



Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

Seeing like the networked state:

Subnational governance in Afghanistan

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About us



The **Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)** aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in conflict-affected situations (CAS). Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international efforts at peace- and state-building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations;
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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Acronyms



ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
CDC	Community Development Council
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
IARCSC	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
KAF	Kandahar Airfield
NABDP	National Area-Based Development Programme
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Executive summary

Instead of the strong, merit-based institutions that provide ‘good’ governance and access to basic services envisioned at the Bonn conference, governance in Afghanistan rests on highly exclusionary and volatile networks of access. Regional elite networks, and the system as a whole, have created and sustain ‘durable disorders’ at subnational level, stitched together through network ties to resemble the centralised government laid out in the Afghan constitution. While institutions exist in name and edifice, network connections are what govern access to resources – being appointed as a governor, gaining employment in the civil service, obtaining the release of a relative from police custody, securing the right to sell vegetables in a bazaar, and so on. As a result, there are no truly ‘public’ goods, and even the most basic forms of protection or access to education and economic opportunities must be sought through network ties.

This is the third and final paper in a series published by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) that explores regional political dynamics and governance. It builds on previous case studies conducted in Nangarhar and Kandahar, the broader work of SLRC in Afghanistan and the wealth of literature on political economy and patrimonial relations in Afghanistan.

The framework through which political and economic life is viewed here is grounded in the idea of networks. This framework borrows the idea of the networked state written about by Sharan (2011; forthcoming), in which patronage networks come to constitute the state, but reframes and expands upon this by adding network theory to enable different ways of seeing power and political organisation. Setting aside the idea of hierarchy, which is essential to much of the literature on patrimonialism, networks are viewed here as horizontal. This does not mean that they are egalitarian, but that power relations are expressed through connectivity.

Personality-based networks of access, often centred on former *mujahedeen* commanders, form the bedrock of social, political and economic life. The ways in which the post-Bonn state has been constructed have undoubtedly

influenced the formation of these networks, but so has the larger historical and geographic construction of space and identity. Many major elite networks centre, geographically and in terms of identity, around Afghanistan’s major port cities of Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar, each of which provides a unique challenge to the authority and cohesiveness of the central state.

Chapter 1 traces the ways in which this conflict between the regional networks and the central state was managed under Hamid Karzai’s regime, and further describes the network analysis approach. The remaining three main sections of this report examine the role of different actors within the networked landscape: chapter 2 focuses on the highly connected elites that dominate regional networks; chapter 3 examines the international community’s subnational governance agenda and programming; and chapter 4 examines how ‘ordinary’ Afghans experience the state and gain access to resources.

While this research is deeply critical of the international community and the Afghan government, it has been undertaken in the hope of contributing to better policy and programming in the future. The conclusion explores policy implications, but readers anticipating a neatly crafted alternative model should look elsewhere. One clear conclusion of this research is that the kinds of radically transformative, linear state-building storylines followed in Afghanistan are rarely useful and almost always a liability on the ground in fragile states. They obscure the very complexity that policy-makers must understand in order to intervene effectively. This paper challenges policy-makers to think differently by questioning the utility of heavily technocratic approaches and decontextualised ‘best’ practices.

1 Introduction



With the growing gloom and cynicism that characterises many discussions of Afghanistan at present, it is easy to forget the ambition and hope that marked the early years of the international intervention. Early strategic and policy narratives constructed Afghanistan as a place in which traditional governance structures – and nearly everything else – had been destroyed and as a country that had to be built again from the ruins¹ The Afghanistan Analysts Network writes how the country was conceptualised as an institutional tabula rasa ‘that could be given institutional frameworks and procedures’ (emphasis added) (AAN, 2011: 11). A 2004 USAID report entitled ‘Afghanistan Reborn’ highlights ‘the rebirth of the country amid the ruins of the fighting’ and details how ‘a more modern society is being built: a market economy is emerging, and women’s rights, the rule of law, education, and agricultural improvements are taking hold’ (USAID, 2004). While there was recognition of threatening elements, mainly ‘warlords’ or regional powerbrokers, it was generally assumed that these would somehow be dealt with through political marginalisation, reform or demobilisation and transitional justice.

The rebuilding process began with the Bonn conference in December 2001, which brought together a carefully selected, if unrepresentative, range of Afghan stakeholders to create parameters for an interim administration. This process continued with the development of the constitution, through the convening of a constitutional *loya jirga* (grand assembly) in 2004, and the first round of elections. This was followed with the Afghanistan Compact, agreed at an international conference in 2006, which provided a central strategic framework for state-building efforts between the Afghan government and the international community. Complementing this was the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which outlined the actions required to realise the Compact’s goals.

Throughout these processes, the international community and its Afghan partners forcefully articulated a democratic, meritocratic and institution-based vision of the state and society. With specific regard to governance, the Compact states that:

¹ Narratives like these are not unique to Afghanistan, of course, and dominate many post-war developmental discourses. The United Nations Development Programme, for example, critically summarises its approach to public administration reform as partially guided by the belief that there is ‘a post-conflict moment’ that offers an opportunity for new political leadership, supported by the international community, to wipe the slate clean and bring in a range of systemic reforms to public service,’ citing its manifestation not only in Afghanistan but in Kosovo and East Timor as well. See UNDP (2014).

Democratic governance and the protection of human rights constitute the cornerstone of sustainable political progress in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government will rapidly expand its capacity to provide basic services to the population throughout the country. It will recruit competent and credible professionals to public service on the basis of merit; establish a more effective, accountable, and transparent administration at all levels of Government; and implement measurable improvements in fighting corruption, upholding justice and the rule of law and promoting respect for the human rights of all Afghans.

Ten years on, the Afghanistan Compact is all but forgotten, many of the ANDS commitments are unmet, and Afghanistan is at risk of becoming a 'failed' state. The government is almost entirely reliant on international aid to fulfil even basic functions like paying the salaries of teachers and police. It is deeply dependent on donor largesse and NGO capacity to provide basic services such as health care. The National Unity Government is deeply divided and a political crisis looms. How could the Afghan government and international community have failed so spectacularly?

This research seeks to understand Afghan governance as it is – and not how the international community wished it to be. It does, however, critically engage with the narratives created by the international community about how government *should* function, and the consequences of this flawed programming and policy. Afghan governance is networked, rather than hierarchical, and much can be learned from understanding how networks distribute power and resources.

This is the third and final paper in a series published by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) that explores regional political dynamics and governance. The main evidence underpinning this analysis is the author's own work on governance in Kandahar and Nangarhar (published as the previous two papers in this series), but it also incorporates the larger work done as part of SLRC in Afghanistan on rural livelihoods, the social and political dynamics of village life and the economic marketplace, as well as the rich body of work on Afghan governance published by AREU over the past 15 years.² This cross-scalar analysis was designed to

address the broader questions of how Afghans make a living and access public goods and basic services, and aims to address the perceived mismatch between the desired outcomes of policy and their actual effects. The SLRC Afghanistan research is brought to bear here in order to understand the 'bigger picture' of how state institutions and governance efforts have been designed and implemented and to what effect, as well as the broader dynamics that drive political and economic life in Afghanistan.

Attempting to understand how governance functions, how Afghans experience governance and what the outcomes are for 'ordinary' Afghans in terms of access to public goods is an ambitious task to cover in a single paper. This paper does not aim to offer a complete answer to these questions, but rather draws on case study evidence to craft a framework for understanding the issues. While this research is deeply critical of the international community and the Afghan government, it has been undertaken with the hope of contributing to better policy and programming in the future.

The structure of the report

Each component of this report examines the role of different actors within the networked landscape. The first part of this report (chapters 1 and 2) examines how Afghan governance functions at the subnational level, with a focus on the elites at the centre of these networks, and elaborates a networked theory of governance, drawing on previous research conducted by the author in Nangarhar and Kandahar as well as secondary literature and a number of interviews conducted on Herat and Mazar.

The second part (chapter 3) examines the international community's interventions and the arena of 'formal' governance. It seeks to understand what effect the international/national governance agenda and governance 'reform' had on the networked state, and the interplay between these two seemingly contradictory ways of 'doing business'. The third part (chapter 4) examines the outcomes of this governance in terms of how 'ordinary' Afghans experience the state and gain access to resources. While institutions exist in name and edifice, there are unwritten rules of the game that Afghans must navigate. Nearly all aspects of life are governed by relations and transactions – employment in the civil service, obtaining the release of a relative from police custody, securing the right to sell vegetables in a bazaar, and so on – what are the implications for how 'ordinary' Afghans experience the 'state' and 'public' goods?

² For more information and a full list of publications, see: www.securelivelihoods.org/content/2257/Afghanistan.

2 Origins of the networked state

Sharan describes Afghanistan as a networked state in which personality-based patronage has ‘come to constitute the state.’ In essence, the state functions as ‘a venue for contestation and negotiation by different networked elites who use state resources to promote and expand their networked interests within and outside the state’ (2011: 2-3). This paper borrows Sharan’s rhetorical conception of networked governance as fundamental building block, but differs from Sharan on several important points³ and articulates the ‘network’ in a fundamentally different way. Drawing on systems analysis, including the work of Manuel Castells and Mark Granovetter as well as more recent literature, it introduces new frames of analysis from network theory into the ways in which we understand power and the distribution of resources in the political and economic marketplace.⁴

The central hypothesis is that personality-based networks of access, often centred on former *mujahedeen*⁵ commanders, form the bedrock of social, political and economic life. Networks, by definition, are not hierarchical, marking a significant departure from the literature on Afghan patron-client relations. This is not to say that networks of access are egalitarian or flat; here, power relations are expressed through the idea of connectivity. Connections are achieved through ties among individuals; a set of ties creates a network. The power of networks is determined by their connectivity, or the sum of connective ties and the potential they provide for further ties. Power is cultivated through their network connections, but because ties are *reciprocal* in that individuals are obliged to one another in some way, and *distributional* in that they enable resource flows and sharing, strategies of power accumulation require access to resources. Network connections can only be forged where sufficient resources are available to support them.

While the idea of networks frames this analysis, the historical and social context in which these networks are embedded influences the opportunities for connectivity

3 Primarily that the state exists somehow apart from these networked ties, while this analysis posits that it is entirely dependent on these ties; Sharan limits his examination of networks to two competing networks which are seen as distinct, whereas this analysis would allow greater space for collusion and collaboration and the overlapping of ties. Sharan’s conception of networks still appears to include some elements of hierarchy, as he articulates in more recent work (Sharan, forthcoming), while the notion of networks employed here is truer to classical network theories, horizontal in configuration, that express power relations in terms of connectivity rather than hierarchy.

4 While this paper draws on the work of Douglass North and others who have sought to understand many of the same issues, many of these frameworks are limited by their political normativity in ways that the more sociological theories employed more frequently here are not.

5 Mujahedeen refers to insurgent fighters during the war against the Communist government and Russian forces.

and the general configuration of networks. The ways in which the post-Bonn state has been constructed have undoubtedly influenced the formation of these networks, but so has the larger historical and geographic construction of space. Many major elite networks centre, geographically and in terms of identity, around Afghanistan's major cities of Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar, each of which provides a unique challenge to the authority and cohesiveness of the central state. This chapter traces the ways in which these networks were created or consolidated after 2001, and the implications for nascent state-building efforts.

Stitching together the networked state

Afghanistan's four major centres outside Kabul – the port cities of Kandahar in the south, Jalalabad in the eastern province of Nangarhar, Mazar-i-Sharif in the northern province of Balkh and Herat in the west – are the key centres of power in Afghanistan. Barfield (2010: 48-9) compares these regions to toy building-blocks that have been 'fitted together in many different ways over the course of time' – at times as part of other empires or as independent entities – 'but each block...survives and reemerges as a distinct region no matter the changes in political organisation, arrivals of new populations or religions, or attempts to impose larger and more uniform identities on them.' The formation of these ancient centres was driven by their ability to collect enough revenue to support centralised means of taxation and revenue collection, based on agricultural surpluses and trade. They are outward-facing in many respects, oriented towards their borders with Pakistan, Iran and others, and international linkages have played a major role in shaping political and economic life over the centuries.

Applying North et al.'s (2007) and Mielke et al.'s (2011) notions of social orders – or the rules governing behaviour and interaction – here is helpful in allowing us to see beyond the boundaries of the formal state. The social order(s) of each region encompass the state but extends well beyond, denoting the full range of processes at work. This includes: tribal, ethnic and religious identity, whatever it might signify at different times in each of these geographic spaces; close, if not always consistent, economic, political and cultural relations with Iran in the west; resentment toward and economic dependence on Pakistan in the south and east; relations with Kabul (particularly fractious in the west, and perceived neglect elsewhere); the role of and relations with occupying forces; and so on. All of these factors, and others, coming together to influence the socio-cultural, economic and political terrain of each region.

In the past as now, the government in Kabul cannot be said to truly control these regions – but the allegiance of regional powerbrokers is essential for the viability of the central government. Under the interim government,⁶ the country was divided into four military zones: the north under the command of Mazar, the east under Jalalabad, the south under Kandahar and the west under Herat, plus a separate zone for Kabul. These zones closely approximated the four provinces into which Afghanistan was divided at the time of Amir Abd al-Rahman Khan (1880-1901) and, more recently, were used by the *mujahedeen* government in the 1990s (Malikar and Rubin, 2003). Many of the same personalities and factions ran these zones in 2001 under the *mujahedeen* government, which left each of the major *mujahedeen* commanders to run their fiefdoms autonomously so long as they pledged loyalty to Kabul. Even as the new president Hamid Karzai publicly declared the 'era of warlordism is over', the reality more closely resembled a recreation of a warlord-centric order under new conditions (Zucchino, 2006).

While the international community focused on ideating the future of Afghan governance through the Bonn process in the capital and at overseas conferences, other forms of governance were taking hold on the ground. Rubin (2004) details how *mujahedeen* commanders drew on US resources and backing to mobilise networks and assume control amid the power vacuum left by the fall of the Taliban. The more power they assumed on the ground, the more leverage they had in influencing formal processes, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle. The state envisioned in the constitution is hierarchical and centralised, yet the process of state formation on the ground was more or less horizontally woven through alliances among elite networks. Rarely attempting to confront or subdue his rivals, Karzai instead relied on transactional bargains with personalities at the centre of these networks to support the appearance of his dominance. Karzai used the appointment of provincial governors, ministers and other key positions in order to solidify elite bargains.

The networked structure of the *de facto* state meant that actors and their actions were interdependent and personalised, rather than independent or mediated through institutions. In Wasserman and Faust's (1994) study of social networks, power and resources are only accessed through what they refer to as 'relational ties'. The power of networks is determined by their connectivity, or the sum of these ties and the potential they provide

⁶ The Afghan Interim Administration was created at the Bonn conference, lasting from December 2001 until a *loya Jirga* was held in on 13 July 2002 to establish a transitional administration.

for further ties.⁷ In Afghanistan, several concepts and ideas encompass what is meant by ties or connectivity. *Wasita*, or connections, might be drawn upon to gain access to jobs or other opportunities; an individual might draw upon his *qawm*, akin to tribe or ethnic group; *ashnai* is used to denote familiarity between individuals within a community.⁸ Similar concepts to connectivity exist, in varying forms, elsewhere – from the concept of *guanxi* in China to ‘networking’ in the US and elsewhere. But connectivity as it is applied to case of networks in Afghanistan is something more, meant to envelop the entire assemblage of these ties, the potential for new ties and the meanings of these ties.

Karzai’s ties to various personality-centric networks largely gave state sanction to the existing social orders as they evolved after the fall of the Taliban, but only if they could be superficially reconciled with international frameworks and expectations. After all, Karzai’s legitimacy with the international community rested upon his ability to do this – which was not necessarily a sure bet at the time. His lineage and tribal roots meant he was already heavily connected among some elite networks, particularly among the Durrani Pashtuns. However, his ability to unify the disparate networks that dominated the post-Taliban landscape without his formal role and the resultant connections was contingent on international resources and political support.

There were instances in which Karzai challenged some key network actors – or at least, where he appeared to do so – where they appeared to be irreconcilable. One example is the removal of Ismail Khan as governor of Herat in 2004. Khan’s removal followed a meeting of major governors in Kabul, during which Karzai threatened to resign the presidency if they did not begin to remit taxes to the central state,⁹ implement the basic laws of the country and no longer use the ‘zone commander’ titles but their official government positions.¹⁰ Khan openly defied Karzai and subsequently held a *jirga* (tribal council) in Herat which confirmed him as emir and military commander, despite the fact that his military title as commander of a zone no longer existed administratively. He had also, in the preceding months, been making aggressive inroads into surrounding provinces, suffering

defeats that weakened his position and which created an opening for Karzai to further disempower him.

While Khan’s military defeats and open defiance of Karzai undoubtedly played a role in his removal, strongmen like Khan faced an existential choice in which they had to adapt to what Sharan (2011) refers to as an increasingly ‘internationalised’ space in order to survive. In order to maintain power and access resources, individuals like Khan had to adjust their image, rhetoric and mode of operating to new minimum standards. The weakness of the state meant that they did not have to surrender power or control so much as change the appearance of how they wielded that power. For those that did so, new opportunities presented themselves. Writing around this time, Giustozzi notes that ‘a general expansion of the economy offered new opportunities to invest and profit from the resources accumulated during the war’ that such warlords-cum-businessmen were rapidly taking advantage of – through land grabs, the creation of private security companies, the unofficial regulation or control over economic activities, the unofficial capture of border crossings and so on – from their state positions (2005: 3).

Khan was eventually able to adapt to the new rules of the game, but just enough to survive politically. He accepted the ministerial post in Kabul offered by Karzai but did not entirely cede control of Herat. The successors Karzai appointed to Khan’s governorship of Herat were consistently weak, allowing Khan’s network to maintain a strong influence on government and private business.¹¹

State formation and networks of access

Those who were quicker to evolve and more compliant than Khan prospered, and it is those figures that are the focus of the remainder of this chapter and the next. They succeeded by creating powerful networks around themselves; much as Karzai networked his influence through the cultivation of ties at national level, these actors networked their influence at regional level. They sought to extend their power over as many spheres as they could, generating as much control over resources and redistributable income as possible. Individuals like Atta Mohammad Nur, governor of Balkh, or, in years past, Gul Agha Sherzai, former governor of Kandahar and Nangarhar, and Ahmed Wali Karzai, former chair of the Kandahar provincial council, sought to control resources not only to fund their networks but also in order to close off opportunities to rivals.

7 Adapted from Soh, et al.’s (2015) theoretical work on the value of social networks.

8 For more on how *ashnai* is expressed in political representation or with regard to elector processes, see Larson (2009).

9 Most had at this point been levying and retaining taxes collected at lucrative border crossings.

10 For a fuller account of this meeting, see Tarzi (2004).

11 For more on Khan’s influence in Herat, see Leslie (2015).

The incentives to expand connectivity, and the dynamism of political events, meant that these networks had to be shape-shifting and mutable, expanding and contracting in response to internal and external factors. Rivals could collaborate for a limited period of time if their interests overlapped, then seek to undermine one another and, at a later date, cooperate and collude once again. These networks are simultaneously based on a number of social gradients such as tribe, family, ethnicity and so on. This relates to what Roy (1986: 15) terms a 'mythological reference to a tribal past' but also to the social and cultural divisions and groupings constructed prior to 2001. These socio-cultural factors shore up mutual trust and play an important role in determining the options for connectivity, but they are not rigid boundaries when it comes to options for connectivity. These intersectional identities can be fluid and dynamic; they are pathways that enable the growth of networks.

While key elites sought government positions, it was not so much because of what *they* could do for the government but what the government could do for *them*. State institutions and positions are valued because they are conduits for resources. Resources are seen here as a fairly broad category, encompassing both money and state power but also opportunities for grants to gain resources such as through rent-seeking (such as a position as a customs official or policeman), employment in state structures and private business and other opportunities. As such, securing a role in government, through election or appointment, enabled now-influential individuals to capture the state and international resources to strengthen their position within access networks. State institutions were instrumentalised from their inception, acting as expressions of power of the networks that dominated them and in whose interests they acted. Consequently, they do not exist above or beyond the reach of these networks; in the course of events, networks formed the *basis* of many state institutions at subnational level (most pronounced, as discussed in the following chapter, with regard to security forces and line ministries).

A role in government, however, was rarely sufficient on its own but had to be supplemented by connections. In the early years of the international intervention, cultivating close relations with international military forces (and, to a lesser extent, donors) was essential. The king-making role that international forces played in political competitions and the massive influx of money and resources that they brought with them cultivated what de Waal (2009) terms a 'rentier political marketplace' characterised

by pervasive rent-seeking and intense, occasionally violent, competition among elite networks for access to critical revenue streams. This resulted in a high degree of volatility and short-term unpredictability, particularly where international resources and presence were most heavily concentrated. Precisely where the international community wanted stable governance the most, the incentives they provided instead exacerbated instability – a theme further explored through the case studies from Kandahar and Nangarhar outlined in the next chapter.

3 The networked state at subnational level



This chapter looks at two elites at the centre of personality-based networks – Gul Agha Sherzai, in his posts as governor of both Kandahar and Nangarhar, and Ahmed Wali Karzai, as provincial council chair in Kandahar – to understand how networked governance functioned at the subnational level. As the case of Khan shows, individuals employed different strategies with different end results. Sherzai and Ahmed Wali do not represent the full spectrum of approaches or tactics, but they do underscore the contrast between government as it was meant to exist (in the international imagination) and the networked forms of governance that existed in practice. The conclusion attempts to put these examples into a broader context by contrasting them with examples from Afghanistan's other regional power centres, Herat and Balkh.

The Sherzai network in Kandahar and Nangarhar

Gul Agha Sherzai may not have become governor of Kandahar at all without US forces' support. After 11 September 2001, US Special Forces backed Sherzai, then still in Pakistan, to reconstitute his *mujahedeen* forces. However, Hamid Karzai – also backed by the US – had promised Mullah Naqib, an influential tribal elder and former *mujahedeen* commander, the governorship in exchange for his assistance in negotiating the Taliban's peaceful surrender of the city. Yet with US forces on Sherzai's side and Sherzai threatening all-out war, Karzai and Naqib had no choice but to back down and cede the governorship to Sherzai.

Being appointed governor was integral to Sherzai's ascent, but only insofar as it gave him leverage, post-Bonn legitimacy and connections. There were few state resources to use or capture in 2002, but a state position – then as now – enabled access to international resources. Four areas of activity were integral to the creation and expansion of Sherzai's network. First, strategic land-grabs allowed Sherzai's network to gain valuable territories, some of which were distributed to or through Sherzai connections and later rented out to international forces (Gopal, 2014). Sherzai seized the land upon which the Kandahar Airfield (KAF) was later built. While KAF initially supported 8,000 people, it would grow to support 32,000 by 2010 and become the centre of international military presence in the south (Motlagh, 2010). Sherzai's network had privileged access to the extremely lucrative contracts that flowed from KAF. He netted an estimated USD 1.5 million a month in exchange for providing fuel, building materials and other items (Hodge, 2012).

Second, in order to be seen as a 'good governor' in the eyes of the international military – the qualifier upon

which this lucrative access hinged – Sherzai had to be seen to provide security. As state security forces did not exist in any meaningful way in these early years, local security forces comprised various ostensibly pro-state militias and were complemented by the private militias loyal to individuals like Sherzai. Sherzai's paramilitary forces ostensibly focused on counterterrorism and counternarcotic efforts in concert with international forces. They pursued the 'Taliban' and 'terrorists' relentlessly, despite the fact that there were few, if any, active Taliban or Al Qaeda actors present in Kandahar at this point.¹² While US forces believed they had allies in the fight against terrorism, Sherzai leveraged the conflict to increase his coercive power, creating 'intelligence' and manipulating the internationally backed security apparatus to target rival networks.¹³ For example, Sherzai and/or his associates are alleged to have been heavily involved in opium cultivation and trade, and leveraged US military support and nascent state security structures to eliminate rivals (Jackson, 2014).

Recruitment of the militias fell largely along the lines of old *mujahedeen* and tribally based alliances, essentially the networks Sherzai had maintained while in exile and reactivated and expanded after September 2001. These forces, to varying degrees, then became the state security forces as and when they developed (Jackson, 2014). For example, the Achakzai, who supported Sherzai in capturing Kandahar, were significantly over-represented in the state police forces. Providing 'security' had economic incentives: it not only allowed them to target rivals under the cover of state legitimacy but also to earn a profit from it, as the release of prisoners could be obtained for a fee.¹⁴

A third critical arena of activity was the regulation of the Spin Boldak border crossing with Pakistan. In order to control the border trade, Sherzai needed alliances. Again, the Achakzai played a pivotal role in controlling the border crossing at Spin Boldak. The Noorzai, who controlled these resources prior to 2001, to the exclusion of the Achakzai, were largely now excluded. As part of a rival network, the Noorzai have been generally marginalised by and to some degree persecuted by the government

and security forces, and many have turned to the Taliban. Beyond the Achakzai, a great many others benefitted from the customs trade, either through securing jobs at Spin Boldak customs house or by forming alliances with Sherzai's network in order to gain preferential treatment in the cross-border trade. Positions and licences could be purchased, but not without a connection – however indirect – to the Sherzai network. Little of the border tax collected went to the central government, netting the Sherzai network an estimated USD 8 million a month (Forsberg, 2010).

The Sherzai-Achakzai alliance illustrates how closely access networks align to tribal affiliations in Kandahar, but one has to be careful not to be too reductionist. Tribes, like any other social unit of organisation, are dynamic, contested and constantly evolving. Any number of 'elders' in a given tribe wield power and pursue varied, at times opposing objectives; while one elder may be said to lead or indeed have been anointed as a leader of a given tribe, this hardly means he controls it. Because one tribe appears to be highly connected, it does not mean that all members of that tribe benefit from this connectivity in the same way. 'Tribe' is important here, however, because it is one of many connective identities that can form the basis of ties between and among networks.

Thus by looking at the representation of certain tribes in various government organs, it is possible to understand at least some of the ties among networks. Many of the Ghilzai tribes and the Durrani tribes that had supported the Taliban (such as the Noorzais) were systematically excluded from government positions.¹⁵ While Sherzai's own tribe, the Barakzai, dominated provincial-level appointments (heading 52 of the 60 civil service departments in 2003), the Popalzai, the tribe of the Karzai family, dominated district-level governance (Giustozzi and Ullah, 2007). While the Karzai network was in fact a competitor to Sherzai, the Popalzai elites would have been simply too powerful at national and local levels to exclude. The tie between these networks is mutually beneficial, as at the time neither would have benefitted from actively confronting the other – despite the fact that both were aggressively undercutting the other where it was possible to do so without direct conflict. The Alokzai,

12 While it is difficult to put an exact date on the re-emergence of the Taliban in Kandahar, there were virtually no credible reports of insurgent-attributed attacks in Kandahar in 2002 and very few Taliban present at all in Kandahar until late 2002. They did not establish stable strongholds in the province until 2004 and only began to infiltrate areas close to Kandahar City in 2005-2006 (see Giustozzi, 2008).

13 For more detail, see Gopal (2014: 110-115).

14 This is a pattern of extortion that has outlived Sherzai's reign and persists to the present.

15 In general, the majority of the Panjpai, notably the Noorzai, and the Ishaqzai, along with the Ghilzi, were marginalised from government. Part of this follows or replicates historical patterns, whereby the central state favored the Durrani, over the Ghilzi, by elevating them locally and nationally before the Soviet coup. In Kandahar, elite Durrani families owned much of the land with the village leaders (*maliks*) and tribal elders beneath them subservient to a largely Durrani ruling class.

the tribe led by Sherzai's rival for the governorship in 2001, Mullah Naqib, held significant influence at the local level but their ties to Sherzai were weak and fraught. The Alokozai were heavily represented within the police, with the outspoken Akram Khakrezwal serving as provincial police chief. Predictably, Sherzai consistently sought to undermine Khakrezwal's authority, and both Sherzai and Karzai's network meddled in Alokozai tribal affairs in ways that fragmented the tribe from within and weakened its overall position (Jackson, 2015; Gopal, 2014).

Network affiliations are generally harder to discern in a fourth area of critical activity: the regulation of economic activity. Most directly, Sherzai family members established lucrative businesses in everything from taxi services to construction companies. More broadly, Sherzai and his proxies levied taxes on local businesses and traders in exchange for permission to operate throughout Kandahar. The desire of individuals like Sherzai to occupy office and appear legitimate in the eyes of the international community also means that they actively concealed these conflicts of interest. Consequently, it is often difficult to trace the extensive business interests associated with Sherzai or those with whom he had close ties. In the economic sphere, many of the ties that Sherzai assembled were likely 'marriages of convenience', mutually beneficial and essential to his maintaining control.

Granvotter's (1983) work on strong versus weak ties is useful in understanding how actors like Sherzai assemble their connections. Strong ties come with strong obligations while weak connections imply weak obligations and low expectations of compliance, but also agility. Sherzai had strong ties to the Achakzai¹⁶ networks that controlled the border and, to a large degree, security. These ties were long-term in nature, pre-dating the fall of the Taliban. There was also pronounced mutual dependence and probably a strong expectation of compliance on both sides. Sherzai's connection to the various traders and entrepreneurs emerging in Kandahar's newly booming war economy were considerably weaker. There may have been a fairly one-sided expectation of compliance by Sherzai from these actors, but it is clear that Sherzai could change the terms at any time. Indeed, he colluded with and subsequently drove out some businessmen who became 'too' successful and, in doing so, posed a threat to those with stronger ties to him.

Sherzai's efforts to cultivate a networked state in Kandahar resemble Karzai's efforts at national level in that both sought to govern through connections with elites at the centre of personality-based networks. These connections necessitated the accumulation of state and international resources to maintain and expand ties. Consequently, in Kandahar, subnational government institutions were structured and staffed based on their loyalty and accountability to a single person or network rather than the central government and the populace. That certain tribes and groups were near-systematically denied access to government employment, for example, exacerbated feelings of alienation from the state. But this also meant that they were in a weaker position in other aspects of life, whether it was economic participation or settling land disputes. It is partly because of these exclusions, and at times the violent persecution of excluded groups, that the insurgency is able to operate.

In August 2003, Karzai removed Sherzai as governor and appointed him Minister of Urban Affairs. As with Ismail Khan, the quasi-official story appeared to be that Karzai had been frustrated in his attempts to compel Sherzai to remit customs revenue to the central state and was under increasing pressure from the international community to disempower 'warlords'. Sherzai's power had already begun to wane in Kandahar, in large part because of the manoeuvrings of President Karzai's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai. Sherzai was briefly reappointed as governor in Kandahar in late 2004, but his position vis-à-vis Ahmed Wali continued to decline while the Karzai network in Kandahar – to which this paper will return later – flourished.

Unlike Khan, Sherzai had an unexpected and fairly spectacular second act in Afghan politics. After he was removed from Kandahar for the second time, he was appointed governor of Nangarhar. This was a double-edged sword: as with Khan's removal from Herat and appointment as a minister, it was a face-saving measure for Sherzai but also one that would significantly weaken his network. At the time, Nangarhar had a fairly stable political settlement dominated by the Arsala network. The Arsala network centred on several brothers who individually rose to prominence during the *mujahdeen* period, but who were descended from an esteemed family that had held government positions for over a century. Haji Abdul Qadir, who had governed the east under the *mujahdeen* government, was appointed as zone commander and then governor, and succeeded by his brother, Haji Din Mohammad, which was essentially a return to the pre-Taliban order. While there was rivalry

¹⁶ Note that the Achakzai are sometimes considered a sub-tribe of the Barakzai.

with lesser warlord-types, no one possessed the power or resources to seriously contest Arsala dominance in Nangarhar. Resources were distributed in such a way as to enable a fairly stable political settlement and the province remained relatively secure.

In other words, there appeared to be little chance of Sherzai succeeding in the east. His tribal linkages from Kandahar would be of no use in the eastern social order, and the brute force with which he asserted dominance and claimed territory in Kandahar during the relatively lawless interim government period would not be tolerated in 2005. And yet he thrived, for a time. He did this by cultivating connections with those who either saw themselves as Arsala rivals or were marginalised by the Arsalas. This included commanders like Hazrat Ali, a former Northern Alliance commander from the minority Pashayee ethnic group. If Sherzai and the Arsalas constituted the loci of two main networks, Hazrat Ali is at the centre of a weaker third. Ali became the quasi-official police chief under the interim government, with his 18,000-man strong, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)- and Special Forces-supported militia controlling large swathes of Jalalabad. Following the same patterns seen with the absorption of militia networks in Kandahar, the Pashayee were significantly over-represented in the formal security forces.¹⁷ Hazrat Ali's influence was just important enough for Sherzai to need his support.

Sherzai also cultivated ties with Pashtun tribal networks that had been marginalised by the Arsalas, like the Shinwari and others. More generally among the rural elite, he strengthened the position of key *maliks* and created his own system of new *maliks* to oppose ones who would not be co-opted. Sherzai leveraged these relationships to strengthen links with the international forces by delivering on counter-narcotics activities. Fortunately for Sherzai, international forces profoundly distrusted the Arsalas and thus saw him as a potential ally. In 2004, Nangarhar was responsible for cultivating nearly a quarter of Afghanistan's poppy (a close second to Helmand) and the international community saw the Arsalas as complicit (UNODC and Counternarcotics Directorate, 2004; Shahzad, 2002). Mediated by Sherzai, elders received cash, in-kind goods and development projects in exchange

for publicly pledging to eradicate poppy. While the UN declared Nangarhar 'poppy-free' in 2008, eradication was not as comprehensive as official reports suggest. Elders negotiated, on behalf of farmers, with Sherzai proxies how much of the crop was to be eradicated and how much the farmers could keep. Sherzai then channelled development projects, via his influence over line ministries and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), to *maliks* (local leaders) in his network.¹⁸

Because access to resources tracked network connections like these, access only for some tribes and in some districts improved. Hazrat Ali's home district of Dari-Noor was successful in this regard. Ali had leveraged the state to ensure that Dari-Noor would be relatively well off – particularly considering its geographic remoteness, lack of arable land, trade or private business and low education levels among the population. There is a strong district council with myriad ties to provincial and national government, access to electricity is widespread, and the men of Dari-Noor have plentiful job opportunities with state and private security forces.

By contrast, the relatively less well-connected Mohmand tribesmen of Rodat had fewer links to the provincial and national government. Making matters worse, the elders from Rodat found themselves in direct conflict with Sherzai in 2008 over a land grab.¹⁹ There are few other reasons why Dari-Noor should be better off than Rodat. Rodat is easily accessible by paved road, relatively close to Jalalabad, and its population well educated and peppered with industrious businessmen and traders. However, in 2013, it had little to no electricity or hydropower (unlike spatially remote Dari-Noor), an abusive ex-jihadi district governor (aligned with Hazrat Ali) and a police force of around ten men when government policy dictated that it should have had around 150.

As in Kandahar, Sherzai quickly sought to develop alliances to control the border at Torkham and maximise its distributional potential. Local sources estimate that mid-rank customs officials under Sherzai paid

¹⁸ Note that these deals appeared to have broken down by 2012, discussed further on in this section. See also Landay (2012).

¹⁹ In 2007, a police training academy was built in Hesar-i-Shahi but tensions only rose the following year, when Sherzai announced he would build Sherzai township in Hesar-i-Shahi to provide houses for the police. When a group of *maliks* and other notables from the area met with Sherzai to express their concern, he promised them half of the plots but they ultimately received none. The elders protested, blocking the Jalalabad-Torkham road and attempting to set the police academy on fire. Police shot and killed two people. Soon after, residents began grabbing the land for themselves and constructing houses on what they referred to as not Sherzai township but Martyred Township. Sherzai mobilised a group of *maliks* loyal to him to persuade locals not to grab the land but with little effect. The government rejected the five tribes' ownership of the land but they continued to occupy it. See Mumtaz (2013).

¹⁷ Many powerful individuals within the provincial security apparatus hailed from Dari Noor, including a Provincial Police Chief, a Deputy Provincial Police Chief, provincial council members and district governors. Ali has used his relationships with US forces to ensure that his predominantly Pashayee fighting forces are well integrated into semi-sanctioned militias supported by US Special Forces (the Shaheen 'eagle' forces and 'tiger' forces) and private security companies owned by Ali or fellow Pashayee ex-commanders. For a detailed analysis (abbreviated here), see Jackson (2014).

USD 10,000 upfront to obtain their positions and remitted a cut of the proceeds thereafter (Jackson, 2014). There was no question of Sherzai keeping the majority of official customs revenue as he had in Kandahar; he did not remit all of it to the central state, but he was forced to give up a good deal more. Perhaps as a response, he instituted the 'Sherzai tax' – despite the fact that governors have no ability to levy or collect taxes. The tax was structured just as any state-levied tax would be, with truck drivers required to pay roughly USD 75–87 per truck – netting the Sherzai Fund approximately USD 30,000 a day.²⁰ Although no official receipts were given, the Sherzai tax's consistency and stated purpose meant it was perceived as relatively legitimate in comparison to the myriad other 'taxes' and bribes demanded at the border.

Sherzai justified the tax with claims that the profits were used for public good through the Sherzai Fund, which financed activities ranging from local power-supply projects to meeting ad hoc requests from petitioners to covering shortfalls in the provincial government and line ministry budgets. When questioned about his refusal to remit these funds to Kabul, he claimed that he did not trust that the revenue would be equitably redistributed (see Katzman, 2013) – a claim that bore some weight, given the over-centralisation of funding and the slow budget execution rates between Kabul and the provinces.²¹ In effect, there was no such thing as a 'provincial budget' for the governor to draw upon. Instead, there was de-concentrated spending through each of the individual line ministries at provincial level, but this largely comprised staffing and operations costs rather than programming. This was often slow to be dispersed and there were persistent discrepancies between provincial budget requests and the funding allocated by the central state. The interaction between a highly centralised fiscal system and the relative decentralisation of power incentivised the capture of local resources outside of state processes. The central government exerted pressure on Sherzai to disband the tax but its collection only stopped after his removal in October 2013.

As in Kandahar, Sherzai sought to control and regulate economic activity. Cultivating ties with Sherzai allowed businessmen privileged access to provide services to

the government and government support when they encountered opposition. Minoia et al. (2014) detail how this worked in the vegetable trade. A single powerbroker, Haji Gul Murad, was able to buy a licence from the government – facilitated by Sherzai, but an arrangement that persists – to essentially establish a monopoly over the Jalalabad vegetable market. Murad oversees the market, collecting taxes on each product that passes through the market and issuing the international trading licences required to engage in the lucrative trade with Peshawar.

The root of Sherzai's troubles in Nangarhar can be attributed, just as happened with Ahmed Wali in Kandahar, to the ascendancy of a rival network, led by Abdul Qadir's sons Zahir and Jamal. It again underscores the importance of obtaining state positions in accessing resources and power: Zahir had been elected to Parliament in 2010 and Jamal was elected to the provincial council in 2009, serving as its chair in 2010 and 2011. The Arsalas led a broader coalition of rival networks – many of which had been cut out of rent-seeking opportunities by Sherzai – that staged protests, levelled public allegations of corruption and generally sought to undermine him. Protests appear to have dissipated as quickly as they appeared without the stated demands of the protestors having been met. The broad consensus is that deals were quietly struck with distribution at the core of mediation: Karzai directly and indirectly intervened to force Sherzai to give a greater share of resources to the Arsalas network. The tactic of sporadic performative protests worked well for the Arsalas, raising their profile and increasing their wealth while significantly damaging Sherzai's standing and decreasing his resource base.

Other factors worked against Sherzai. By 2011, Jalalabad was all but encircled by insurgent presence. Between 2014, poppy cultivation rose to nearly the same level as it had been at the height of cultivation in 2007.²² Sherzai's governance strategy had created rifts through which the Taliban were able to gain a foothold in the province.²³ As the drawdown of international troops approached, aid money declined. Popular opinion had also turned against international forces in the east, which in turn tainted public perceptions of Sherzai. In October 2013, he resigned.

20 According to a customs official interviewed in January 2014. See Jackson (2014).

21 A World Bank review of expenditure elaborates on these dynamics in much further details. It notes 'an imbalance of discretion or authority over provincial resources' and cautions that 'the disconnect between the relatively decentralised nature of public expenditure in Afghanistan and the highly centralised system of budget authority stands as a serious constraint to the efficiency of planning and implementation of large proportions of the national budget' (World Bank, 2008: 7).

22 In 2012 and 2013, poppy cultivation increased nearly 400%, and increased a further 16% in 2014. See UNODC and the Ministry of Counternarcotics (2013) and UNODC and the Ministry of Counternarcotics (2014).

23 The first districts to turn to the Taliban, in particular Sherzad and Khogyani, actively resisted eradication campaigns.

The Ahmed Wali network in Kandahar

Ahmed Wali employed many of the same tactics as Sherzai but to even greater effect. His relations with the central government provided unique and critical protection and benefit, particularly once his brother Hamid became president. In the beginning, the network Ahmed Wali was assembling was meant to increase Karzai influence in the south and counterbalance Sherzai. Hamid appointed Ahmed Wali head of the Kandahar reform *shura*, a precursor to the provincial council, in 2002, and Ahmed Wali assumed leadership of the Popalzai tribe after it was clear that Hamid, the previous leader, would become president. These quasi-official positions paved the way for Ahmed Wali and his brother Qayum to set up organisations and councils at provincial, district and village level in order to build a base of support among rural elites and allied tribes. These networks of rural constituents would become essential for electoral mobilisation on behalf of Ahmed Wali, Qayum (who was elected to Parliament in 2005) and Hamid (Wilder, 2005).

The combination of Sherzai's removal and Ahmed Wali's election in 2005 to the chair of the provincial council was transformative. His state position provided him with increased legitimacy and the ill-defined mandate of the provincial council allowed Ahmed Wali to shape its role to reflect and reinforce his growing power. It is important to note that few provincial council chairs elsewhere played such an influential role; it was the combination of Ahmed Wali's network and Sherzai's removal that mattered. Ahmed Wali's election as provincial council chair would not have been quite as important if Sherzai had remained governor or if another similarly influential rival had been appointed to replace him. With Sherzai now gone and his replacement dependent on the Karzai network, Ahmed Wali leveraged his position to demand 'government accountability' by summoning line ministry directors to account for their performance. While this appeared to be in the public good, it had the net effect of making line ministers accountable only to him and undermining the authority of the governor and central government. Ahmed Wali also used the council as a tool to create, control and resolve conflict. The perpetuation of tribal disputes or land conflicts had an economic and political logic in that members of the council would be called on to mediate, for a price – and generally in deference to Ahmed Wali's wishes.

He also acted as a mediator – again for a price. Much like Sherzai and other figures, he received petitioners in the tradition of a *khan* and addressed their problems

either by providing money or exerting his influence to resolve a dispute. This quasi-formal role allowed him to expand his connections, gather information and reinforce the appearance of dominance. According to one Kandahari political analyst, 'Even if you wanted a nothing appointment, to the Ministry of Education or something, it was not the government that decided but Ahmed Wali Karzai.'²⁴

The control of licit and illicit economic activity was also central. Ahmed Wali received significant support from US forces. Like Sherzai, he and his network seized lands the US and Canadian forces were likely to want, including Camp Gecko, Mullah Omar's former home, which was leased to the CIA (Cavendish, 2011). Ahmed Wali did not completely monopolise these contracts: a number of small contracting and other businesses sprang up in response to the money available. Ahmed Wali leveraged links with US and Canadian forces to gain contracts and control military-implemented aid projects. Like Sherzai, he served as a key broker for aid agencies and local businessmen. Access, in many cases, came in the form of paying some benefit or favour to him or his network in return.²⁵ As with Sherzai, those who did not gain Ahmed Wali's favour or whose endeavours became too lucrative were driven out of business and their contracts awarded to those with closer ties to the network (Minoia and Pain, 2015; Constable, 2011). This extended far beyond the lucrative military contracts; almost no activity of any political or economic value took place without Ahmed Wali's sanction.

His official position provided cover for his illicit activity. He leveraged opium eradication in the same way as Sherzai had in Nangarhar: to solidify connections to some of the rural elite, but also to undermine the competition. Ahmed Wali allegedly levied heavy taxes on the transport of opium across bridges connecting the cultivating regions of the Helmand River Valley to Kandahar. UN Office on Drugs and Crime surveys found that 91% of the poppy fields targeted were *outside* of approved eradication zones, strongly implying that some were ignored inside the zones and others, probably those of network rivals, were targeted (Malkesian, et al., 2009). He then funnelled the profits into largely licit activities (like Aino Minna, a property development partly owned by his brothers). In addition to drug money, land grabs (either private or in the guise of state interests) underpinned several property development projects.

24 See Jackson (2014).

25 For further detail, see Jackson (2014) or Forsberg (2010).

The resources coming into Kandahar after 2005 increased as security deteriorated, and Ahmed Wali controlled access to them. With more resources at play, rentier competition intensified and the short termism of these strategies became more pronounced. Under both Sherzai and Ahmed Wali's dominance, network competition was extremely violent – reaching levels not found elsewhere in Afghanistan's regional capitals. Nearly all of the powerful men in key government positions in Kandahar since 2001 are alleged to have maintained or sanctioned secret prisons, to have overseen brutal paramilitary or quasi-official security forces who used torture and executed captives, or to have used state forces and/or their security apparatus to target political, tribal and economic rivals. Targeted killings and assassinations were widespread, with more than 500 politically motivated killings believed to have been perpetrated between 2002 and 2012 (Azami, 2012).

At the height of Ahmed Wali's power in 2011, he was assassinated by a bodyguard. His death created an opening that was quickly occupied by Abdul Raziq, the Achakzai provincial police chief and close ally to Sherzai, Ahmed Wali and the US forces. His control of Spin Boldak made him indispensable to all three actors, which allowed him greater leverage and autonomy. While he employed his own distinct strategy (marked by refraining from explicit domination of the political landscape in Kandahar and an overt focus on security objectives), he has allowed greater space for others to operate so long as they do not threaten his interests and brought security to Kandahar City. This came at a high price: Raziq's brutality has largely been directed toward rival networks and has arguably contributed to the deterioration of security outside of the city.

Just as they had known of the shortcomings of backing Sherzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai, international actors are aware of the risks of backing Raziq. A leaked US diplomatic cable demonstrates that the US government was keenly aware that the choice to back Raziq would undermine the strength of Afghan government institutions, the accountability of security forces and the rule of law (US Embassy, 2010). But as one of Raziq's US Special Forces mentors explained, 'the first priority is to beat the Taliban. Once this is done, we can shift our attention ... Raziq can beat the Taliban' (Trofimov, 2010).

The south and east in context: conclusions and implications

In the south and east, the international community's lack of backing from key network actors had deleterious

effects on their state-building efforts. As the quote about Raziq illustrates, these patterns of behaviour continued long after key international actors appeared to recognise the harmful impact of these strategies on state-building processes. The short termism that characterised these strategies was evident elsewhere in the international intervention. Much of the international resources were short-term in nature and focused on ill-defined ideals of stability. This has manifested, in part, at the micro level in an early reliance on military expenditures and quick impact projects that were often captured by local power-holders.

Large sums of money, short timeframes and the security imperative encouraged network actors to adopt short time horizons. Together with the intensive rivalries over resource capture, this fuelled violent rentier competition. To varying degrees over time, political orders in Kandahar and, to a lesser degree Nangarhar, were characterised by a high degree of violent competition among elites, marked by assassination campaigns, armed violence, threats and intimidation, and major disruptions to the existing political order on a regular basis. The lack of a solid political bargain among networks drives volatility, as does the ongoing conflict in various ways, calling to mind what Cerny (1998) refers to as a 'durable disorder', driven by overlapping and competing sources of power and authority.

The intense concentration of resources in Kandahar and, to a lesser degree, Jalalabad, make them rather extreme cases – at least with regard to volatility. In Mazar and Herat, there is a greater degree of political stability and generally non-violent renegotiation of bargains. Part of this is due to the absence of insurgents: Mazar and Herat were, until recently, considered to be largely immune from insurgency-related insecurity. Part is also due to the lack of military or militarised aid and the incentives it provided for rentier competition: the relative absence of the insurgency meant these areas benefitted considerably less from international military presence and aid. The north had, at least initially, relatively little US military presence, with Italian forces in the west and predominantly Swedish and German forces in the north. Military spending and presence in Herat has been historically low. Atta complained in 2009 that the Nangarhar PRT has USD 89 million for one province while the Balkh PRT, covering four provinces, had just USD 495,000; Balkh is estimated to have received the tenth-most civilian aid of any province, far behind Kandahar, Nangarhar and Herat (Fishstein, 2013). Unlike forces in the south and east, the Swedish PRT in Balkh

was also reluctant to back warlord-figures in the north and channelled a greater proportion of its aid through the government and international and multilateral organisations.

Taken together, these four cases reveal a great deal about the nature of volatility. The cases of Kandahar and Nangarhar show a high degree of volatility *within* the networked state but also the durability and resilience of networks and of networked ways of 'doing business'. While the system itself appears relatively stable, the political, social and economic action they govern is volatile. Specific incidents of volatility may be mistaken for structural change, but volatility as a structural feature helps explain why while political alliances and bargains may change dramatically from week to week, the system ultimately functions in the same manner over many years.²⁶

A lack of volatility does not appear to result in more open access and more stable institution-building. It is often observed that Herat and Mazar have more functional state institutions and stronger service delivery capacity, but evidence is scant and some literature actually contradicts this.²⁷ Similar patterns of networked governance and closed systems of access are evident in both Herat and Mazar. More than a decade since his removal, Khan retains significant territorial influence over Herat and the greater west and his network is deeply embedded in the government and economy. Customs revenues continue to be subverted by power-holders, Khan's network chief among them.²⁸ Land grabs allegedly orchestrated by Khan and his network ties go unaddressed.²⁹ Even local government still appears beholden to him: the provincial council remains an important node in Khan's access networks, as evidenced when a chairman who had resisted Khan's affiliates was replaced with a close associate (Leslie, 2015).

Governor Atta in Mazar in particular is held up as an example of a benevolent, if not exactly benign, strongman. Atta has a clear monopoly on violence in the north and many believe it would crumble without him. However, he does not project a traditional military strongman or warlord/*khan* image, as did Sherzai and Ahmed Wali. Western news articles remark on his sharply tailored suits and the fact that he shaved off his bushy beard, typical of

mujahedeen commanders, when he became governor. He is often referred to as *ustad*, or teacher: a reference to his past as a schoolteacher before joining the *jihad*. He engages in a familiar way with international institutions and processes and the fact that he uses 'the language of government' is remarked upon as a distinguishing feature by Mukhopadhyay (2014: 148). One might assume from appearances that he is somehow 'reformable' – or, at least, not nearly as 'bad' as many of Afghanistan's other so-called warlord governors.

This is largely a matter of appearance more than behaviour (what Fishstein (2013) refers to Atta's 'projection of an aura' of an efficient governor), as his methods are similar. Atta maintained favour with the international community and accessed counter-narcotics funding by cracking down on opium and cannabis cultivation, yet there are persistent allegations that he indirectly profits from it.³⁰ Gaining access to coveted contracts appears to very heavily rely on connections with Atta's network, and Atta's network exerts control over the border crossing at Hairatan through which some 80% of Afghanistan's fuel imports flow.³¹ Atta has not overtly subsidised the state, as Sherzai and Ahmed Wali did. Instead he has sought to co-opt rivals by offering them government positions; those who resist making deals are 'purged from the police and the administration' (Giustozzi, 2012: 45). He has consolidated his control over state institutions by ensuring that they are staffed with those loyal to him and/or affiliated with the political party he is affiliated to, *Jamiat*. *Jamiat*s dominate security organs at provincial and district level, and Human Rights Watch has documented the allegations of abuses committed by formal forces under his control (HRW, 2011). He also appears to control sizable non-state militias (Giustozzi, 2012; HRW, 2015).

While Mazar and Herat are not fully explored as case studies here due to space constraints, they are indeed governed in much the same manner as Kandahar and Nangarhar – albeit under different conditions. The influence of these conditions on network behaviour merits further examination, but taken together with Nangarhar and Kandahar, they help illuminate the entrenched nature of the networked state. Responsibility for the creation and perpetuation of the varied environments in which these forms of governance have flourished lies partly with the international community, a theme that is explored further in the next chapter.

26 Similar patterns are observed in the Horn of Africa in fragile states that function according to similar logics. See de Waal (2014) and Keen (2012).

27 At least in the case of Mazar, see Echavez (2015). No recent comparable literature could be found on Herat.

28 Telephone interview with former consultant to the Afghan government, August 2015.

29 For specific incidents, see Hamide (2012) and Zaheer (2012).

30 See Balkh TV (2004), Ibrahim (2006) and HRW (2015).

31 Interview with former UN official, August 2015.

4 The ‘good’ governance agenda: rhetoric and reality



As the preceding chapter makes clear, international military actors were the most influential external force in shaping Afghan governance and political dynamics on the ground in both Kandahar and Nangarhar. This raises the question of what effect the international/national governance agenda and governance ‘reform’ had on these dynamics. This chapter outlines the post-Bonn governance agenda. Part of the problem with governance programmes and reform efforts was that they were at odds with the actions of – and significantly dwarfed by the influence and expenditure of – international military forces, which had a decisive impact on the formation of the Afghan state. Broadly speaking, subnational governance was largely neglected until the advent of the military surge in 2010, when it was thrust onto centre stage of the international community’s nation-building efforts. In order to follow a chronological narrative, this section divides its analysis of governance efforts into roughly these two periods yet, as will become clear, the periods have a great deal in common in terms of the beliefs that underpinned policy formulation and the challenges that were faced in bringing these policies into being.

Institution-building efforts 2001-2010: ambiguity and incoherence

Before 2010, the international community’s governance efforts arguably focused on Kabul. In part, this stemmed from the fact that the post-Taliban Constitution created one of the most fiscally and administratively centralised governments in the world.³² The focus on Kabul was accompanied by a near-total neglect of governance beyond the capital. This is not evident from policy documents from that time. The 2006 Compact and the ANDS (both the interim and final ANDS) highlighted the importance of building accountable and responsive institutions. The Compact, for example, referred to restructuring and rationalising ‘government machinery’ in pursuance of ‘a fiscally sustainable public administration,’ but these documents were thin on the details of how this was to be done. Yet the problems to stem from this are already signposted in the policy literature during this period, which raises concerns about the lack of clarity and coherence of various subnational government institutions.³³

The programmes, initiatives and reforms that were pursued during these years were piecemeal. The Afghan Stabilization Program, Afghan Local Governments Facility

³² For more, see Lister (2007).

³³ For an overview of these debates, see Lister (2005).

Development Program, Afghanistan Social Outreach and the Afghanistan Subnational Governance Program were all variations on a theme, backed by various donors and supporting the creation of physical infrastructure and/or technical capacity development for local governance.³⁴ While the objectives of these programmes were broadly defined, it's unclear what impact they had beyond the provision of hardware and assets (i.e. constructing buildings or providing computers and office supplies). The National Area-Based Development Program (NABDP) created participatory structures at the district level. However, it would be a stretch to classify the NABDP as a governance programme per se given its narrow focus on a very specific vision of agriculturally led rural growth and the fact that its councils were not aimed at working towards the creation of the district councils envisioned in the constitution.

Consequently, a 2007 Asia Foundation assessment of subnational governance found that 'the basic government structures in place at the subnational level are a carryover from previous governments and are organised to the provincial level with very little structure below' (Asia Foundation, 2007: 1). One possible exception to this is the National Solidarity Program (NSP). While not technically a 'governance' programme, the NSP established the lowest-level unit of quasi-official government in the form of elected Community Development Councils (CDCs). Scant attention, however, was given to the levels of government between the ministries in Kabul and the CDCs in rural communities. The Asia Foundation assessment goes on to attribute the ineffectiveness of governance efforts to the fact that 'there isn't a coherent, common vision for a subnational government structure and how new institutions will integrate into the existing complex terrain of formal and informal local governance' (ibid.).

This lack of a clear vision, and the resulting vagueness that characterised subnational government institutions, inadvertently entrenched networked systems of governance. The provincial councils are a case in point. Provincial councils are not a 'new' institution, and were first given formal recognition by the 1923 Constitution.³⁵ They are not only an institution with a legacy; they are also the only extant subnational body with elected membership.³⁶ They are seen as a critical organ for

communicating the will of the people to the government, although *how* exactly they are meant to do this was never clear. Article 139 of the Constitution states that councils 'shall participate in the attainment of the development objectives of the state and improvement of the affairs of the province in the manner prescribe by laws, and shall advise the provincial administrations on related issues... [and] shall perform its duties with the cooperation of the provincial administration.' With only historical memory and Article 139 to draw on, Afghans voting in the first round of provincial councils in 2005 probably did not have a clear idea of the roles to be fulfilled by those they were voting for.

The 2005 Provincial Council Law was meant to clarify the function of the councils, but confusion persisted: one media report called the law 'disturbingly vague' (Tarzi, 2005). Another Provincial Council Law was approved in January 2014.³⁷ Both laws articulate the council's two core objectives as monitoring provincial development activities and providing oversight for the provincial governor's office. There is no obligation within the role of governor that corresponds to the council's oversight role, meaning the governor has no formal obligation to seek the council's advice or listen any input given. Additionally, provincial councils are not adequately resourced to perform any oversight function.

As with other state institutions that exist in form and edifice but suffer from a lack of clarity and/or coherence in their role, the institution is largely constructed as a vacant space. This isomorphic mimicry – the adoption of organisational or institutional forms in weak states that simulate the appearance of institutions in strong, stable states – enables legitimacy in the eyes of the international community and camouflages the fact that these institutions do not function as they were intended to. Drawing on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Pritchett et al. (2010) describe isomorphic mimicry as a tactic of 'failure,' symptomatic of institutions not functioning at all or not furthering 'development' outcomes. Isomorphic mimicry applied here should not be seen in terms of success or failure; rather its perpetuation is a tactical choice by a variety of network actors in order to further their own access to (international) resources and power.

34 For more on this and ASP in particular, see Miakhel (2012).

35 Note that one key difference in the modern iteration of provincial councils is that they are now elected.

36 Provincial councils are elected every four years, in elections held concurrently with the presidential elections. The number of council members is determined by provincial population, with a quarter of the seats reserved for women and two members serving in the Meshrano Jirga.

37 The 2014 law significantly weakened the councils by stripping them of their monitoring powers. The provincial councils fought back with public protests and persuaded Ghani to issue an administrative decree restoring some of their powers, leveraging the fact that Karzai had signed the law before he left office. Oversight authority was vaguely and unofficially restored but, in essence, the confusion continues. For a more detailed discussion of these developments, see Qaane and Ruttig (2015).

The *de facto* role of provincial councils varies, reflecting the interests of dominant network players at local level and the constellation of alliances or competition among networks. Passive councils may do little more than attend mandated coordination meetings and obey the governor's will. More active provincial councils can play a powerful role. Yet this 'active' quality is usually at the behest of and to the benefit of a given network, as exemplified by the Kandahar council under Ahmed Wali Karzai. Where the governor appears weak or faces significant competition, the provincial council's vaguely articulated formal role in providing oversight can, as in Nangarhar under Jamal Qadir's leadership, provide cover for one network to challenge or undermine another.

In practice, many council members have created their own small access networks. The *de facto* role of the council is seen not as being to influence policy or to give advisory services to the government but rather to facilitate, for a price, access to resources. Because council members do not represent constituencies in the way members of congress or parliament in the United States or United Kingdom, respectively do, they are ostensibly expected to act on behalf of everyone in the province. In practice, they act in the interests of those in their networks. As one informant in Kandahar explained, 'If you are Alokzai, you should go to your close Alokzai council member and the same for every other tribe, but if your tribe has no council member you will have no one with influence.'³⁸

By contrast, concerted attention was paid to civil service reform during this period. These efforts focused on the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), which is responsible for appointing senior-level civil service officials and supervising the appointment of junior-level officials, and later, the creation of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), which governs provincial and district governors, provincial councils and municipalities. The IARCSC was born of a compromise made at Bonn: donors wanted a merit-based technocratic civil service commission while several Afghan factions wanted a division based on factional allegiances.³⁹ The outcome, too, has resulted in a compromise: while the IARCSC administers various tests for positions and oversees vetting for provincial and district civil service positions, these processes exist alongside an informal but fairly consistent scale of bribes and network-regulated access to government positions.

The IDLG, created in 2007, has encountered formidable problems in attempting to meritocratise government positions, the capture and distribution of which is essential to creating ties and solidifying networks. The IDLG is rarely openly challenged or publicly undermined, as confrontation is far less effective than systemic subversion. Meritocratic or technocratic appointments are generally allowed to proceed where they do not threaten network interests, limited to appointments seen as peripheral or unimportant. With all appointment processes, the official selection processes are seemingly followed more for the sake of cultivating the appearance that the institution 'works'.⁴⁰ This gives the appearance of modest success but does not allow fundamental or systemic change. As one Kandahar provincial council member commented, 'those related to powerful officials get the jobs, everyone else is discouraged from applying and the civil service commission process is just a little drama.'

What about those individuals who did believe in the Bonn vision of governance, and sought to 'play by the (formal) rules'? Those who received their appointments based on merit and who played by the (written) rules were much less well positioned to undertake their roles than those who had strong or varied ties but lacked the formal qualifications. Although this extends to all levels of government, the role of the provincial governor is a case in point. On paper, the governor's official remit is limited and comes with few resources. Without external relationships and access to resources outside of the state, the governor is heavily reliant on line ministries in Kabul (which are chronically slow to disburse funds) and the goodwill of local officials to govern.

The examples of Sherzai and Ahmed Wali illustrate the benefits of networked approaches over bureaucratic and meritocratic approaches. Their financial resources and coercion enabled them to compel government employees and institutions to act according to their will. They used this power to capture resources that enabled them to build and maintain their authority through ties. Highly networked individuals compel performance improvement from a civil servant with a phone call or visit from one of his deputies and distribute cash (often obtained illicitly) to cover the budget shortfalls and fund development projects. In comparison, the slow pace of highly centralised, bureaucratic government systems can make a strongman's way of doing things appear responsive and effective. It may take months to receive a long-promised

38 See Jackson (2015).

39 For further detail, see Parkinson (2010).

40 For further detail, see van Bijlert (2009).

line ministry budget allocation or years to replace an ineffective district governor if official procedure is followed.

Post-2010 governance reforms: more of the same?

After 2010, the international community's attentions turned toward provincial and district governance. After a distinct lack of attention to these issues, they were suddenly catapulted to the top of the Afghan government and international community's agenda. These efforts were highly ambitious: the 2010 Subnational Governance Law expounds upon the Bonn vision in ways that probably would have been seen as unrealistic even in 2001. Surge-era institution-building efforts followed suit, aiming to 'fundamentally transform Afghan subnational governance' (Brown, 2012: 4). District-level governance was seen, in particular, as the key stabilisation tool and as essential to the military defeat of the insurgency. Stabilisation-driven interventions at district level have seen particularly poor results, in part because of the expectation that improvements could be achieved in weeks or months – rather than years or decades. Brown (2012) writes extensively on this and, for the sake of brevity, her analysis will not be reproduced here. However, there are several features of these initiatives that, instead of bringing about the hoped-for transformations, inadvertently reinforced networked systems of governance.

Curiously, the shift was not in the content of the approach so much as it was an intensification of effort. First, there was a continued neglect of accounting for existing power structures. It was again assumed that governance structures must be built from scratch. One, perhaps extreme, example was the US military 'government in a box' concept, which included (largely imported and imposed) leaders, cash and equipment rapidly deployed to areas 'cleared' of Taliban by pro-government forces, resulting in widespread criticism and dismal results. Where existing structures were meant to be improved, the persistent assumption was that it was a *technical* problem. A key policy document guiding the US military and civilian surge identifies the problem as a lack of clarity and capacity within subnational government that required 'standard curricula, provincial training centres and improved pay and grade systems' and 'subnational training programme and recruitment and incentives packages in key underserved areas' (US Embassy/USFOR, 2009: 8). Policymakers consistently conceptualised governance as hierarchical and institution-based. Informal village structures could be linked to district structures, district structures linked to provincial structures and provincial structures linked

to central government through an infusion of foreign advisors and funding at each level.

Second, the approach taken did not deal with the contradictions inherent in the pursuit of the stated ideals of the governance agenda (transparency, meritocracy and so on), on the one hand, and the international community's and Afghan government's reliance on networked approaches to govern and maintain security, on the other. The US military and civilian surge plan repeatedly referenced the need to remove or punish 'abusive' or 'corrupt' power-holders as central to creating sustainable security (US Embassy/USFOR, 2009). It is unclear how this could have been done when the US military was simultaneously relying on and funding the networks of individuals like Sherzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai.

Finally, the approach did not address effectively the key structural features that inadvertently incentivised networked approaches and rentier competition, such as the concentration of resources in Kabul or the chronically short timelines in which transformative results were expected. Because the post-2010 approach represented more of the same ideas – that the obstacles to realising accountable, institution-based governance were primarily technical and financial – the result was the intensification and entrenchment of the rentier political marketplace dynamics in play since 2001. The announcement of US troop drawdown in 2011, at the height of the surge, sent contradictory messages that arguably undermined any potential for the long-term buy-in and predictability required to build stable institutions. The precipitous decline in resources since then and the current divisions have added to these dynamics. Elites are increasingly struggling to access the resources they once had, fuelling rivalries, adding to volatility and undermining the already limited and constrained functioning of government institutions.⁴¹

In debating what could have been done differently, the question arises as to whether international actors could have incentivised predatory elites to act in the public good. This speaks to a larger debate in the literature on warlords and hybrid governance. Reno (1998), for example, asserts such figures are only loyal to private interests but allows that such figures could be induced to act in the public good with the right leverage applied. Marten (2012) more optimistically asserts that such individuals can be

41 Mansfield concurs (2015: 4), citing Nangarhar: 'Government positions are perhaps one of the only ways to deliver favour to allies in the provinces, in the hope that this can in turn secure opportunities for further patronage and graft. The result is a high turnover of officials, intense rivalries within the provincial council and a growing sense of instability within the administration.'

convinced that 'good governance' is in their interests. De Waal (2015) offers a slightly more nuanced view, arguing that well-placed patrons may choose to promote public goods for an unknown reason (perhaps personal convictions, or belief that a reputation as 'good' or 'honest' will strengthen their position) but these islands of integrity will last only as long as the external and internal environment remains stable – an unlikely outcome in any highly competitive and volatile landscape.

There are, of course, other perspectives, but these three positions – Reno's 'no', Marten's 'yes, but only under certain conditions', and de Waal's temporary 'islands of integrity' – represent the main arguments relevant

here. In Afghanistan, abundant resources did influence behaviour by creating incentives for highly competitive state capture; but when it comes to influencing behaviour towards 'good' governance, there is scant evidence to draw on. What may matter most to Afghans is whether elite actors can be incentivised in ways that enable people to live their lives with the least interference and allow them to access core public goods and basic services. International policy was geared towards incentivising elites to provide security above all else. Basic services were provided in ways that were largely blind to the terrain of political settlements and bargains, as the next chapter explores in further detail.

5 Navigating the networked state: access to ‘public’ goods

While the previous section focused largely on the machinery of government, the following section turns to how Afghans at the periphery of networks have experienced governance. Public goods are generally defined by their provision equally to all members of society, but the examples from Kandahar and Nangarhar above illustrate that ‘public’ goods aren’t really public at all. In Afghanistan, access to health care, education, justice, protection and other fundamental public goods is heavily influenced by connectivity. Or, as one informant interviewed explained, ‘if you want better access to services in Kandahar, you need three things: power, money and relations.’⁴²

Contrary to the international community’s strategic narratives that say otherwise, Afghans generally do not expect the state and its resources to be open to all because this does not reflect the ways in which they live their lives. This plays out in routine matters as well as during pivotal or potentially transitional moments such as elections. One of the many interviewed in Kandahar, when speaking about the elections, said:

If I vote for [an] honest person, I am sure he will not be able to resolve my problems. If the police take a member of my family, he will not be able to get them released ... Why would I vote for a person who will not be able to resolve my problems?

The candidate with more connections was valued over one seen as ‘honest’ or as having the technical qualifications to be in government.

As the quote suggests, networks create protection. State institutions cannot be trusted in practice, which means that trust is largely personalised. The degree of trust depends on the nature of the tie at stake, but the network acts much like a spider’s web, whereby two individuals who have entered into a bargain with one another are not only tied directly but also connected by secondary or tertiary (and so on) connections. If one individual defaults on commitments, the other will be able to exert pressure through family members, members of the same tribe or ethnicity, business associates, members of the district or provincial council or others they have ties to.

This behaviour arguably reinforces the networked state. However, non-cooperation in the networked state – or refusal to participate in patronage and nepotistic practices – comes with serious repercussions. The alternative is isolation and exclusion, which could

42 Interview with human rights official, Kandahar City, November 2014.

include being deprived of the means of making a decent livelihood, access to certain jobs and even physical protection. For a businessman in Jalalabad, it might be the inability to import raw materials or export finished materials or even sell his goods in a local market. For a *malik* in a rural village, it might mean the inability to lobby for developmental resources and a consequent decline in legitimacy.⁴³ For an average Afghan in Kandahar, a lack of connectivity might mean a lack of protection and thus very real physical danger.⁴⁴ The potential costs far outweigh the incentives to play by official rules.

There are exceptional figures who have sought to challenge the status quo from positions within the state. In Kandahar, Mazar and Herat, several female provincial council members have used their limited influence to speak on behalf of their constituencies and to raise public interest issues with the media. They still need the backing of power-holders in order to sustain themselves politically, but this protection affords some room for manoeuvre. The late Nangarhar provincial council member Angiza Shinwari is one such example. She received significant support from Sherzai, and was fairly open about this in private conversations and publicly; she pursued human rights investigations against a number of powerful individuals, including the Arsalas.⁴⁵ That her targets were Sherzai's enemies undoubtedly allowed her greater freedom and protection by Sherzai's network, yet she was nonetheless an outspoken voice exposing abuse of power and violence against women in the east.

Ghulam Hamidi, the mayor of Kandahar City from 2007-2011, is another example. As head of the municipality, the mayor is one of the few subnational government officials mandated to collect taxes. Hamidi increased the city's revenue seven-fold, putting these funds to use with public works projects, and sought to combat several land grabs – although, perhaps predictably, he was also accused of extorting local businesses, among other things, and appeared to use these rents to sustain his connections. Neither Shinwari nor Hamidi should be portrayed as saints, but they did challenge the existing order in subversive and unique ways. Both, however, were killed in office, assassinated in bomb attacks. Those who 'buck the system' face dangerous consequences.

Connectivity at district level

Individuals on the peripheries of networks are, like those at the centre, driven to maximise their connections. In doing so, they maximise their options. An individual's ability to maximise connectivity is influenced by a wide array of factors (including gender, economic position, education and so on), and their starting position greatly influences their options and the obstacles they face. This in turn influences economic and social outcomes, which is evident in the patterns of governance outcomes at district level.

This is thrown into sharp relief by the case of Kandahar, where many networks fall along clearly delineated tribal and geographic lines. Some districts have been distinctly privileged over others owing not so much to their education levels or natural endowments as to their connectivity. The marginalisation of tribes in Arghandab, along with Panjwai, Maiwand and other districts, by the ruling Popalzai, Barakzai and Achakzai tribes, results in the former having fewer opportunities.

In the case of Dand, an extension of Kandahar City and the ancestral home of the Karzais, having local power-holders in residence or with some geographic tie does not guarantee better outcomes. As Pain's (2010) study of livelihood trajectories in Dand illustrates, local power-holders in residence use economic opportunities, government positions and local government structures as sources of patronage mainly for 'outsiders'. Little has been left to trickle down to the people who actually live there, particularly the landless and most vulnerable. However, geographic proximity to Kandahar City helps mitigate the impact of neglect seen in places like Maruf, Nesh and Arghistan, which are both geographically and politically isolated.⁴⁶

Similar patterns were observed in Nangarhar's districts, as already illustrated in the discussion in chapter 2 of the starkly different opportunities and outcomes for the residents of well-connected Dari Noor as compared to the marginalised district of Rodat. Sukhroad, a peri-urban extension of Jalalabad and home to many influential figures (including several Arsalas), suffers neglect akin to Dand district in Kandahar. Residents are able to compensate through their proximity to Jalalabad and the urban economy and their access to better health and education services in the city compared to the meagre ones available in the district. Southern loop districts, similar to Kandahar's less populated provincial districts,

43 For a further exploration of these themes, with particular relevance to village level development interventions and NSP, see Pain (2016).

44 See Gopal (2014) and Jackson (2015).

45 Interviews with Shinwari, Jalalabad, May-September 2011; July 2013.

46 For a more detailed discussion of the Kandahar case, see Jackson (2015).

are chronically under-represented in national and provincial government. They have been largely neglected beyond whatever resources were required to secure their participation in poppy eradication drives, and even these gains were limited in impact and longevity.

Networked access to education and health care

Unlike governance efforts, basic service provision – education and health care – received enormous attention, resources and energy from donors and the government. Since 2002, school enrolment has increased from 1 million to 8.7 million with an estimated 57% of primary-aged children in school (Central Statistics Organisation, 2014). Health care coverage has rapidly expanded, with the number of functioning health facilities increasing from 496 in 2002 to more than 2,000 in 2012 (World Bank, 2016).

This appears to be a stark departure from historical patterns of service delivery, in part due to the fact that the central state has had as little cohesion as it has had administrative-distributive powers (Saikal, 2004). Networked forms of governance probably predated 2001, and to some degree may influence citizen expectations of service provision. As Shahrani (1998: 228) points out, historically the growth of government ‘at any level was seen as a means of extracting and accumulating wealth from the people and not one of dispensing the needed services for their ‘citizens.’

From the outset, the influx of resources meant that there would be attempts to exert control over access to employment in these sectors – even health and education positions are not as ‘lootable’ or enriching as customs or the security sector. A World Bank/AREU study of basic services surmises that the Ministry of Education, the largest single civilian employer in Afghanistan, is a rich resource for distribution of jobs and ‘attracts interest as a vote bank’, noting that teachers can instruct pupils to campaign for certain candidates and exert influence over community voting patterns (Echavez, 2016: 30).

The implications of all of this for Afghans extend beyond access to issues of quality. A persistent challenge in basic service delivery has been quality, particularly after sufficient expansion of services in the technical sense had been achieved.⁴⁷ If teaching and medical expertise are a secondary recruitment consideration in the networked state, this negatively impacts quality across the board. Donors and ministries are often criticised for

not focusing enough on technical and financial aspects that would improve quality, but they frequently overlook the more political factors that can work against qualitative improvements.⁴⁸

School construction is also lucrative, with cases in which elders (who mediate site selection) are able to influence the process to enrich themselves. While the involvement of elders is generally meant to ensure community needs are adequately considered, this is unlikely to work when elders are not acting in the interests of their communities but instead according to network logic. In these cases, individuals fear that challenging the elders on school construction would ‘invite difficulties in the delivery of education services’ (Echavez, 2016: 49).⁴⁹ Additionally, the common practice of creating ‘ghost schools’, or schools that only exist on paper but receive significant funding and resource allocations, is a widespread problem that the Minister of Education has publicly acknowledged (Qayomi, 2015).

In the health sector, the World Bank/AREU study finds similar patterns of connectivity influencing access to services. One of several documented examples of political interference in clinic site selection was in Wardak province. Provincial council members of the Hazara-dominated Behsud district had several local clinics even though they were not in line with ‘official’ selection procedures. Out of the eight districts in the province, this single, well-connected district contained 40% of the entire province’s health clinics (Echavez, 2016: 42).⁵⁰

Nonetheless, the study finds that the ‘impact of nepotism and clientelism on health sector recruitment is more limited’ than in the education sector, due to health service delivery being contracted out to NGOs through the Basic Package of Healthcare Services (BPHS) (Echavez, 2016: 31). BPHS financial transfers are made directly from the Ministry of Finance to implementing NGOs, which reduces the opportunities to control access to the funding involved. Education, by contrast, is delivered directly by the government. This is not to suggest that NGOs are free from corruption, but they are less likely to be as heavily ‘networked’ as the government. While the government sees BPHS as one of the ‘key elements of

48 On health care, see Coleman and Lemmon (2011) and Acerra, et al. (2009). On education, see Dörner and Langbein (2014) and Ministry of Education (2014). And, in the interests of disclosing that the author herself has previously overlooked these factors in her analysis of the education sector, see also Jackson (2011).

49 On ‘ghost’ schools, see SIGAR (2015).

50 While not as explicitly detailed, a separate World Bank review of BPHS contains several references to ‘political interference’ as a main risk to BPHS achieving its intended outcomes. See World Bank (2015).

47 See Ministry of Education (2014) and Dörner and Langbein (2014).

the health system being built by the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health', at least part of its success appears to lie in the fact that it is implemented largely *outside* of the government (Ministry of Public Health, 2015: vii).

A concluding note is required here, applicable to the entirety of this paper but particularly this section and the perspectives of Afghans presented herein. While the hope is that this theory of the networked state can be employed in ways that improves life for Afghans at the peripheries of these networks, there is a risk it reinforces ideas that 'corruption' is part of Afghan culture or values. As interviews with hundreds of Afghans undertaken since 2012 as part of this research have consistently underscored, few are satisfied with this closed system of access. While many actively participate in this system and see it as the status quo, the promises made by the international community and the government have nonetheless created high expectations that have consistently gone unmet.

6 Conclusion



There are several lessons to be drawn from this analysis, at least in terms of which policy measures exacerbate predatory and exclusionary network dynamics. In particular, this research underscores the absolute need for policy coherence across the international intervention. Since 2001, the international community has pursued a profoundly contradictory and ultimately self-defeating strategy. While spending significant energy and resources on improving governance and the provision of ‘public’ goods, donors and foreign militaries have nurtured a system that has profoundly weakened nascent subnational government institutions. The creation of the networked state was a collaborative process between the Afghan government and an array of international actors, abetted by an overwhelming focus on security objectives, particularly as the insurgency grew in strength.

Secondly, this was exacerbated by the chronic short-termism of the international intervention, now in its fifteenth year. Any cohesive approach of this nature requires long-term investment and resources, something which was undermined by the international avoidance of state-building from the outset (as embodied by the ‘light footprint’ approach). The short-term timeframes of six to eighteen months, which shaped the horizons of the international intervention and the players within it, fuelled competition and volatility.

Thirdly, a coherent, concrete vision of governance, rooted in existing social, economic and political dynamics, is vital. The vague and politically naive vision articulated for Afghan governance was crippled by the tabula rasa approach. Technocratic approaches are fundamentally misguided and insufficient if they are not designed to work effectively amid prevailing political interests. The failure to adequately understand what existed before, and what new political and social dynamics emerged after the fall of the Taliban, meant that the international community essentially did not have to consider how to work within existing constraints. In this formulation, the main constraints appeared to be the *absence* of various technically conceptualised things – lack of capacity, low literacy and education levels, lack of institutions, lack of experienced civil servants, and so on.

Finally, historical trajectories matter. Transformations of the nature promised at Bonn are slow and precarious processes with a heavy degree of path dependency involved. As Grindle (2012) surmises in her extensive research work on patronage politics and governance reform, preceding systems constrain the options for change and influence the trajectory of their replacements, meaning that change is shaped by a series of contextual

constraints and strategic choices. Similar findings are supported, in various ways, by the burgeoning literature on political settlements.⁵¹ This research finds that there are certain preconditions that lead to the certain types of governance or governance challenges. At regional and provincial level, high levels of international investment, military presence and border crossings are likely to result in certain highly competitive and factional environments (i.e. de Waal's rentier political marketplace) – more so than elsewhere. At district level, the preconditions for development and security may be obscured if districts are examined in isolation or simply as a component piece of a hierarchical structure. Here the development of smarter tools and approaches, employing sophisticated analysis that is responsive to political dynamics, is required.

This is not a new realisation nor a particularly earthshattering one. There are important parallels found in much older works, including Bratton and Van de Walle's (1994) work on neopatrimonialism in Africa and Ferguson's (1999) work on the failure of 'modernisation' in Zambia. What is striking is how consistently, across space and time, policy-makers neglect to meaningfully consider pre-existing conditions and instead impose radical, stubbornly linear policy prescriptions that promise near-total social and political transformation. There is no simple alternative model that arises from this analysis. If anything, though, it suggests that strictly linear thinking has little relevance to the dynamics that characterise fragile contexts like Afghanistan. Policy formulation must be rooted in Afghan realities rather than internationalised notions of 'best practice'. A first step towards rectifying this lies in understanding the constraints posed by and the underlying logic of the system, which this paper has explored across both subnational governance and service delivery. However this understanding will only be useful insofar as it informs engagement, resulting in different ways of working.⁵²

The future of the networked state

For many long-term Afghanistan analysts, few if any of these conclusions will be revelatory. This audience is also likely to be deeply dissatisfied with the above calls for policy coherence, long-term vision and so on, knowing how nebulous and seemingly unattainable these ideals have historically been in the Afghanistan case. They may

also argue that lack of understanding was not necessarily the central problem. Many individuals in policy-making positions at the time were well aware of many of the risks of these approaches: that supporting so-called warlords and embedding them into the foundation of the state apparatus would have profoundly negative consequences for the future of Afghanistan. And, perhaps for the sake of expediency or for want of other readily available options, they pursued these policies anyway. There is little reason to think that will change now. This leaves the author of this paper in the unenviable position of attempting to craft recommendations that are both realistic and feasible in an international context of growing pessimism and nearly imperceptible levels of political will.

Additionally, the social, political and economic dynamics of Afghanistan have changed profoundly since the conclusion of field research in 2015. After year upon year being proclaimed 'pivotal' or 'critical' for Afghanistan, the change that has long been heralded is arguably finally happening. The drawdown and consequent decline in resources that are essential to sustain networks has had significant, if still unfolding, consequences. This too places the author in an uncomfortable position: attempting to predict the future in a period of dynamic change in the hope of crafting policy-relevant and forward-looking closing remarks.

When shocks to the resource supply occur – either through a large influx of resources or a rapid decline – networks rapidly reconfigure. This is a pattern clearly observed in Nangarhar with the Arsalas, well documented by Mansfield (2015), as well as in the north with Atta and the west with Khan. As distributive entities, networks are configured in orientation to their resource bases. One implication is that as western resources dry up, they are again turning inward or towards regional players. In many cases, these network nodes are abandoning their more acceptable public faces as governors or elected officials and returning to jihadi imagery, style and, most importantly, resource bases.⁵³ Many are returning to their respective fiefdoms (essentially the 2001 zone designations) and re-arming themselves.

With the decline of international resources, the networks underpinning the central state have radically changed. The Abdullah-Ghani government, itself internally divided, has never been able to cultivate the grand political bargain Karzai struck with regional network players early on. The networked state that Karzai so carefully

51 For an overview, see Kelsall (2016).

52 As Booth et al.'s (2016) study of working with political economy analysis illustrates, very often the problem is not policy makers' understanding of policy dynamics but the obstacles to translating these understandings into policy changes.

53 The exception here might be Khan, as he never really abandoned his cultivated jihadi image or those networks.

stitched together is coming apart at the seams. This is due both to the internal division of the regime but also the lack of resources in the post-drawdown period required to sustain such arrangements. The illusion of a viable central state is slowly slipping away.

The result is greater fragmentation. This is true in terms of elite regional networks but also evident at local levels as mid-level players and low-level civil servants alike are now jockeying against one another. This has materialised in the decline of functioning of government at local levels, particularly where local and regional networks are engaged in an uncertain process of reconfiguration. What this means for the average Afghan in practice is that the connections that, some years ago, might have guaranteed access to a passport or a place at university are now increasingly uncertain, requiring them to diversify and expand their connections. This scrambling for connections has created ever greater levels of uncertainty and panic. This varies across contexts; networks linked to Atta or Raziq, for example, remain relatively stable, while more fluid contexts, such as Nangarhar and Kunduz, are seeing much greater volatility.⁵⁴

One option is to revitalise the networked state. In such an approach, the international community (specifically the US) would revert to the kingmaker and resource bank role it played in the Karzai years. This would require concerted action across the diplomatic and military spheres to more robustly support Ghani, above and apart from Abdullah (there can, after all, only be *one* king). With international resources and support behind him, Ghani would then be able to strike deals with regional players such as Atta in the north, Khan in the west and Raziq in the south, as well as with strands of the insurgency. However, this option is unlikely to be taken up. There is little political appetite among the international community for such a resource-intensive approach, and it may indeed be simply too late to recreate past ways of doing things under a new and different regime.

Another option is to let the National Unity Government, internally divided and at war with itself, continue down the path of gradual disintegration, while focusing on influencing regional players more directly. This would imply a further division of Afghanistan into rival regional orders with little semblance left of a unified central authority. Understanding localised political settlements will become essential for development and humanitarian practitioners, as they will be almost entirely reliant on

some sort of locally consolidated order to gain safe access and implement programming. This implies greater costs, due to the inherent difficulties, as well as more adaptable and politically savvy implementation approaches.

What might be most important now is what the international community *does not* do, rather than what it *does*. In policy terms, it makes little sense to invest in new and grand national initiatives or in dysfunctional institutions when the local and the 'informal' will undoubtedly grow in importance. An ethos of minimising harm, where possible, would be wise. While seemingly obvious from the analysis above, it is worth explicitly stating that supporting militias or re-arming regional players (through the Afghan Local Police or any other means) would be, without exception, catastrophic.

There are myriad other scenarios that could unfold, impossible to predict now in a period during which the tectonic plates underlying political settlements appear to be rearranging themselves. While all this helps provide new ways of understanding how power and access to resources functions in Afghanistan, it also risks reinforcing the sense of hopelessness that currently characterises issues of governance in Afghanistan. While this malaise is understandable, it is misplaced and dangerous. How the international community chooses to deal with elite networks is arguably more important now than at any point since Bonn.

54 Observations drawn from a separate research trip to Afghanistan in February 2016.

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