethnizität und ethnische Konflikte in Afghanistan* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> See Hayatullah Mohammadi, *Tasir-e jahanishodan bar farhang dar Afghanistan* (Kabul: Entesharat-e Farhang, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> On the evolution of the Afghan state, see Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826–1863)* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998); Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization 1880–1946* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Hasan Kawun Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

East, to mobilise. This formed part of the context for both the July 1973 coup against the King, and much more seriously the April 1978 Communist coup that overthrew President Daoud's Republic. The new Marxist rulers ran into difficulties fairly quickly, not only because of their internecine hostility to each other, but because they faced grave difficulties in winning legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Afghans. This in itself served as a reminder that the April 1978 coup was a product of fracturing within the Kabul-based political elite, rather than a reflection of mass demand for revolutionary change. As a result, resistance to the Communist regime, mounted by so-called *Mujahideen* groups, emerged quickly, and came to imperil the regime's very existence. This, in turn, provided the context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.<sup>15</sup>

It is now clear that the Soviets had hoped that their displacement of an unpopular Communist leader in Kabul, Hafizullah Amin, would be well received, creating an opportunity for them to withdraw their forces relatively rapidly and leave a more popular government behind. This, however, did not eventuate. The dependence of the new regime on Soviet assistance contaminated it from the outset, and the *Mujahideen*,<sup>16</sup> who developed operating bases in Pakistan to which millions of refugees had fled following the invasion, and who received covert assistance from the United States,<sup>17</sup> effectively denied the Soviets the ability to exercise control over the country. Indeed, when the Soviet Politburo, under the new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, took the decision in principle in November 1986 to withdraw from Afghanistan, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev was recorded in the transcript of the meeting as remarking that 'we have lost the battle for the Afghan people'.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet withdrawal was completed in

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<sup>15</sup>See Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985); Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985); Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Douglas A. Borer, *Superpowers Defeated: Vietnam and Afghanistan Compared* (London: Frank Cass, 1999); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.299-330; William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

<sup>16</sup>On the nature of the Afghan resistance, see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004); Rizwan Hussain, *Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Abdulkader Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008)

<sup>17</sup>See Bruce Riedel, *What we Won: America's Secret War in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014)

<sup>18</sup>See A.S. Grossman, 'Sekretnye dokumenty iz osobykh papok: Afganistan', *Voprosy istorii*, no.3, 1993, pp.3-33 at p.25.

February 1989, and the communist regime collapsed in April 1992, barely four months after it lost access to Soviet supplies at the end of the previous year.<sup>19</sup>

In some contemporary reports on Afghanistan, there is a tendency to treat the armed opposition to the Karzai and then the Ghani governments as simply an extension of the activities of the *Mujahideen* in the 1980s. This is at best an oversimplification. Some of the Taliban leaders had been affiliated loosely with the *Harakat-e inqilab-e Islami*, a so-called ‘moderate’ party led by Mawlawi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi; and Jalaluddin Haqqani had been a notable commander associated with the *Hezb-e Islami* of Mawlawi Younos Khalis. However, many of the more prominent members of post-2001 Afghan government also had *Mujahideen* backgrounds, and it was not until 1994, well after the collapse of the communist regime, that the Taliban movement even appeared on the scene. And its emergence had much more to do with Afghanistan’s vulnerable *regional* position than with the issues that drove the Afghan resistance to the Soviets in the 1980s.

## 2.2 International context

To understand this regional context, it is necessary to step back a little and contemplate the wider history of Southwest Asia. In 1893, a British official, Sir Mortimer Durand, drew a boundary between British India and Afghanistan which came to be known as the Durand line. The path that it took had the effect of dividing the Pushtun ethnic group between India and Afghanistan. When the partition of the subcontinent came into view in 1947, the Afghan government demanded that the Pushtuns in India have the option of uniting with their co-ethnics in Afghanistan. This, of course, did not happen; presented with the options of joining either India or the new state of Pakistan, Pushtuns in the Northwest Frontier voted to join Pakistan. The consequence, however, was that Afghanistan was the only state that voted against the admission of Pakistan to membership of the United Nations, and for the next 30 years, Afghanistan ironically had far more cordial relations with Hindu-majority India than with Muslim-majority Pakistan.

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<sup>19</sup> See Amin Saikal and William Maley (eds), *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Artemy M. Kalinosvsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Rodric Braithwaite, ‘The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan’, in Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack (eds), *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical, and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover and Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) pp.196-213.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan proved a generous host to Afghan refugees,<sup>20</sup> but at the same time, the Pakistani regime of Gen Zia ul-Haq was determined to avoid a situation in which Afghan nationalism would flourish as a potential future threat to Pakistan. For this reason, Zia and the ISI went out of their way to support radical Islamist elements in the Afghan resistance such as the *Hezb-e Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar rather than more secular, nationalist forces. (As Zia himself was promoting an agenda of Islamisation in Pakistan, this was hardly surprising in any case.) Apparently as a matter of *Realpolitik*, those leaders who succeeded Zia after his death in a plane crash in August 1988 adhered to the same basic script that Zia and the ISI had crafted.<sup>21</sup> What changed was the identity of the Islamists whom Pakistan acted to support. In the aftermath of the collapse of the communist regime, while most resistance parties came together to try to establish a new government,<sup>22</sup> the ISI-backed *Hezb-e Islami* of Hekmatyar rocketed Kabul as part of a strategy to deny any other forces the ability to exercise peaceful control over the capital. Hekmatyar's forces, however, proved unequal to the task of occupying or controlling significant territory, and it was in response to this that the Interior Minister of Pakistan, Major-General Nasseerullah Babar, moved to confect the new force that came to be known as the Taliban movement.<sup>23</sup> While Pakistan sought to deny that it was the Taliban's patron, President Musharraf later conceded that 'we had assisted in the rise of the Taliban',<sup>24</sup> and General Babar developed the habit, which infuriated the Pakistan Foreign Ministry, of referring

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<sup>20</sup>On the refugee population, see Nancy Hatch Dupree, 'The Demography of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan', in Hafeez Malik (ed.), *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) pp.366-395; Rüdiger Schöch, 'UNHCR and the Afghan Refugees in the early 1980s: Between Humanitarian Action and Cold War Politics', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol.27, no.1, 2008, pp.45-57; Daniel A. Kronenfeld, 'Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.21, no.1, 2008, pp.43-63; Susanne Schmeidl and William Maley, 'The Case of the Afghan Refugee Population: Finding Durable Solutions in Contested Transitions', in Howard Adelman (ed.), *Protracted Displacement in Asia: No Place to Call Home* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) pp.131-179.

<sup>21</sup>See Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992).

<sup>22</sup>See William Maley, 'The Future of Islamic Afghanistan', *Security Dialogue*, vol.24, no.4, December 1993, pp.383-396

<sup>23</sup>See, for background, William Maley (ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (London: Hurst & Co., 1998); Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Afghanistan, Al Qa'ida and the Holy War* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi (eds), *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup>Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: The Free Press, 2006) p.202.

to the Taliban as ‘our boys’.<sup>25</sup> The Taliban were a pathogenic rather than traditional force, and this was to have dire consequences for both Afghanistan *and* Pakistan.

One other important factor to note is that with the collapse of the communist regime in 1992, international attention rapidly drifted away from Afghanistan to other parts of the world. In particular, the wars of the Balkans distracted the attention of both the United States and the United Nations, and few powers went out of their way to monitor what was happening in Afghanistan. As a result, the Taliban takeover of Kandahar in 1994, Herat in 1995, and finally Kabul in 1996, attracted less attention than perhaps these developments merited. Indeed, barely a week after the Taliban took over Kabul, US Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphel stated that ‘We have no quarrel with the Taliban in terms of their political legitimacy or lack thereof’.<sup>26</sup> There is little evidence that the United States at this stage had much understanding at all of the new forces that were at loose in Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.3 Structural causes of conflict

The most profound contributing factor of a structural kind to ongoing conflict in Afghanistan was the substantial collapse of the state that followed the Soviet invasion in December 1979. This was long disguised by the aid flows, equivalent to a life-support system, that the USSR provided for its local clients; but when the communist regime collapsed, it rapidly became clear that the Afghan state had collapsed as well. The Afghan resistance in 1992, and for that matter the Taliban in 1996, found themselves controlling the symbols of a state rather than functioning bureaucratic instrumentalities that could penetrate society, mobilise resources, regulate behaviour, or sustain social order more broadly.<sup>28</sup> In this context two related problems became apparent. One was that there was no longer an actor called ‘the state’ that was capable of exercising a monopoly over legitimate means of violence, in the process offering security protections to ordinary people as they went about their everyday lives. The other was that the loyalties of many ordinary Afghans shifted away from the state to a range of non-state actors that could better provide them with protection or assistance.

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<sup>25</sup>See S. Iftikhar Murshed, *Afghanistan: The Taliban Years* (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2006) p.45.

<sup>26</sup>BBC *Newshour*, 3 October 1996.

<sup>27</sup>See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin, 2005); Roy Gutman, Gutman, *How We Missed the Story: Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, and the Hijacking of Afghanistan* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup>On these functions of the state, see Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) p.4.



When the Taliban appeared, some observers saw a silver lining in what others saw as a dark cloud, voicing the hope that their advent would bring peace to a war-torn territory.<sup>29</sup> This proved not to be the case. The Taliban ruled more on the basis of coercive capacity than popular legitimacy; their regime would not have collapsed so swiftly in 2001 if they had genuinely enjoyed generalised normative support. Much more seriously, as their policies left them internationally isolated, with only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates according them diplomatic recognition, they proved more than willing to welcome any ‘friend’ who might offer them the support that they craved. This was the context in which Al Qaeda managed to implant itself in Afghanistan, with ultimately dire consequences for its Taliban hosts.

## 2.4 Immediate causes of conflict

The international intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 had one very simple immediate cause: the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, planned by Al Qaeda from its sanctuary in Afghanistan. These attacks left 2,973 people dead.<sup>30</sup> It is virtually inconceivable that having been attacked as it was, the United States would have responded in any other way. The shock to US elite and mass opinion caused by the attacks was the greatest since the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941, but with the added factor that visual images of the attacks were almost instantly transmitted to a vast American television audience, whereas images of the Pearl Harbor attack found their way into popular consciousness more slowly through newsreel footage.

It is, of course, true that the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda were distinct forces;<sup>31</sup> and this gave rise to at least the theoretical possibility that Afghanistan could have avoided an intervention had Al Qaeda’s leader Osama Bin Laden been handed over to the Americans. But of this there was realistically never much prospect. Attempts by the ISI to persuade the Taliban to hand Bin Laden over to the US came to naught.<sup>32</sup> The belief that this objective was attainable overlooked two critical kinds of norms that linked Bin Laden with his Taliban hosts. On the one hand, a *norm of reciprocity* obliged the Taliban to protect Bin Laden because of assistance he had rendered to them in the past. On the other hand, a *norm of hospitality* encoded in Pushtun custom also demanded that

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<sup>29</sup>See, for example, Nancy DeWolf Smith, ‘These Rebels Aren’t So Scary’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 February 1995; James Fergusson, ‘Afghanistan: The Peace Brought by the Taliban’, *The Independent*, 19 February 1997; Ben R. Goldsmith, ‘A Victory to Fear or a Source of Hope?’, *The World Today*, vol.53, no.7, 1997, pp.182-184.

<sup>30</sup>See *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) p.311.

<sup>31</sup>See Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012).

<sup>32</sup>See John F. Burns, ‘Pakistan Makes Last-Ditch Appeal to Taliban’, *The New York Times*, 28 September 2001.

he be protected. The best measure of the force of these norms was that the Taliban were actually prepared to see their regime destroyed rather than violate these norms by handing over a guest.

## 2.5 Early warnings of conflict

One point that is not sufficiently recognised to this day is how abundant were the warning signs that disaster would likely flow from the Taliban's hospitality to Bin Laden. That Al Qaeda had the US in its sights was clear not just from Bin Laden's broad rhetoric,<sup>33</sup> and his explicit February 1998 'Declaration of Jihad against Jews and Crusaders',<sup>34</sup> but also from the terrorist attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on 7 August 1998, for involvement in which four of Bin Laden's associates were convicted in a US court in May 2001.<sup>35</sup> The embassy attacks prompted a number of measures directed against Bin Laden, starting with cruise missile strikes on Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan two weeks after the embassies had been struck. On 7 July 1999, the Clinton Administration froze all Taliban assets in the USA and banned commercial and financial ties between the Taliban and the USA.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in Resolution 1267 of 15 October 1999, the United Nations Security Council demanded that the Taliban turn over Bin Laden 'to appropriate authorities in a country where he has been indicted, or to appropriate authorities in a country where he will be returned to such a country, or to appropriate authorities in a country where he will be arrested and effectively brought to justice'. Resolution 1267 also contained a wide-ranging requirement for states to freeze 'funds and other financial resources' either belonging to the Taliban or available for them to use.<sup>37</sup> Further measures were adopted in Resolution 1333 of 19 December 2000. The need to take these measures should itself have ensured that the United States was on high alert. And to some degree the US intelligence community was, as the memoirs of US National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counter-terrorism Richard A. Clarke made clear.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the US system of information coordination, such as it was, failed to match warning signs coming to different agencies from different sources; and there is also evidence of some complacency about Al Qaeda from the higher echelons of the Bush Administration; on

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<sup>33</sup>See Flagg Miller, *The Audacious Ascetic: What the Bin Laden Tapes Reveal about Al Qa'ida* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015).

<sup>34</sup>'Nas Bayan al-Jabhah al-Islamiyah al-Alamiyah li-Jihad al-Yahud wa al-Salibiyyin', *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), 23 February 1998, p.3.

<sup>35</sup>See Peter L. Bergen, 'The Bin Laden Trial: What Did We Learn?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol.24, no.6, 2001, pp.429-434.

<sup>36</sup>*Federal Register*, vol.64, no.29, 7 July 1999.

<sup>37</sup>On these sanctions, see Jeremy Matam Farrall, *United Nations Sanctions and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp.374-395.

<sup>38</sup>See Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: The Free Press, 2004).

6 August 2001, President Bush in his daily brief had been presented with an article from the Central Intelligence Agency entitled 'Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US'.<sup>39</sup> The specific targets that were struck on September 11 were not identified in advance, but no one could claim that the attacks came out of the blue.

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<sup>39</sup>See Richard K. Betts, 'Two Faces of Intelligence Failure: September 11 and Iraq's Missing WMD', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.122, no.4, 2007-08, pp.585-606 at p.588.

## 3 The pre-intervention phase

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### 3.1 Decision-making and political context

The US response to the September 11 attacks was shaped by a number of different factors. First, of course, was an overwhelming public demand for action in response. This was entirely understandable given the graphic nature of the attacks, but it did have the effect of limiting the President's room to manoeuvre. For example, had the President's response been purely diplomatic rather than military, he may well have had to cope with mounting criticism to the effect that the response was not proportionate to the nature of the initial attack. Second, the United States in the wake of the attacks had received extensive international support from its allies, from non-aligned states, and from the decision-making bodies in international organisations and alliance structures of which the United States was a part. As a result, if President George W. Bush opted to respond robustly to the attacks, he was unlikely to encounter much in the way of international opposition, at least in the short run. A third factor, however, related to President Bush's relative lack of international experience. Ironically, his father, who had served as President from 1989 to 1993, had one of the strongest pedigrees in recent times in dealing with international issues: at different stages he had served as a Congressman, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Chairman of the Republican Party, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Vice-President. George W. Bush, by contrast, had very little international experience; indeed his only service in public office had been as Governor of Texas. Nor had he shown much interest in international affairs. This meant that members of his administration with more extensive international experience, such as Vice-President Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, were also very significant players in the policy-making and decision-making that immediately followed the September 11 attacks. Both strongly supported a forceful military response.

In the top echelons of the Administration, there was a shared understanding that the United States should not risk repeating the experience of the Soviet Union by becoming bogged down in a land war in Afghanistan. This militated strongly in favour of aerial bombardment to blast away the Taliban regime, augmented by the escalation of partnerships with anti-Taliban Afghan forces.<sup>40</sup> President Bush in his memoirs recalled that on the afternoon of Sunday 16 September, he decided 'to employ the most

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<sup>40</sup>See Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas Griffith Jr., 'Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model', *International Security*, vol.30, no.3, 2005-06, pp.124-160.

aggressive of the three options' that the US military had provided him, and that 'we would put boots on the ground, and keep them there until the Taliban and al Qaeda were driven out and a free society could emerge'.<sup>41</sup> This was refined in a fashion described by Rumsfeld: 'We believed our special operations forces could establish links with potential allies in Afghanistan, providing us with better intelligence and demonstrating that we were willing to help those who helped us'.<sup>42</sup> One notable point, however, was made by journalist Bob Woodward in the light of extensive interviews with participants in the meetings that preceded Bush's decision: there was 'no off-the-shelf military plan'.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.2 International law and legality

One issue that did not figure prominently in discussion nonetheless merits at least some attention, and that was the legality of international action to overthrow the Taliban regime. Under the framework of international law governing the use of force by state, there are broadly three situations in which force can be used. First, the United Nations Security Council, relying on Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, may authorise the use of force by one or more states.<sup>44</sup> Article 42 in Chapter VII specifically provides that the Council 'may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security'. Second, a state may act on the basis of the provision in Article 51 of the Charter that 'Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security'. Third, a state may use force at the invitation of another. This is a reflection of the sovereign capacity that states enjoy in the international system, but it obviously needs to be approached with caution: in December 1979, the Soviet Union claimed to have been invited into Afghanistan, but it became clear subsequently that the 'invitation' had been broadcast from a radio transmitter within the USSR itself.<sup>45</sup>

In 2001, the Security Council passed a number of resolutions in solidarity with the United States following the September 11 attacks, but none directly authorised the use of force as, for example, Resolution 678 of the Council had done before the initiation in 1991 of Operation Desert Storm to force the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The United States instead relied on Article 51 and the inherent right of individual or

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<sup>41</sup>George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Random House, 2010) p.191.

<sup>42</sup>Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011) p.360.

<sup>43</sup>Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002) p.80.

<sup>44</sup>See Danesh Sarooshi, *The United Nations and the Development of Collective Security: The Delegation by the UN Security Council of its Chapter VII Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>45</sup>See Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, p.30.

collective self-defence, and at the time few voices were raised to question the validity of that justification. One analyst since then has raised the question of whether the attacks that the United States experienced were ‘armed attacks’ within the meaning of the term in Article 51 as interpreted by the International Court of Justice in the 1986 case of *Nicaragua v. United States* [1986] ICJ Reports 14.<sup>46</sup> However, one other factor rendered these concerns substantially irrelevant, namely that Afghanistan’s seat in the United Nations had remained in the hands of the ‘Rabbani Government’ which the Taliban had driven from Kabul in 1996. On multiple occasions the Taliban had sought to occupy the seat, only to have the Credentials Committee of the General Assembly recommend that the status quo remain in place. Unsurprisingly, the Afghan Permanent Representative at the UN, Dr Abdul Ghafoor Ravan Farhadi, raised no objections to US action against the Taliban, and this arguably amounted to tacit consent sufficient to justify US action in legal terms.

### 3.3 Military planning and intelligence

The approach of the United States to mounting an operation in Afghanistan proved to be methodical once the broad character of the operation had been chosen by President Bush. Existing alliance structures provided a viable framework for the US to interact with its British allies, who *were* involved in the first wave of attacks in October 2001; but for the most part, the United States at this time looked for moral support rather than military or material support, since adding additional international participants to military operations would not necessarily enhance their legitimacy but could complicate their execution. On the other hand, the choice of local allies was a very important choice indeed to be made. One potential partner, the Pushtun Abdul Haq, was a moderate member of the Arsala family with significant support networks in the east of Afghanistan. On 26 October, however, he was captured and murdered by the Taliban, and while one writer has excoriated the US for not partnering with him,<sup>47</sup> it remains far from clear that he would have been able to provide *within a realistic time frame* the on-the-ground military support which the US was seeking. The perceived complexity of Pushtun social structure also worked against attempts to partner principally with Pushtuns at this stage. The force that could best meet US needs seemed to be the anti-Taliban ‘United Front’, known colloquially as the ‘Northern Alliance’. Its key leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, had been assassinated two days before the September 11 attacks; but rather than causing the Front to collapse, the assassination produced a high level of rage against the Taliban that the US was well placed to support after it too came under terrorist attack. The Front was also a useful source of local intelligence; the US at

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<sup>46</sup>See Myra Williamson, *Terrorism, War and International Law: The Legality of the Use of Force Against Afghanistan in 2001* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009) pp.189-202.

<sup>47</sup>See Lucy Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution: The Inside Story of Abdul Haq, The CIA and How Western Hubris Lost Afghanistan* (London: Bactria Press, 2011).

this time could hardly rely on Pakistan, and had not been investing heavily in HUMINT capacity for Afghanistan.

One further requirement for an effective operation in Afghanistan was to ensure that Pakistan was under control. This was ensured through a brutal US demarche to President Musharraf of Pakistan, delivered by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, which set out specific American requirements and left Musharraf with no room to negotiate or manoeuvre, Musharraf claimed that Pakistan was warned that if it sided with the terrorists, it should 'be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age'.<sup>48</sup> This was probably the bluntest diplomatic message since the notorious note from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to Serbia in July 1914. Unfortunately, one crucial warning was left out of the demarche to Pakistan: that Pakistan should consider itself on long-term probation.

### **3.4 Mission objectives and strategic narrative**

A successful military campaign is often complemented by a compelling strategic narrative that serves to explain and legitimate actions being taken by a state and its armed forces. Freedman defines strategic narratives as 'compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn'.<sup>49</sup> As part of a detailed study of strategic narratives, De Graaf, Dimitriu and Ringsmose have argued that a strong strategic narrative articulates 'a clear and compelling mission purpose'; holds 'the promise of wartime success'; must be 'coherent and consistent'; and has 'few and/or weak competitors'.<sup>50</sup> In 2001, the overarching vocabulary that was employed by the Bush administration was that of a 'war on terror', initially to smash Al Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban regime. This language doubtless resonated with the mood of much of the American public, but embedded in it were a number of potential difficulties for the future, in particular how 'victory' could be determined in a conflict where the enemy was not a state that could be conquered and occupied, but rather an inchoate network of attackers who could easily blend into complex, inscrutable societies when it was in their interest to do so.

The US decision to work with local partners implied, even if it did not explicitly affirm, a particular theory about how the campaign to overthrow the Taliban would proceed. Regular armies grinding their way through battlefields in order to seize and occupy

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<sup>48</sup>For Musharraf's account, see Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir*, p.201.

<sup>49</sup>Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (London: Adelphi Paper no.379, Routledge, 2006) p.22.

<sup>50</sup>Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu and Jens Ringsmose, 'Introduction: Shaping societies for war: strategic narratives and public opinion', in Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu and Jens Ringsmose (eds), *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion, and War: Winning domestic support for the Afghan War* (London: Routledge, 2015) pp.3-13 at pp.9-10.

territory, as one witnessed for example with the conquest of Germany in 1945, was not what the Bush administration had in mind. Rather, its approach involved the precipitation of ‘cascades’, which occur when ordinary people, witnessing a change in the direction from which the wind is blowing, reposition themselves in order to be allied with the stronger power. This was the kind of development that had led to the collapse of the Communist regime in April 1992. The strength of such an approach is that it does not require the deployment of substantial international forces. A consequence that flows from it, however, is that one’s local partners may be very well-positioned to pursue objectives of their own which do not necessarily coincide entirely with the objectives of their patron.

One other critical point to note is that the Bush administration had been notably scornful of the use of American power to promote the objective of ‘nation building’, which it saw as a form of overreach that had flourished under the administration of President Clinton. In the Afghanistan case, however, it was plain that the overthrow of the Taliban would initially create a vacuum. From the earliest days, the Bush administration saw filling this vacuum as principally the responsibility of the United Nations, although of course with support from the United States. Anticipating such a responsibility, the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 3 October 2001 appointed Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi of Algeria as his Special Representative for Afghanistan. Brahimi had earlier served as Special Envoy for Afghanistan from 28 July 1997 to 20 October 1999. Enjoying the confidence of the Americans, he was well placed to help fill the gap that was about to be created.

### **3.5 Pre-intervention dynamics**

Three other features of the pre-intervention environment deserve to be noted, since all were to give rise to difficulty once the intervention began. First, from the moment the September 11 attacks took place, there were figures in the Bush administration, notably Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who sought to use the attacks as a basis for arguing that the United States needed to strike against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. No evidence linked the Iraqi regime to the September 11 attacks, but eventually Wolfowitz and people who shared his views were successful in their advocacy, and the March 2003 US invasion of Iraq ended up sucking a great deal of oxygen out of the Afghan theatre of operations. Second, because Afghanistan was a landlocked country and the poor relations between Iran and the United States precluded the use of Iranian territory for transport of supplies to US forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan was likely to emerge as the principal route of transport for such supplies, even though it had been the principal supporter of the Taliban. This meant that from the outset, it was vital that the United States apply such pressure that Pakistan could not even think of acting perfidiously without grave risk for its interests. Third, on the eve of the attack, the United States



found itself about to move into a country of which it had little recent first-hand knowledge. The US Embassy in Kabul had been closed in 1989 at the time of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; but for the decade before that, ever since the murder in February 1979 of Ambassador Dubs, it had been run as a low-key operation. By 2001, much of the US expertise on Afghanistan was outside government agencies, and this too was to prove a problem once the intervention was launched.

## 4 Entry and stabilisation phase

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### 4.1 The overthrow of the Taliban regime

On 7 October 2001, the United States launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’, striking at targets in Afghanistan using land-based B-52 bombers and B-1 ‘Stealth’ bombers, together with 25 strike aircraft (F-14 Tomcats and F-18 Hornets) from the aircraft carriers USS Enterprise and USS Carl E. Vinson. Furthermore, some 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles were fired from British and American submarines and four US vessels.<sup>51</sup> Ten days later, President Bush stated that the enemies’ air force and air defences were being demolished, ‘paving the way for friendly troops on the ground to slowly but surely tighten the net to bring them to justice’.<sup>52</sup> These attacks were devastating in their effects: captured enemy combatants reportedly confirmed that ‘the precise bombing from planes they often could not hear or see broke the will of battle-hardened troops’.<sup>53</sup> By the end of combat, approximately 12,000 bombs had been dropped, 6,700 of them precision-guided.<sup>54</sup>

On the ground things did not proceed quite so easily, highlighting the difficulty of working with local allies with their own interests to protect. There is some evidence that within the United Front forces, the suspicion arose that out of sensitivity to Pakistan’s desire not to see the anti-Taliban forces take over Kabul, the US was slow to hit Taliban frontlines.<sup>55</sup> A more serious problem surfaced when US Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared to suggest that ‘moderates’ within the Taliban could be persuaded to join a future Afghan government.<sup>56</sup> This was emphatically not what Washington’s Afghan partners wished to hear, and it prompted spokesman Dr Abdullah to remark that there was ‘no such thing as moderate Taliban elements’.<sup>57</sup> One consequence was to dispose

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas E. Ricks and Vernon Loeb, ‘Initial Aim Is Hitting Taliban’s Defenses’, *The Washington Post*, 8 October 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Thom Shanker, ‘Bush Says Aim Is to Ease Entry of Land Force’, *The New York Times*, 18 October 2001. The Taliban had almost no significant air assets, but the risk that they held anti-aircraft missiles could not be discounted.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Schmitt and James Dao, ‘Use of Pinpoint Air Power Comes of Age in New War’, *The New York Times*, 24 December 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Bryan Bender, Kim Burger, and Andrew Koch, ‘Afghanistan: First Lessons’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, vol.36, no.25, 2001, pp.18-21 at p.20.

<sup>55</sup> David Rohde, ‘U.S. Tactics Thwart Afghan Rebels’, *The New York Times*, 18 October 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Pamela Constable, ‘U.S. Hopes to Attract Moderates in Taliban’, *The Washington Post*, 17 October 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Dexter Filkins, ‘Rebel Leader Rejects Role for Taliban in New Regime’, *The New York Times*, 17 October 2001.

Washington's partners to recover control of Kabul as quickly as possible, irrespective of what the US (and Pakistan) might want.

In November 2001, the 'cascade' for which the US had been hoping finally occurred. On 9 November, the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif fell to groups led by the Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostam, the Shiite leader Ustad Mohaqqueq, and Commander Atta Muhammad of the *Jamiat-e Islami*. On 10 November, the United Front took over Baghlan, Pul-e Khumri and Bamiyan, and Dostam took over Hairatan and Shibarghan. Maimana fell the next day, and on 12 November the Taliban lost the major western city of Herat. On 13 November, faced with multiple attacks on their positions north of Kabul, the Taliban fled the capital, looting the main currency market and the Da Afghanistan Bank as they left.<sup>58</sup> The United Front then occupied Kabul, and on 22 November, Pakistan finally closed the Taliban Embassy in Islamabad and subsequently handed the Taliban Ambassador, Abdul Salam Zaeef, over to the Americans.<sup>59</sup> Some mopping-up remained. The northern city of Kunduz fell on 26 November, amid reports that with US complicity, an airlift had been mounted by Pakistan to extract a large number of Pakistani Taliban who had been trapped in the town.<sup>60</sup> Finally, on 9 December, Hamid Karzai led an unarmed convoy into the Taliban's former stronghold of Kandahar.<sup>61</sup> The Taliban leadership fled to Pakistan, and on 16 December, Secretary of State Powell stated that 'We've destroyed al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and we have ended the role of Afghanistan as a haven for terrorist activity'.<sup>62</sup> One nagging problem, however, remained. Osama Bin Laden had escaped.

## 4.2 Actors and instruments

The United States was obviously the most interested party in Afghanistan in the strict sense of the term, but it was equally clear from the outset that whilst it was prepared to deploy ground troops in order to pursue Al Qaeda within the framework of Operation Enduring Freedom, it was exceedingly reluctant to become entangled in the wider task of providing ambient security for the Afghan population more broadly. This, over time, was to lead to a bifurcated international presence in Afghanistan, in which the United States, and special forces troops from friendly nations, engaged in missions directed

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<sup>58</sup>Keith B. Richburg, 'In Kabul, a Wide Wake of Destruction: Looting and Vandalism Mark Taliban's Retreat', *The Washington Post*, 15 November 2001.

<sup>59</sup>See Susan B. Glasser and Kamran Khan, 'Pakistan Closes Taliban's Last Embassy', *The Washington Post*, 23 November 2001. Not surprisingly, Zaeef's memoirs drip with scorn for Pakistan. See Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011).

<sup>60</sup>See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking Press, 2008) pp.90-93.

<sup>61</sup>David Rohde with Eric Schmitt, 'Taliban Give Way in Final Province Where They Ruled', *The New York Times*, 10 December 2001.

<sup>62</sup>John Kifner with Eric Schmitt, 'U.S. Officials Say Al Qaeda Is Routed From Afghanistan', *The New York Times*, 17 December 2001.

against residual elements of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, while troops from a substantial number of other countries were tasked with playing a broader stabilisation role. The obvious challenge to which this gave rise was one of effective coordination in an environment in which diverse militaries were playing very different roles; and for Afghans in particular, the complexities of the international missions in Afghanistan often seemed quite bewildering.

When non-Taliban Afghan political actors gathered under UN auspices in Bonn in November-December 2001 to map a political future for their country, one of the points on which they agreed was the importance of deploying an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghanistan in order to overcome the challenge of a security vacuum. The establishment of such a force, with a so-called 'Chapter VII' enforcement mandate, was authorised by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1386 of 20 December 2001. Informed observers, and Ambassador Brahimi, argued strongly in favour of the deployment of ISAF as rapidly as possible throughout Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup> This was important not so much for strictly military reasons as for the purpose of maintaining a positive sense of momentum in favour of the transition which had been inaugurated by the overthrow of the Taliban regime. This, however, was blocked in March 2002 by the Bush Administration,<sup>64</sup> which was already looking to preserve US airlift assets for future use against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. On 13 October 2003, by supporting UN Security Council Resolution 1510, the Administration reversed its position, but by then crucial momentum had been lost.

NATO was symbolically involved in Afghanistan from the moment of the September 11 attacks, and organisationally shortly thereafter. Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty was invoked the day after the attacks, although that Article did not require specific actions from alliance members.<sup>65</sup> The more potent marker of NATO involvement came on 11 August 2003 when NATO took over command of ISAF, pursuant to a decision taken by NATO on April 16. This initially led to a situation in which 'Operation Enduring Freedom' had a different commander from ISAF, but from February 2007, ISAF was also under the command of the Commander, US Forces – Afghanistan. The framework within which a large number of NATO troops served was that of the 'Provincial Reconstruction Team' (PRT). Drawing inspiration from some efforts undertaken during the Vietnam War, the PRTs were to operate as mixed teams of military personnel and civic affairs specialists, ensuring that development followed

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<sup>63</sup>See Elizabeth Olson, 'UN Official Calls for Larger International Force in Afghanistan', *The New York Times*, 28 March 2002; International Crisis Group, *Securing Afghanistan: The Need for More International Action* (Kabul and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2002).

<sup>64</sup>See Alan Sipress, 'Peacekeepers Won't Go Beyond Kabul, Cheney Says', *The Washington Post*, 20 March 2002.

<sup>65</sup>See David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan: Fighting Together, Fighting Alone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) p.36.

rapidly in the wake of the stabilisation of particular districts or areas. The first team was deployed in Gardez in January 2003, and ultimately PRTs were located in many different parts of the country. With the passage of time, however, it became clear that there was no single PRT ‘model’, and that a great deal of variety existed between different PRTs depending upon where they were located, the character of the state principally responsible for supporting them, the abundance of resources to which they had access, and the organisational cultures of the specific militaries involved.<sup>66</sup> Surprisingly, there was also very little opportunity for one PRT to learn from the experience of others, and relatively rapid personnel turnover compromised the ability of PRT staff to develop dense networks of relationships with locals in the areas in which they were deployed.

### 4.3 Intervention dynamics

In the year following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, it appeared that Colin Powell’s optimism about the outcome of the campaign was justified. At one level this was understandable. Despite the blocking of ISAF expansion, many Afghans felt optimistic about their future, and a 2004 survey of Afghan opinion by The Asia Foundation found that a clear majority of respondents, some 64%, felt that the country was moving in the right direction.<sup>67</sup> At another level, however, Secretary Powell’s confidence was misplaced. Already in December 2001, members of the Taliban were plotting in Peshawar with Pakistani interlocutors how they could disrupt the process of change which the United States and its Afghan allies were seeking to pursue;<sup>68</sup> in September 2002, a bomb blast in downtown Kabul killed a large number of civilians; on 27 March 2003, a Red Cross aid worker was murdered near Kandahar; and by 2004, security incidents were being registered in many different parts of the country. This resurgence of violence presented NATO with a real dilemma. As one analyst put it, ‘materially, the Allies simply did not resource the campaign adequately both in military and civilian-diplomatic terms. By 2008, therefore, they were headed for defeat’.<sup>69</sup>

The word ‘defeat’ was perhaps too strong, but the situation had undoubtedly become very serious. An analysis prepared in advance of the NATO Summit in Bucharest in

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<sup>66</sup> See Nik Hynek and Péter Marton (eds), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2012); William Maley and Susanne Schmeidl (eds), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> *Democracy in Afghanistan 2004: A Survey of the Afghan Electorate* (Kabul and San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014) pp.19-21.

<sup>69</sup> Sten Rynning, ‘ISAF and NATO: Campaign Innovation and Organizational Adaptation’, in Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell (eds), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013) pp.83-107 at p.92.

April 2008 set out to capture the danger: ‘The Taliban are not in a position to march on Kabul, but that has never been their immediate intention. Their principal strategic aim, and that of their backers, is rather to sustain that level of violence required to sap the will of NATO and other states currently supporting the Karzai government. The mere spectacle of such a weakening discourages ordinary Afghans from actively supporting the government and encourages them to sit on the fence ... The nightmare scenario arising from this is that of a West Asian “badlands” region flowing from Pakistan into Afghanistan in which the sovereignty of the Afghan and Pakistani states is almost entirely nominal and local groups with radical agendas merge with Al-Qaeda and readily find hospitality – in other words, an expanded version of the very conditions that led to the 9/11 terrorist attacks’.<sup>70</sup>

At this point, the international endeavour in Afghanistan was blighted by several different problems. One was the difficulty of coordinating the activities of a range of different militaries, especially when contributing countries’ governments had imposed so-called ‘national caveats’ on the ways in which their forces could be used. This meant that the forces were considerably less flexible an instrument than commanders might have wished. This problem was augmented by the lack of a comprehensive strategy to guide the activities of commanders on the ground. The strategic narrative of a ‘war on terror’ was far too abstract to offer day-to-day guidance as to what should be done. It was only at the Bucharest Summit that NATO promulgated ‘ISAF’s Strategic Vision’, complemented by an internal Comprehensive Strategic Political-Military Plan. The Strategic Vision was based on four key principles: a firm and shared long-term commitment; support for enhanced Afghan leadership and responsibility; a comprehensive approach by the international community, bringing together civilian and military efforts; and increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan’s neighbours, especially Pakistan.<sup>71</sup> A third and acutely-challenging problem was the massive distraction created by the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and the military difficulties that the United States encountered in the wake of the invasion.<sup>72</sup> In December 2007, the chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, remarked that ‘In Afghanistan we do what we can. In Iraq we do what we must’.<sup>73</sup> This captured all too clearly the priorities of the Bush administration, and from the point of view of

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<sup>70</sup> Daoud Yaqub and William Maley, ‘NATO and Afghanistan: Saving the State-Building Enterprise’, in Robin Shepherd (ed.), *The Bucharest Conference Papers* (Washington DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States; London: Chatham House, 2008) pp.5-17 at p.7.

<sup>71</sup> For more detailed discussion, see Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) pp.57-58.

<sup>72</sup> For an affirmation of this point from the upper echelons of the Bush Administration, see Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) p.569.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Burns, ‘Mullen: Afghanistan Isn’t Top Priority’, *The Washington Post*, 11 December 2007.

those working in the Afghan theatre of operations could only have been deeply dispiriting.

It was into this environment that the re-minted idea of counterinsurgency (COIN) was injected, drawing not only on newly-published US military doctrine, but also on analyses by students of warfare.<sup>74</sup> This version of counter insurgency was distinctive for making the local population the central focus of military activity, rather than focusing on an enemy to be destroyed by kinetic means. Furthermore, COIN doctrine posited the importance of comprehensively integrating different instruments of power and influence in order to achieve the wider objective of winning popular support and putting in place outcomes that would be sustainable in the long run. Several factors however, worked against the implementation of a fully-fledged COIN approach in Afghanistan. One related to time. ‘Counterinsurgency’, one US general argued, ‘works if the intervening country demonstrates the will to remain forever’.<sup>75</sup> This was not what President Barack Obama signalled in his speech on Afghanistan at West Point in December 2009. There, after outlining a range of tasks to be undertaken through an expanded American commitment, he concluded ‘After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home’.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, while General Stanley McChrystal, a gifted leader who had taken over as US commander in Afghanistan in May 2009, was strongly committed to a COIN approach, his own tenure was cut short by a scandal relating to derogatory remarks that his staff had made about the President and Vice-President, which resulted in McChrystal’s resignation in June 2010 and subsequent retirement.<sup>77</sup> By the time his successor, General David Petraeus, had settled in, the commencement of the draw-down of US forces was beginning to loom on the horizon. A third problem was that once the US Administration signalled its intention to begin drawing down its forces, pressures built domestically in its NATO and non-NATO allies to do the same, with the Dutch withdrawing in August 2010 and the Canadians in mid-2011.

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<sup>74</sup> See *The U.S. Army\*Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). An overview of the debates this generated can be found in Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Daniel P. Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General’s Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014) p.429.

<sup>76</sup> *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Washington DC: The White House, December 01, 2009). For further discussion of this speech, see William Maley, ‘Afghanistan: Grim Prospects?’, in Shahram Akbarzadeh (ed.), *America’s Challenges in the Greater Middle East: The Obama Administration’s Policies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp.195-216.

<sup>77</sup> General Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2013) pp.387-388.

#### 4.4 Cooperation with local actors

When any intervention occurs suddenly, it is more than likely that intervening forces will be undersupplied with detailed contextual knowledge about the local actors with whom they will need to engage. This was certainly the case in Afghanistan; the US had long kept the main anti-Taliban forces of the United Front at arms length, something that the commentator Anthony Davis described as an example of ‘staggering negligence, or myopia’.<sup>78</sup> But that said, while many visitors have found ordinary Afghans to be exceptionally friendly, Afghan society can be very difficult to understand, not least because of its ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, economic and regional diversity. While it may be tempting for foreign forces to rely on the advice of congenial figures with local experience,<sup>79</sup> the danger is that such partners themselves may be in a position to shed light only on some aspect of Afghanistan’s considerable complexity. There is a strong case for strengthening the knowledge of social anthropology within professional militaries, since it is often anthropological analysis that can best illuminate the social dynamics of an unfamiliar environment such as the Afghan.<sup>80</sup> Failures of analysis can see foreign militaries entangled in, compromised by, and ultimately scarred by local conflicts that they do not understand at all.<sup>81</sup>

From the outset of the intervention in 2001, the issue of how to select and engage with local partners was haunted by the problem of the seamy backgrounds that some of those potential partners had. The blocking of ISAF expansion in early 2002 virtually forced President Karzai to cut deals with petty power holders in many parts of the country who had the potential to become troublesome spoilers if they were not given positional goods within the state. This had the effect of ‘pre-selecting’ some of the local partners with whom international forces had to deal. But in some cases, especially those involving deployed Special Forces, the international actors developed their own local links, and not necessarily with people who enjoyed substantial local legitimacy. These links became a source of power for the favoured few. Given the narrow task-orientations of such forces – essentially killing Al Qaeda operatives and smashing Al Qaeda networks – this was perhaps unsurprising, but it had the potential to alienate ordinary Afghans who were not linked by clientelistic ties to the newly-empowered actors. When one makes friends in Afghanistan, it pays to reflect on what enemies one

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Davis, ‘How the Afghan War Was Won’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol.14, no.2, 2002, pp.6-13 at p.7.

<sup>79</sup> See Kevin Sieff, ‘Nebraska Kebab-Maker Has Advised Seven U.S. Commanders in Afghanistan’, *The Washington Post*, 29 March 2013.

<sup>80</sup> See William Maley, ‘Studying Host-Nationals in Operational Areas: The Challenge of Afghanistan’, in Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields and Sebastiaan Rietjens (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies* (London: Routledge, 2014) pp.53-64.

<sup>81</sup> An excellent study of how this can happen is Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Campaign* (London: Hurst & C., 2014).



might be making as a result. Furthermore, since individuals are not institutions, this approach raised major questions about long-term sustainability. A good example of this was Matiullah Khan of Uruzgan, who was kept at arms-length by the Dutch, embraced by US and to a degree Australian special forces, and then assassinated not long after the withdrawal of his patrons.<sup>82</sup>

When an insurgency escalates, it is only natural for military personnel to become much more cautious in their interaction with locals, since it may be difficult to distinguish friend from foe; the number of so-called ‘green on blue’ attacks in Afghanistan attests to this problem. From the insurgents’ point of view, such attacks are entirely rational, since they hold out the hope of eroding the ability of the regular military to obtain human intelligence from locals. This was a problem that grew ever more serious in Afghanistan, as the focus shifted from kinetic activities to counterinsurgency premised on an understanding of local complexities. Thus, while the United States had some spectacular successes in the ‘war on terror’, notably the discovery of Bin Laden in Pakistan and his subsequent elimination in May 2011, too often there was a mismatch between needs for information and what intelligence could supply. This was well captured in a scathing analysis by an experienced American general: ‘Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers – whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers – U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis, and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency’.<sup>83</sup>

#### **4.5 Political development**

While international forces in the short run were able to mount operations effectively against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, in the long run the development of local security forces was an unavoidable requirement, which in turn required a reconstitution of the instrumentalities of the state. The starting point in this process was the Bonn conference of November-December 2001 at which anti-Taliban Afghan political actors reached an

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<sup>82</sup>See Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king: The Challenges to Strengthening Governance in Uruzgan* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relation *Clingendael*, 2010); Dexter Filkins, ‘With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire’, *The New York Times*, 5 June 2010; Azam Ahmed, ‘Powerful Afghan Police Chief Is Killed in Targeted Suicide Attack’, *The New York Times*, 20 March 2015.

<sup>83</sup>Michael T. Flynn, Matt Pottinger and Paul D. Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010) p.7.

agreement on a path to take towards a new political system.<sup>84</sup> An ‘Interim Administration’, later to become a ‘Transitional Administration’, was headed by a compromise candidate, Hamid Karzai; and under its auspices a constitution was to be drafted with elections to follow. The broad timetable laid out in Bonn was basically met, with a new constitution taking effect in January 2004, and a presidential election on 9 October 2004 returning Karzai with 55.4% of the vote. On paper the new constitution gave Afghanistan a strongly presidential system and one which centralised a great deal of power in the president’s hands. Relatively little thought, however, was given to what the scope and strength of the future state should be, and as a result Afghanistan ended up with 29 departments in the Interim Administration, setting the scene for intense interagency rivalries as different bodies competed for access to donor dollars.

While the development of the Afghan National Army was substantially a task for which the United States took primary responsibility, the US was not in a position to ensure that the Afghan government was a legitimate and respected power that foot-soldiers would feel honoured to serve. Bureaucratic complexity, and rapid injections of funds to produce a quick peace dividend, predictably laid the foundations for corruption, especially given the weakness of the rule of law. Furthermore, the strength of the presidency as a source of patronage took the system in a neopatrimonial direction, with formal bureaucratic structures entwined with systems of patronage, clientelism, and nepotism.<sup>85</sup> Adding to this problem, Karzai proved to have limited skills in the area of policy development and implementation, as opposed to networking and coalition building. Yet once he was elected to the presidency in 2004, people naturally looked to him to take the lead in the very areas in which he lacked relevant skills, and this contributed to a sense of drift within the Afghan government at just the time that the activities of the Taliban and their associates was beginning to escalate. By 2009, confidence that Afghanistan was moving in the right direction had fallen from 64% in 2004 to a mere 42%;<sup>86</sup> not surprisingly that year’s presidential election witnessed epic levels of fraud, with the bulk of it benefiting Karzai.<sup>87</sup> Karzai managed to retain the presidency for a further five-year term, but his second term was marked by even less dynamism than his first, and by fractured relations with President Obama, who had not

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<sup>84</sup>See William Maley, *Rescuing Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006) pp.31-40; William Maley, ‘Looking Back at the Bonn Process’, in Geoffrey Hayes and Mark Sedra (eds), *Afghanistan: Transition Under Threat* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008) pp.3-24.

<sup>85</sup>See William Maley, ‘Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Challenges and Pathologies’, *Central Asian Survey*, vol.32, no.3, September 2013, pp.255-270.

<sup>86</sup>*Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul and San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2009).

<sup>87</sup>Nils B. Weidmann and Michael Callen, ‘Violence and Election Fraud: Evidence from Afghanistan’, *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.43, no.1, 2013, pp.53-75.

warmed to Karzai and was unlikely to be attracted by Karzai's occasional resort for domestic purposes to anti-American statements.<sup>88</sup>

The shift in Washington from the Bush Administration to the Obama administration added an additional element of complexity to planning for Afghanistan's future. Even though the Bush Administration was distracted by Iraq, it did remain committed to stabilisation in Afghanistan. By contrast, although Obama during his campaign for the presidency had contrasted the case for involvement in Afghanistan favourably with the case for involvement in Iraq, he ultimately had little interest in seeing his presidency blighted by a foreign war in the way that Lyndon B. Johnson had experienced in Vietnam. As a number of memoirs and reports have also suggested, his Administration embraced people with radically different views on how best to handle the Afghan situation.<sup>89</sup> Some, particularly those close to the Pentagon, tended to favour an increase in the number of troops on the ground. Others, including Vice-President Biden and US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, were much more sceptical about whether the troop increase could make much difference while sanctuaries remained in Pakistan and Karzai remained an inadequate local partner. The position that President Obama outlined at West Point in December 2009 sought to offer something to proponents of both these positions – the surge of troops in the short run but a timetable for troop withdrawal in the longer run. The problem with this approach was that it simply invited the Taliban to hold tight for a limited period, and left Washington's NATO allies uneasy about the likely future trajectory of operations. It also assumed, somewhat heroically, that Karzai could be galvanised by the looming drawdown of Western forces to become a different kind of leader.

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<sup>88</sup>For a sample, see Ben Farmer, 'Karzai cancels press conference after anti-American rant', *The Telegraph* (London), 10 March 2013. Karzai's concerns that the US was doing too little to address the issue of Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan was legitimate, but his choice of words was unlikely to win him any support in Washington.

<sup>89</sup>See Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

## 5 Transition and the exit phase

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### 5.1 Type of transition and catalysts

The word ‘transition’ can be used in a number of different ways, and may mean quite different things to different people. It broadly connotes the handing of key responsibilities, especially in the area of security, from international to local actors. In the best of worlds, it may capture a situation in which a successful international intervention is followed by a smooth transition of both power and responsibility to legitimate local actors, allowing the bulk of international forces to depart and leaving sustainable political arrangements behind in their place. The endings of the postwar occupations of Germany and Japan come to mind. On the other hand, transition may also referred to a situation in which a mounting sense of exhaustion about a distant conflict leads intervening powers substantially to abandon the more demanding of the objectives which they had originally set for themselves so that forces can be extracted whatever the conditions on the ground. This will scarcely ever be depicted by the departing forces as a failure, but the expression ‘cutting without appearing to run’ may describe it rather precisely. The period in Vietnam between the signing of the Paris Accords of 1973 and the fall of Saigon to Communist forces in April 1975 provides a paradigmatic example of this kind of transition. Afghanistan’s transition from March 2011 fell somewhere between the two, but closer on the whole to the Vietnamese rather than the German or Japanese experience.

In the country from which forces are departing, a deep kind of ambivalence may well prevail. For some locals, international forces may have well and truly overstayed their welcome;<sup>90</sup> this can happen to any intervening force, no matter how popular it might initially have been. Others may dread the consequences of the departure of international forces, fearing some kind of cascade effect that allows unappetising actors to return to the forefront of political competition. Still others may welcome the withdrawal on emotional grounds but fear the withdrawal on rational grounds. What is important, however, to note is that ‘transition’ tends to have *multiple* consequences that can affect people in different ways. In Afghanistan, the shrinking international military presence reduced the protective cover for aid agencies, especially those which had relied on PRTs as an operating framework; this led, in turn, not just to the winding-up of specific aid projects, but also to a fall in demand for a range of Afghan-supplied services of which international actors had been the main purchasers. In this way, household incomes often

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<sup>90</sup>For a detailed elaboration of this possibility, see Astri Suhrke, *When More is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011).

felt the effect of transition quite directly, forcing people to seek new ways of surviving economically on a day-to-day basis. As the effects of the withdrawal of international forces began to be more widely felt, the rate of economic growth fell from 14.4% in 2012 to just 3.1% in 2013.<sup>91</sup>

## 5.2 The commencement of transition

Once President Obama had committed his administration to commence the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan after the temporary surge that he announced in his West Point speech, it was almost inevitable that transition to full Afghan responsibility for security would flow as a result. In his inaugural speech in November 2009, President Karzai had foreshadowed that Afghanistan would assume such responsibility within five years.<sup>92</sup> The 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon identified the end of 2014 as the terminus for the transition process, although the Summit Declaration also stated that ‘Transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven, and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF-troops’.<sup>93</sup> The contradiction between a specified end-date for transition and the claim that transition would not be calendar-driven was immediately obvious, and it led to ‘over-emphasis on physical destruction of the Taliban’, as well as ‘overstated successes, false starts, attempts to hide or minimise failures, and inevitable setbacks’, and civilian agencies left ‘high and dry’.<sup>94</sup>

In December 2014, ISAF was indeed wound up and replaced from 1 January 2015 by a non-combat advisory mission, ‘Operation Resolute Support’, paralleled by a new US mission, ‘Operation Freedom’s Sentinel’. The Lisbon Declaration introduced the term *inteqal*, or ‘transition’, into Afghanistan’s shared political vocabulary, and the Karzai government sought to do its best to make the new process work. The transition process was ultimately carried out sequentially in five tranches, announced by Karzai on 22 March 2011, 27 November 2011, 13 May 2012, 31 December 2012, and 18 June 2013. The selection of provinces and districts for inclusion in different stages of the process was the responsibility of a ‘Joint Afghan-NATO *Inteqal* Board’ (JANIB), which

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<sup>91</sup>See *Transition to Afghan Control in 2014: Perspectives from sub-national level in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2014) p.9. For more detailed discussion of the economic effects of international withdrawal, see Keith Crane and Victoria Greenfield, ‘The NATO Drawdown: Implications for Afghanistan and Pakistan’, in Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory, IV (eds), *Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western regional policy* (New York: Routledge, 2015) pp.269-289.

<sup>92</sup>See Adam Gabbatt and Matthew Weaver, ‘Hamid Karzai sets Afghan security target in inauguration speech’, *The Guardian*, 20 November 2009.

<sup>93</sup>*Lisbon Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon on 20 November 2010* (Brussels: Press Release PR/CP(2010)0155, Public Diplomacy Division, NATO, 20 November 2010) para.4.

<sup>94</sup>David J. Kilcullen, ‘Fumbling the baton: US civil-military relations in the Afghan war’, in William Maley and Susanne Schmeidl (eds), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective* (London: Routledge, 2015) pp.10-24 at pp.18-19.

provided its first set of recommendations in a report dated 24 February 2011. The Chair of JANIB, who also served as Chair of the Afghan Transition Coordination Committee, was Dr Ashraf Ghani, who had served as Finance Minister from 2002-2004 and was to succeed Karzai as President in September 2014.

While NATO had proclaimed that transition would be conditions-based, it was not the case that the rollout of transition reflected progressive achievement of satisfactory levels of security and stability throughout Afghanistan. Part of the difficulty in assessing the progress of transition in terms of *outcomes* rather than simply *process* is that there is no full consensus on the measures that might be used. Insecurity has a subjective as well as objective dimension. Even though the day-to-day lives of individuals may not be blighted by violence, they may have ongoing and pervasive apprehensions about what the future holds. This reflects Hobbes's famous warning in *Leviathan* that war consists not simply of violence but of the 'known disposition thereto'.<sup>95</sup> A politically successful transition ultimately must be one that can dispel such subjective fears, since if they persist, they can help to undermine the legitimacy of the state, and encourage people who feel vulnerable to seek protection either by aligning with armed non-state actors, or by positioning themselves for prudential reasons as supporters of armed opposition groups. In the objective realm, one may seek to measure security with a range of different metrics – the number of security incidents in a district, the number of security incidents involving fatalities in a district, the likelihood that one will be able to travel without incident on the main roads of a district or province. There is, however, a problem of data collection that can surface when one seeks to make use of such metrics. International forces may experience quite different types of threat from those experienced by local Afghans, and those that only afflict Afghans may be underreported. Furthermore, some Afghans may be more vulnerable to attack than others, especially in remote areas to which extremists may gravitate if they feel that forces are being concentrated for an attack upon them. In other words, disturbing as they are, data on civilian casualties may well understate the scale of the problem that the country continues to face.

### **5.3 Actors and instruments**

In any transition of this kind, the Army is likely to be central to effective progress. It was the disintegration of the armed forces of the communist regime that precipitated regime change in April 1992. After 2001, the reconstitution of an Afghan National Army (ANA) was one of the central responsibilities that the United States assumed. Several factors significantly complicated the process. One was that the US's local armed partners naturally wanted their personnel to be the core of a new ANA. Another

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<sup>95</sup>See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp.88-91.

related to the sheer complexity of the task. Re-establishing an army involves far more than basic training of front-line soldiers; it equally requires an efficient administrative structure to ensure that combat personnel are properly supplied and managed. Most importantly of all, it is necessary to foster an ethos of loyalty to civilian powerholders; in the absence of such an organisational culture, the lure of ‘Bonapartism’ may be very great, and the army may rapidly become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Furthermore, in the long run it is necessary that the armed forces be of a size that can be funded from locally-raised resources, for as Rubin put it, ‘If the state cannot sustain the recurrent costs of its security forces, its stability will be at risk. Nor can any state long survive the funding of its army and police by foreign powers’.<sup>96</sup> A 2014 survey study nevertheless concluded that ‘The government institution Afghans trust most is the ANA. The ANA, being a multi-ethnic, national, modern institution, seems best to reflect the direction Afghans would like to see their government ultimately move’.<sup>97</sup> Increasingly one encounters spontaneous expressions of support for the ANA, even from Afghans who are otherwise very critical of the government.

The other agency central to the delivery of security is the police. A police force fills the critical gap between protection against high-level threats of orchestrated mass violence, for which the army must take responsibility, and protection against behaviour that is antisocial but not unlawful, which is best handled through the promotion of social norms. Between these two problems lies the problem of criminality, and it is police who are classically charged with addressing it. That said, however, the fact that police tend to be distributed throughout the community means that police power can often be abused, which is why the idea of a ‘police state’ carries a negative connotation. In Afghanistan, two main police forces have come into existence, namely the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan Local Police (ALP). Neither managed to secure much of a reputation. If anything, the ANP developed a reputation for being corrupt and predatory;<sup>98</sup> and the ALP, loosely-modelled on the community-based *arbaki* from Loya Paktiya, stands as an example of the difficulty of transplanting from one part of Afghanistan to another a social institution with its own delicate evolutionary history.<sup>99</sup> In fairness to the ANP, however, three points should be noted. First, police corruption is

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<sup>96</sup>Barnett R. Rubin, ‘Constructing Sovereignty for Security’, *Survival*, vol.47, no.4, Winter 2005, pp.93-106 at p.99.

<sup>97</sup>*Afghan Citizen Perception Survey: Final Report* (Kabul: ATR Consulting, February 2014) p.35.

<sup>98</sup>See Andrew Wilder, *Cops or Robbers?: The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007); Tonita Murray, ‘Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, 2002-2011: An Overview of a Flawed Process’, *International Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1, January 2011, pp. 43-63; Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammed Ishaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan: The Politics of the Lame Leviathan* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013).

<sup>99</sup>See Aziz A. Hakimi, ‘Getting savages to fight barbarians: counterinsurgency and the remaking of Afghanistan’, *Central Asian Survey*, vol.32, no.3, September 2013, pp.388-405.

an endemic problem in many countries, not just Afghanistan, and corrupt individual police rarely have the opportunities to loot the state that can be available to well-connected people at the apex of the political system, such as those who profited from the operation of the Kabul Bank as a Ponzi scheme.<sup>100</sup> Second, individual police are often vulnerable to intense pressure from people who are more strongly armed and better connected than they are.<sup>101</sup> Third, the ANP has one of the highest casualty rates of any institution in Afghanistan, and many police have died in the line of duty; Crawford estimates that some 14,200 police had been killed as of late December 2014.<sup>102</sup>

#### 5.4 Challenges exposed by transition

The Afghan National Army has broadly managed to hold its own since the end of the ISAF mission, but a number of challenges have surfaced since then, which in part explain why President Obama was prepared to countenance a rescheduling of the timetable for the extraction of remaining US forces in Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> One problem has been the emergence in Afghanistan of ultra-violent forces purporting to be attached to the ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’ (ISIS). Taliban sympathisers have actually been targeted by these new radicals, heightening the suspicion that they may be a breakaway from the old Taliban rather than a force with any direct origins in the Arab Middle East. Nonetheless, their appearance in Afghanistan is undoubtedly unsettling for Washington.<sup>104</sup> Another problem is that of desertion, which when added to the problem of combat casualties keeps the ANA’s recruitment and training systems under endemic stress. Beyond this, the approach of the ANA has been characterised as ‘passive defensive’, with soldiers in various redoubts waiting for the enemy to materialise.<sup>105</sup>

This is a very dangerous problem. It invites the spectacle of ANA units, and wider communities, being ‘picked off’ at will by the Taliban, and the risk is that this can

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<sup>100</sup> See Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State Building in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2013) p.104; for more detail see *Report of the Public Inquiry into the Kabul Bank Crisis* (Kabul: Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, 2012).

<sup>101</sup> See Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan after the Taliban* (New York: Penguin, 2006); also Sarah Chayes, *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *War-related Death, Injury, and Displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001-2014* (Providence: Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, 22 May 2015) p.8.

<sup>103</sup> Michael D. Shear and Mark Mazzetti, ‘U.S. to Delay Afghan Pullout to Aid Airstrikes’, *The New York Times*, 25 March 2015.

<sup>104</sup> See Kim Sengupta, ‘Isis in Afghanistan: The country’s Taliban problem hasn’t gone away – and it has new extremists to contend with’, *The Independent*, 23 July 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Goldstein, ‘Casualties Up, Afghan Forces Try to Hang On’, *The New York Times*, 23 July 2015.



amplify the impression that time is on the Taliban's side. At the very least it can force the government to rush forces from one part of the country to another in a way that creates an impression of disorganisation and inadequacy. In Wardak, besieged Hazara members of the Afghan Local Police were gruesomely killed by the Taliban after failing to secure effective relief, even though Wardak is adjacent to Kabul.<sup>106</sup> In late August 2015, Musa Qala in Helmand, site of a major battle in December 2007 involving British and Afghan forces, reportedly fell to the Taliban.<sup>107</sup> And most seriously of all, after the ISAF mission was wound up, Kunduz in northern Afghanistan came under regular attack,<sup>108</sup> and this culminated in the Taliban's seizure and occupation of the city from 28 September-13 October 2015, an event that sent shock waves running throughout the country<sup>109</sup> – not least because of the Taliban's killing and abduction of civilians and the hunting-down of women human rights defenders, NGO workers, and journalists.<sup>110</sup> The attack on Kunduz was not a manifestation of peasant warfare; it was carried out by what counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen has called 'professional full-time fighters, put through rigorous training by experienced instructors in the camps in Pakistan, with uniforms, vehicles, heavy weapons, encrypted radios, and a formal command structure'.<sup>111</sup> These are the kind of events that risk precipitating a cascade in the Taliban's favour.

Perhaps the most intractable problem relates to where the loyalties of key ANA offices at critical nodes within the organisation actually lie. Ideally, such figures are loyal to the ANA as an institution, with the institution itself being loyal to the civilian authorities. Past history in Afghanistan, however, suggests that this is likely to be an overly-simple picture of loyalties. The Communist regime fell in April 1992 in part because of the disintegration of the Afghan army at that time. A recent study by Philipp Münch suggest

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<sup>106</sup>Mujib Mashal, 'Heavy Losses for Afghan Army in Battle Near Kabul', *The New York Times*, 5 July 2015.

<sup>107</sup>See Danielle Moylan, 'Afghan district British soldiers died fighting to liberate falls to Taliban', *The Telegraph* (London), 26 August 2015.

<sup>108</sup>Mujib Mashal and Jawad Sukhanyar, 'Afghan Troops Rush to Kunduz as Taliban Flood In', *The New York Times*, 29 April 2015; Obaid Ali, *The 2015 Insurgency in the North: Case studies from Kunduz and Sar-e Pul provinces* (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 4 June 2015).

<sup>109</sup>See Kamal, Marjane Kamal, 'L'offensive de Koundouz: Le contexte militaro-stratégique', *Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan*, no.151, 2015, pp.7-11.

<sup>110</sup>See *Afghanistan: Harrowing Accounts Emerge of the Taliban's Reign of Terror in Kunduz* (London: Amnesty International, 2015); *Afghanistan. Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Special Report on Kunduz Province* (Kabul: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 2015).

<sup>111</sup>David Kilcullen, *Blood Year: Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror* (Melbourne: BlackInc., 2016) p.177.

that the ANA may also face ongoing problems of organisational integrity.<sup>112</sup> One trigger for trouble could be fracturing within the Afghan political elite. Another could be acute battlefield stress, prompting fundamental disagreements over how the armed opposition should most effectively be confronted.

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<sup>112</sup>Philipp Münch, *Resolute Support Light: NATO's New Mission versus the Political Economy of the Afghan National Security Forces* (Kabul: AAN Discussion Paper 1/2015, Afghanistan Analysts Network, January 2015).

## 6 Results and outcomes

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Despite events of this kind, there can as yet be no clear verdict voiced over whether the intervention that began in October 2001 should be categorised as a success or a failure. This is not simply because many such exercises at the end of the day have elements of both success and failure attached to them. It is also because different relevant actors have different conceptions of what ‘success’ and ‘failure’ might involve. An Afghan’s understandings of success and failure might be very different from those of a British politician or a Canadian general. Furthermore, short-term ‘success’ might not prove sustainable, and with the benefit of deeper hindsight may appear to have contained the seeds of its own unravelling. Given the subjectivities involved, it is therefore hard to draw firm conclusions, but the 2015 opinion survey of The Asia Foundation offers some insights as far as Afghans are concerned. Some 36.7% of respondents saw the country as moving in the right direction, down from 54.7% in 2014. Some 79% of Afghans say they would be afraid when traveling within Afghanistan. A clear majority would be afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration (69%), run for public office (73%), encounter international forces (79%), or encounter the Taliban (92%).<sup>113</sup> These figures suggest that Afghans are increasingly unsettled by the daunting realities that they confront on a day-to-day basis. The situation in Afghanistan remains extremely fragile, as the movement of over 200,000 Afghan asylum seekers to Europe in 2015 made clear.<sup>114</sup>

The United States is the main ‘intervening’ country that is likely to have a significant ongoing relationship with Afghanistan. Many other countries have spoken of doing the same, but their deeds have suggested otherwise, as troops have been withdrawn and the tasks of embassies reallocated to diplomatic missions in neighbouring countries. The United States, as a power with global interests, has concerns about the future of Afghanistan that may not be shared to the same degree by all its allies. One relates to the dangers that would accompany a perception that the US endeavour in Afghanistan had failed. When the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, a line of argument rapidly spread in Islamist circles that this proved that religion was a force multiplier that could defeat even a superpower. Were the Afghan government to crumble, there is no doubt that a similar rhetoric would resurface in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the intention of mobilising opinion against the United States. As the US confronts

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<sup>113</sup>*A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2015* (Kabul and San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2015) pp.16, 194.

<sup>114</sup>See <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php> (accessed 6 January 2016).

Islamist extremists such as those of ISIS, it is in its interest not to see this kind of argument being deployed effectively by the enemy. Another relates to regional security. Probably the most disturbing risk should the Afghan enterprise come to be seen as a failure is that terrorist groups such as *Lashkar-e Toiba* or *Jaish-e-Muhammad* in Pakistan could be inspired to mount another large attack in India along the lines of the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai; the Pathankot airbase attack in January 2016 highlights the ongoing danger.<sup>115</sup> Such a major attack could well prove the trigger for rapidly-escalating conflict in a combustible part of the world. Thus, despite the substantial drawdown in US forces, the US has ongoing strategic interests in ensuring that the situation in Afghanistan does not unravel. But that said, Afghans have quite recent memories, from the post-1989 era, of being abandoned by the wider world, and it is a fear that many still entertain.

Crucial to Afghanistan's future will be the capacity of the Afghan government to secure generalised normative support, or 'legitimacy'.<sup>116</sup> Legitimacy is not the only basis for the stable exercise of power; coercion and exchange are non-legitimate forms of domination that can underpin the survival of a regime. However, a legitimate government has much less need to devote resources to ensuring its own survival, and is more likely to prove robust in the face external threats. Like power and authority, legitimacy is essentially relational, and therefore hard to measure in simple terms. However, when legitimacy is low, there are obvious symptoms for which to watch. A legitimacy crisis can lead to the collapse of the regime, as occurred in the Philippines in 1986 when President Ferdinand Marcos lost office. A more common phenomenon is that of diminished or eroded legitimacy, most apparent when a government becomes timorous because it cannot afford to test the limits of its authority. This arguably was a problem that affected President Karzai in his second term, from which it is hard to point to many concrete achievements. It is much more difficult to assess whether this is a lingering problem for the National Unity Government established in September 2014 that saw Ashraf Ghani sworn in as president and his election rival Dr Abdullah sworn in as 'Chief Executive Officer'. There is no doubt that Ghani is a far more vigorous and incisive figure than Karzai proved to be,<sup>117</sup> but much will depend on the actual performance of the National Unity Government in the midst of a difficult security situation, and no matter how energetic an individual leader may be, there is still a danger of that leader's being overwhelmed by the scale of the problems that the country faces. A major demonstration outside the Presidential Palace in November 2015 to

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<sup>115</sup>Hari Kumar, 'Battle is Over at Air Base, India Says', *The New York Times*, 6 January 2016.

<sup>116</sup>See William Maley, 'Democracy and Legitimation: Challenges in the Reconstitution of Political Processes in Afghanistan', in Brett Bowden, Hilary Charlesworth and Jeremy Farrall (eds.), *The Role of International Law in Rebuilding Societies after Conflict: Great Expectations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp.111-133.

<sup>117</sup>See Elizabeth Rubin, 'Karzai in his Labyrinth', *The New York Times*, 9 August 2009.

protest the killing of civilians by extremists served notice to the Government that an inability to provide better security could lead to dire political consequences.<sup>118</sup>

One challenge for the immediate future in the management of relations between Afghanistan and its supporters is that more than eighteen months after President Ghani took office, Afghanistan *still* does not have a confirmed Defence Minister. This does not reflect neglect on the President's part; rather, it highlights a structural difficulty in the Afghan constitution which makes the appointment of a minister conditional on the approval of the Lower House of Parliament, the *Wolesi Jirga*. Nonetheless, in a country facing the kind of security challenges and threats that were outlined at the beginning of this paper it is simply astounding that it does not have a confirmed Minister of Defence. This case highlights another difficulty for the National Unity Government. While President Ghani and CEO Abdullah seem to have been doing their best to work together cooperatively, there are still very significant tensions between some of their networks of followers. When votes were being audited after the second round of the presidential election in 2014, antagonisms between supporters of the different camps reached such levels of intensity that international actors had to remove scissors from the counting centre. Such passions do not die down overnight, although they may be soothed if the government proves appropriately inclusive.

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<sup>118</sup>See Mujib Mashal, 'Afghans Demonstrate for More Security After Seven Hostages Are Beheaded', *The New York Times*, 12 November 2015.

## 7 Conclusion

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### *Were the mission objectives met?*

In one particular respect, the international mission in Afghanistan can be judged a considerable success. While Osama Bin Laden was not immediately captured, he was deprived of the unique convenience that his Afghan operating base provided. His key operational organisational colleague Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was captured in Rawalpindi on 1 March 2003, and Bin Laden himself was killed in an American raid on his refuge in Abbottabad in Pakistan on 2 May 2011.<sup>119</sup> In the period between the September 11, 2001 attacks and his death, Bin Laden proved incapable of orchestrating any attacks even remotely comparable in scale to those that had struck the United States. To avoid capture, Bin Laden had to resort to means of communication with his followers which were extremely cumbersome and eroded his capacity to function efficiently as the leader of a terrorist network. Furthermore, the September 11 attacks galvanised many Western countries to alter their internal security arrangements in ways that reduced the vulnerability of many possible targets to attack. Terrorism in Western countries remains a focal point for attention from political elites, but as President Obama observed following the murders on screen of two US television journalists in August 2015, ‘the number of people who die from gun-related incidents around this country dwarfs any deaths that happen through terrorism’.<sup>120</sup>

On the other hand, efforts to endow Afghanistan with a consolidated democracy have fallen short. This is *not* because ordinary Afghans are somehow ‘unready for democracy’. There is every reason to believe that they value a system in which it is possible to change rulers without bloodshed, and survey evidence consistently records popular support for a democratic system. The Asia Foundation in 2015 found 57% of respondents satisfied with democracy, made up of 43% ‘Somewhat satisfied’ and 14% ‘Very satisfied’.<sup>121</sup> The problem is, instead, two-fold. First, the institutional structures of a democratic order remain feeble, especially the rule of law. There is too much scope for well-connected people to get what they want on the strength of arbitrary power,<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Peter Baker, Helene Cooper, and Mark Mazzetti, ‘Obama Says Bin Laden Killed in Operation Inside Pakistan’, *The New York Times*, 2 May 2011.

<sup>120</sup>Raziye Akkoc, ‘Virginia shooting aftermath: Victim’s father urges tougher gun control’, *The Telegraph* (London), 29 August 2015.

<sup>121</sup>*A Survey of the Afghan People*, p.194.

<sup>122</sup>See Whit Mason (ed.), *The Rule of Law in Afghanistan: Missing in Inaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

and networks remain central to the practice of politics.<sup>123</sup> Second, rulers and their immediate circles may have little appetite for being ejected from power; indeed, it was greatly to President Karzai's credit that in 2014 he made no effort to cling to the presidency through illicit means, even though there was much speculation that he would attempt just that. In 2009, however, a driver behind the electoral fraud may well have been the reluctance on the part of Karzai's associates to surrender the power which they hope to retain through his continuation in office.

One further point, easily overlooked, is that interventions may be evaluated on the basis not just of intended but also of unintended consequences. Early in this paper, mention was made of the way in which globalisation has reached Afghanistan at the very moment when the population is experiencing a notable 'youth bulge'. The consequences for Afghanistan in the long run may be very considerable indeed. Energised youth are an ambiguous political force.<sup>124</sup> They can easily become disaffected, at which point they can form anti-social gangs or be attracted to radical poles of the political spectrum.<sup>125</sup> This happened in the early 1970s,<sup>126</sup> with catastrophic results. But they can also be a dynamic force, promoting the idea of modernity as opposed to the antimodernist worldview of groups such as the Taliban. Indisputably there are many young Afghans now who have a far wider range of opportunities than they could ever have dreamt of enjoying under the Taliban regime, and in the long run the effect of this change may prove to be strongly positive.

*Was there a clear vision of a transition to long-term counter-terrorism policy?*

The driving force behind the recent transition of security responsibility in Afghanistan was not the need to replace a counterinsurgent with a counterterrorist strategy, but rather the implementation of a timetable for transition that reflected President Karzai's desire in November 2009 to present himself as being in the driving seat, and President Obama's desire to rid himself of entanglement in an overseas conflict not of his own making. The language of counter-terrorism certainly figured in the explanation of how transition from international assistance to Afghan responsibility would be carried out, with counter-terrorism being one of the tasks explicitly mandated for Operation Freedom's Sentinel. From the Afghan point of view, however, it is not clear that the assumption of security responsibility involved a fundamental rethinking of the nature of

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<sup>123</sup>See Timor Sharan, 'The Dynamics of Elite Networks and Patron-Client Relationships in Afghanistan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.63, no.3, 2011, pp.1109-1127.

<sup>124</sup>See Yukitoshi Matsumoto, 'Young Afghans in "transition": towards Afghanisation, exit or violence?', *Conflict, Security and Development*, vol.11, no.5, 2011, pp.555-578.

<sup>125</sup>See S. Reza Kazemi, *The New Gangs of Herat: How young Afghans turn away from their community* (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 24 October 2014).

<sup>126</sup>See Baqui Yousefzai, 'Kabul University Students: A Potential Political Force?', in Louis Dupree and Linette Albert (eds), *Afghanistan in the 1970s* (New York: Praeger, 1974) pp.167-182.

the threats that had to be confronted. Essentially, the identity of the armed opposition remained unchanged, as for the most part did its tactics, and these had always involved attacks of a kind that could be labelled terrorist. To the extent that ‘pure’ insurgency combines the spirit of peasant rebellions with ideology,<sup>127</sup> Afghanistan’s experience since 2001 has been of something rather different: a ‘creeping invasion’ from Pakistan, albeit feeding on some local grievances, reflecting Pakistan’s geopolitical interest in preventing the emergence of any stable pro-Indian government in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the US understanding of what counter-terrorism might entail remained (and remains) relentlessly US-centric. In late December 2014, when Secretary of Defense Hagel announced Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, he specifically focused on ‘counter-terrorism operations against the remnants of Al-Qaeda to ensure that Afghanistan is never again used to stage attacks against our homeland’.<sup>128</sup> It is extremely doubtful whether many Afghans at all see ‘the remnants of Al Qaeda’ as the most serious source of threat from a security point of view; the Haqqani network and the Taliban more broadly are much stronger candidates for this title. In this sense, a fundamental mismatch continues between US and Afghan orientations. From a widely-held Afghan point of view, the key source of terrorism for Afghanistan and the wider region is Pakistan and specifically the ISI. This is actually no secret to key US policymakers. US Ambassador Eikenberry made a similar point from Kabul: ‘Pakistan will remain the single greatest source of Afghan instability so long as the border sanctuaries remain. Until this sanctuary problem is fully addressed, the gains from sending additional forces may be fleeting’.<sup>129</sup> The problem rather has been a deep and pervasive unwillingness to address the problem directly, which has led to frustration on the part of a wide range of Afghans, and an attempt to find other ways around the problem, such as promotion of the idea of negotiations with the Taliban as a potential way out of the morass.

*Was there already cooperation with local security and intelligence services before the exit?*

In the Afghan case, the cooperation between international forces and local security and intelligence services before the exit was not just extensive but pervasive. At one level, the Afghan security sector was very much a creature of its international backers. The

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<sup>127</sup>See Raj Desai and Harry Eckstein, ‘Insurgency: The Transformation of Peasant Rebellion’, *World Politics*, vol.42, no.4, July 1990, pp.441-465.

<sup>128</sup>Dan Lamothe, ‘Meet Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, the Pentagon’s new mission in Afghanistan’, *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2014.

<sup>129</sup>Quoted in David E. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama’s Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012) p.33.



funding to support the security sector came from foreign sources,<sup>130</sup> and the design and training of the armed forces and police very much reflected the techniques and priorities of the United States, in respect of the ANA, and initially Germany in respect of the ANP.<sup>131</sup> Mirroring US institutions, Afghanistan also developed a National Security Council, and a National Directorate of Security charged with thwarting the activities of terrorists through intelligence gathering and monitoring.

At another level, however, the Afghan security sector had some inscrutable features, of which the most important were political connections to influential people above and beyond the formal connections that an organisational diagram would have led one to expect. For example, after the second round of the 2014 presidential election, Dr Abdullah's team released audiotapes of mobile phone conversations in which, they claimed, the Chief Electoral Officer could be heard planning the systematic rigging of votes. As one report put it, 'In 15 minutes of sometimes slightly surreal conversation, two men urge an official to fire election staff with suspect loyalties and replace them with known supporters, ramp up plans for vote buying and ballot stuffing, and close down polling stations in areas thought to be unsympathetic'.<sup>132</sup> What is important here is not the content of the recordings so much as the fact that they could be made by Afghans with an interest in the outcome of the election. The SIGINT capacity to make such recordings, of course, did not reside in Dr Abdullah's immediate circle, but rather in the National Directorate of Security which was widely seen to contain a number of staff who were sympathetic to Abdullah and sceptical about the prospects of a free and fair poll.

*What were the major obstacles in facilitating this transition?*

On the whole few obstacles stood in the way of transition to Afghan ownership once the United States decided to move in that direction. It could not be prevented from removing its forces, and since key NATO and non-NATO allies depended on US assets for support, their own deployments inevitably shrank in pace with the Americans'. In the United States, some voices in Congress and the Senate warned against transition to Afghan responsibility on the basis of a timetable rather than the satisfactory achievement of meaningful benchmarks. In Kabul in July 2015, Senator John McCain argued that the 'the threat environment continues to evolve in ways that clearly, in my view, demands a reassessment of the administration's current calendar-driven

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<sup>130</sup>From the fall of the Taliban to the end of FY2014, the US provided US\$57.503 billion in 'Afghan Security Forces Funding': see Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, August 17, 2015) p.71, Table 12.

<sup>131</sup> See Tonita Murray, 'Police-Building in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Civil Security Reform', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 14, no. 1, January 2007, pp.108-126 at p.110.

<sup>132</sup>Emma Graham-Harrison, 'Afghan election crisis: "stuffed sheep" recordings suggest large-scale fraud', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2014

drawdown of US forces with a plan that must be based on conditions on the ground'.<sup>133</sup> Agitation of this sort might well be seen as a positive or constructive obstacle to a transition that could risk becoming reckless if it were pursued in circumstances where it could plainly precipitate an internal collapse. A further obstacle came in the form of uncertainty as to the exact future shape of the Afghan government, with President Karzai's second and final term concluding in 2014, and a great deal of fluidity in the political situation as a result. Karzai himself, never a strong policy innovator, experienced some erosion of his power as he moved into a classic 'lame duck' phase, but with the competition to succeed him proving unprecedentedly open, for international actors it was necessary to engage in a great deal of speculation and gaming in order to try to work out what course Afghan internal politics might take in the post-Karzai period. The greatest risk of course at this time was that uncertainty about the future could trigger unforeseen political realignments to the advantage of the armed opposition. This did not eventuate in 2014, but it was an unstated fear of many political actors as well as ordinary Afghan citizens.

Inevitably, obstacles emerged not to transition in principle but to smooth or efficient transition. Withdrawal of foreign forces is a large-scale enterprise of very considerable logistical complexity, and from time to time bottlenecks inevitably developed in the process. The main implication for the longer run related to the diminution of US medical evacuation capability for injured soldiers, and of air support more broadly. Ground troops without much air cover are much more vulnerable to insurgent blows, and Afghan soldiers know this perfectly well. They are also aware, from a particularly nasty scandal in 2011-2012 involving malnutrition amongst patients at the Dawood National Military Hospital in Kabul, that local support services for the wounded have been poor.<sup>134</sup>

*To what extent could this transition be called successful?*

The jury is still out as far as the overall 'success' of the transition to Afghan security ownership and to a viable counter-terrorism strategy is concerned. It may be out for quite some time to come. Whilst a range of credible scenarios for Afghanistan's future can be developed, the actual trajectory of events will likely depend not just on what has been done up to this point, but on a whole range of decisions yet to be taken by occupants of critical policy positions. What one does need to reiterate, forcefully, is that *for Afghans*, while much that is positive has occurred since the overthrow of the Taliban, a diverse range of dangers tend to haunt people as they go about their everyday lives. Casualties within the civilian population or in the ranks of the ANA and ANP are

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<sup>133</sup>John McCain on Afghanistan: US must reassess troop withdrawal', *The Associated Press*, 4 July 2015.

<sup>134</sup>See John Wendle, "'Auschwitz-like' Afghan military hospital investigation 'delayed'", *The Telegraph* (London), 25 July 2012.

not simply statistics. Every one is a tragedy for a wider circle of people who lose a breadwinner, or a loved one, or a sense that life is worth living.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, when explosives are detonated by suicide bombers in the midst of civilians going about their day-to-day business, it is not just those in the immediate vicinity who fall victim. Terror of its nature is designed to cause psychological effects that are disproportionate to the physical harm that terror produces. At a certain point even the bravest begin to wilt in the face of such an onslaught and the temptation to flee to other parts of the world, even with the horrible dangers that can accompany such a journey, can prove overwhelming. A meaningful counter-terrorism policy for Afghanistan is not one primarily directed at the now-much-diminished threat posed by Al Qaeda. It will be one that squarely confronts the problem of *sponsorship* of terrorism as a tool of state policy.

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<sup>135</sup>See Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'When few means many: The consequences of civilian casualties for civil-military relations in Afghanistan', in William Maley and Susanne Schmeidl (eds), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective* (London: Routledge, 2015) pp.165-176.

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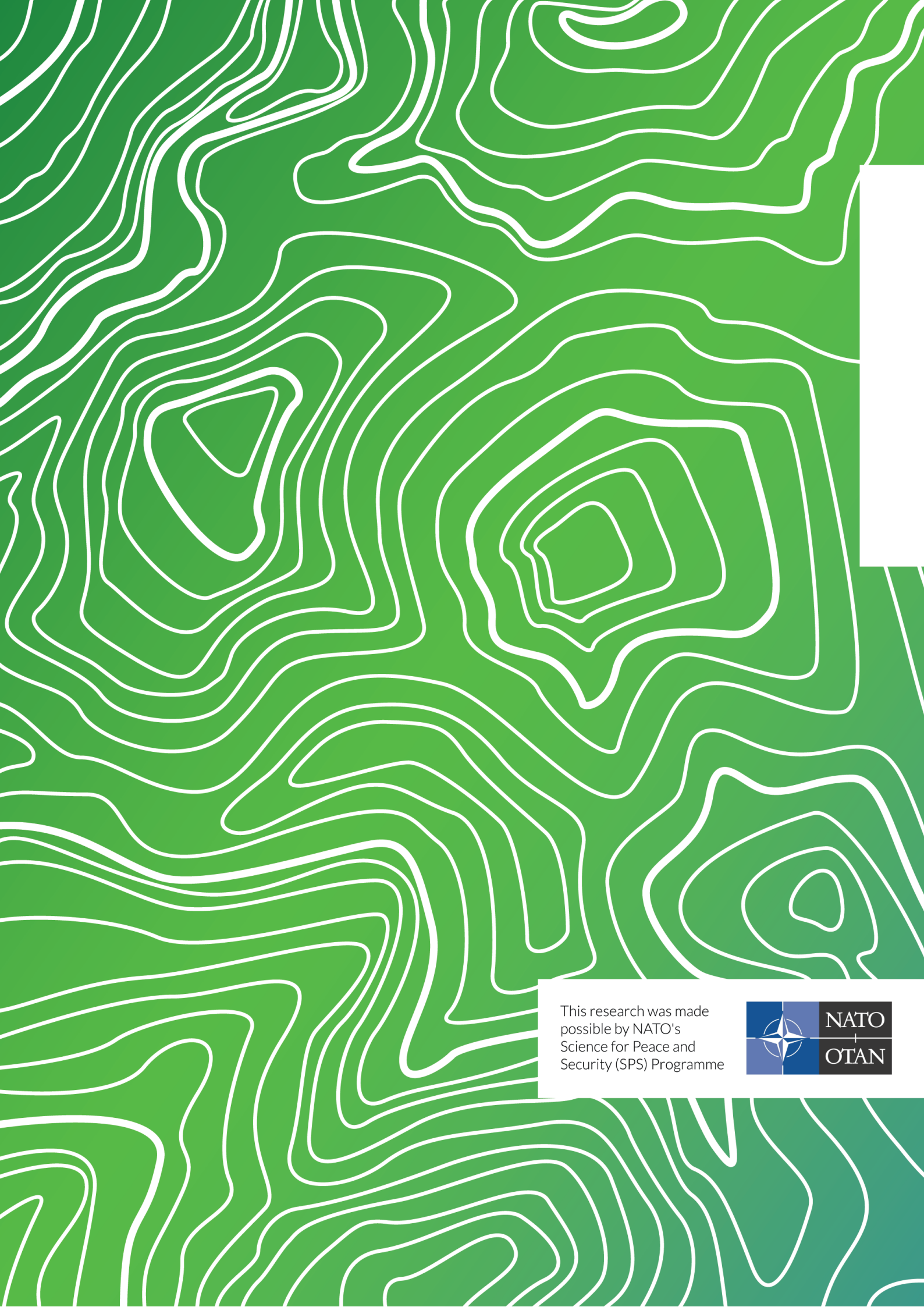
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