

Mistakes, means and opportunities

How donors understand and influence legitimate and inclusive politics in Afghanistan

CRU Report

Erwin van Veen



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Mistakes, means and opportunities

How donors understand and influence legitimate
and inclusive politics in Afghanistan

Erwin van Veen

CRU Report
August 2016

August 2016

© Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

Unauthorized use of any materials violates copyright, trademark and / or other laws. Should a user download material from the website or any other source related to the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', or the Clingendael Institute, for personal or non-commercial use, the user must retain all copyright, trademark or other similar notices contained in the original material or on any copies of this material.

Material on the website of the Clingendael Institute may be reproduced or publicly displayed, distributed or used for any public and non-commercial purposes, but only by mentioning the Clingendael Institute as its source. Permission is required to use the logo of the Clingendael Institute. This can be obtained by contacting the Communication desk of the Clingendael Institute (press@clingendael.nl).

The following web link activities are prohibited by the Clingendael Institute and may present trademark and copyright infringement issues: links that involve unauthorized use of our logo, framing, inline links, or metatags, as well as hyperlinks or a form of link disguising the URL.

Cover photo: Afghan provincial governors considering issues of peace, prosperity and rehabilitation during the country's first regional Jirga. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

About the author


Erwin van Veen is a senior research fellow with Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit who focuses on the power dynamics of the organization of security and justice in conflict-prone environments.


About CRU

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' is a think tank and diplomatic academy on international affairs. The Conflict Research Unit (CRU) is a specialized team within the Institute, conducting applied, policy-oriented research and developing practical tools that assist national and multilateral governmental and non-governmental organizations in their engagement in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

The Clingendael Institute
P.O. Box 93080
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

Follow us on social media

 @clingendael83

 The Clingendael Institute

Email: cru@clingendael.nl

Website: <http://www.clingendael.nl/cru>

Contents

Acknowledgement	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	5
1 Contemporary Afghan domestic politics in historical perspective	7
Selected features of Afghanistan's political settlement	7
Effects of international engagement on Afghan domestic politics since 2001	12
The country's current elite pact considered in terms of its legitimacy and inclusiveness	16
2 How do donors seek to understand Afghan domestic politics?	19
The tools that donors use to make sense of Afghan politics – and their limitations	20
Internal constraints donors face when trying to understand Afghan politics	23
Transmitting political knowledge into development programming	27
Consequences of limited understanding, internal constraints and partial transmission	28
Conclusion: Ideas for improvement	30
Developing conditions that enable a better understanding of Afghan domestic politics	31
Broadening the suite of instruments to stimulate inclusive and legitimate politics	32
Annex: Methodology	34
References	35

Acknowledgement

This report was made possible by the German Ministry for Development Cooperation (BMZ) and the German *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), which I gratefully acknowledge.

Moreover, the report could not have been produced without the assistance of some key people who work for these institutions. In particular, Shinta Sander (BMZ/GIZ) provided helpful overall guidance to the study while Benjamin Werner (GIZ) and the staff of the German Risk Management Organization (RMO) in Kabul proved invaluable in enabling a safe field visit to Afghanistan by providing risk alerts, transport, safety assessments and logistical support. Thank you.

In addition, a sizeable number of people – donors, Afghan government officials and civil society representatives alike – graciously freed up about an hour of their time to speak with me while already facing full agendas and on the basis of requests at unreasonably short notice. Fortunately, flexibility is the operative word in Afghanistan. I very much appreciated the willingness to talk, as well as the frankness of these conversations.

Finally, reports tend to greatly improve as their author is challenged in peer-review type processes. For this sort of assistance – on a personal basis – thanks go to Véronique Dudouet (Berghof Foundation), Jort Hemmer (Clingendael), Stephen Ndegwa (World Bank) and Lenny Linke (Afghanistan Analysts Network).

The field work for the report was concluded at the end of November 2015 and its writing at the end of December 2015. It does not reflect developments beyond this date. Naturally, the text, as well as any errors, remain the responsibility of the author.

Executive Summary

Long hidden in the technical jargon of aid delivery, the ‘politics’ of development have steadily gained prominence in debate and practice over the past few years. This shift has been particularly pronounced in relation to the highly fragmented and politicized conflict-affected environments in which development was long approached on the basis of the politically neutral and technically focused paradigms of the Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action. The realization is now fairly widespread that the political aspects of development processes are not limited to electoral competition, political parties and affairs of state, but include the entire range of policies and resources across which power is exercised. This makes the extent to which external actors understand the domestic politics of the conflict-affected environments where they operate of paramount importance for the appropriateness and effectiveness of both their diplomatic and their development initiatives.

This report contributes a case study of Afghanistan to the debate. From the perspective outlined above, it analyses how donors seek to understand Afghan domestic politics, how donors feed such understanding into their development activities and what recommendations can be distilled from the present state of affairs that have relevance for new, more ‘politics-oriented’ strands in the development discourse, such as ‘thinking and working politically’ or ‘doing development differently’. The report focuses specifically on how donors seek to understand and improve the legitimacy and inclusivity of Afghan domestic politics as part of their corresponding commitment under the **New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States**.

Its main conclusion is that donors generally have a modest and one-sided understanding of the nature and dynamics of Afghan domestic politics as expressed through the key premises of its political settlement, a narrow outlook on what type of activities constitute support for the promotion of more legitimate and inclusive politics, and a limited suite of instruments for doing this. Table 1 below visualizes the main factors that bring this situation about. Each factor is examined in the main body of the report.

One important aspect of the present state of affairs is that donors display a nearly uniform and strong focus on the central Afghan state and its government, despite a long history of decentralized governance and a fusion of informal and formal power at all levels of rule. Another aspect is that donors focus their efforts to improve political legitimacy and inclusivity on technical and capacity-building initiatives that seek to improve the procedural aspects of electoral democracy, largely ignoring the historic evidence that ‘input-legitimacy’ is not what counts most in Afghanistan.

Table 1 Key factors that influence donors’ understanding of Afghan politics

<p>Factor 1: The fragmented and hybrid nature of Afghanistan’s governance, and its legacy of violence, make it difficult to grasp the country’s political complexity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A fading certainty about who has the right and ability to rule - Violence as an acceptable method to acquire or resist power - Foreign influence as a permanent feature of power and governance - A consultative and reciprocal relationship between centre and regions - A steady undercurrent of religious influence on the affairs of state 	<p>Result A limited understanding of Afghan politics and only a modest ability to promote greater political inclusivity and legitimacy</p>
<p>Factor 2: Each tool that donors use to develop insight into Afghan domestic politics has serious limitations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anecdotic bilateral diplomatic conversations - Occasional country-wide conflict or political-economy analysis - One-off project-specific conflict or political-economy analysis - Employment of local staff with their own backgrounds and loyalties - Intelligence that often has military sources 	
<p>Factor 3: Strategic and operational internal constraints limit how well donors are able to understand Afghan domestic politics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitude of interference - Security focus - Parliamentary micro-management - Focus on central government - High staff turnover - Limited language abilities - An overemphasis on risk to staff - Narrow interpretation of political inclusivity and legitimacy - Spending pressure - Planning limited to the short-term 	<p>Consequences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No effective challenge to a central-state-centric, executive-focused governance paradigm - Significant resource allocation based on limited political understanding of potential effects - Technical institution-building with a procedural understanding of introduced legitimacy
<p>Factor 4: The transmission of political knowledge into development programmes is ad hoc and personalized instead of organized and institutional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lack of structural connectors between political analysis and development programming - Incompatibility of level and ‘fit’ of information - Short-term programme cycles unable to absorb analysis - Outsourcing of programming to multilaterals 	

It is noteworthy that a significant number of donors are keenly aware of their narrow understanding of Afghan domestic politics, are frank about their internal limitations that play an appreciable role in bringing about this narrowness, and seek to do as good a job as possible under the circumstances. It is nevertheless problematic that the general awareness of this situation has not translated into a sense of urgency that the risk of unintended consequences arising out of well-intended diplomatic and development initiatives (including the fight against terrorism) is significant and needs to be addressed. Or, to put it negatively, the danger of doing harm is clear and present. Worse, the

evidence suggests that international engagement has already significantly damaged the quality of governance in Afghanistan – an assertion further substantiated in the report.

Although these findings are not necessarily new, they have not yet been corroborated through more systematic examination of how the inner workings of donor operations influence the level of political understanding that donors can hope to achieve in fragile societies. As this is an important dimension that should be taken into account in future improvement efforts, the report intends to make a contribution to stimulating more thoughtful political analysis and engagement in conflict-affected countries.

However, as many of the elements listed in Figure 1 have been around for years, they give rise to the suspicion that the ability of donors to do a better job in understanding and supporting domestic politics in fragile societies is not very susceptible to such efforts at change. Accepting this premise for the purpose of the present report suggests two sets of recommendations: one pertaining to the enablers needed for developing a deeper understanding of Afghan domestic politics; the other pertaining to the instruments necessary for establishing a broader concept of legitimacy and inclusivity.

Enablers that can bring a better understanding of Afghan domestic politics about:

1. Create greater domestic political acceptance for the higher cost of obtaining good-quality data in conflict-affected environments.
2. Creatively improve the living conditions of expatriate staff to make longer postings more attractive.
3. Develop standard approaches for creating external capacity that can systematically deliver high-quality political analysis.
4. Develop more sophisticated risk-management practices and accept higher risk-mitigation costs.

Instruments that can broaden the suite of options to stimulate inclusive and legitimate politics:

1. Build greater insight into how elite transitions can be facilitated by encouraging fresh talent and leadership to enter the political arena.
2. Develop a better understanding of how institutional and personalized forms of governance can be combined in federally oriented governance hybrids.
3. Explore what incentivizes warlords and armed groups to compete politically for their interests in a peaceful manner.

Introduction

'Politics' dominate governance and resource allocation in every society, if politics are understood as the manner, relations and utilization of rule and power by a selected few in the service of, in the name of, or against the many.¹ Unsurprisingly, this also holds true for the area of development cooperation. Surprisingly, though, it remains a somewhat new insight that was long hidden under the technical jargon of aid delivery. However, development politics are experiencing an extended period of 'coming out', much like security did in relation to development about 20 years ago. Today it is commonplace to state that development and security are inextricably linked. Politics and development may yet develop an equally intimate connection.

From this perspective, the case study report analyses how donors currently seek to understand Afghan domestic politics, how they feed such understanding into their development activities – especially those that aim to increase the legitimacy and inclusivity of governance – and what lessons or good practice can be distilled from this.

The inquiry takes the **New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States** as its guiding frame.² This political agreement, concluded in 2011 and endorsed by some 50 donors, multilateral development organizations and fragile states, contains a series of mutual commitments on how development efforts in conflict-affected environments can jointly be improved. Among other things, it proposes a range of peace- and state-building goals (PSGs) that should steer development efforts to enable sustainable exits from fragility. Its first goal (PSG1) focuses on 'Legitimate Politics – Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution.' In practice, this has often amounted to efforts to improve political legitimacy and inclusivity in fragile societies. The lagging implementation of this objective provides the starting point for the present study. The salience of PSG1 increased recently as a result of the endorsement by the United Nations of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which builds in part on the New Deal.

-
- 1 This is a narrower definition with more focus on the 'body politic' and the question of for whom power is exercised than, for example, that of Robert Dahl, which suggests that we understand politics as 'any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority'. This includes political processes in, for example, firms or civil society organizations. Dahl, R., *Modern political analysis*, 5th edn, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall International, 1991.
 - 2 For a full overview of the initiative that led to the 'New Deal', as well as core documents, [online](#) (accessed 02/12/15). For a recent review of implementation efforts to date, see Hearn, S., *Independent review of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, New York, New York University CIC/IDPS, 2016.

Given the limited time available for the inquiry, it has not been possible to develop a context-specific understanding of what inclusive and legitimate politics might amount to in Afghanistan. Instead, the research has focused on how donors seek to understand Afghan domestic politics. The term 'political settlement' was used in some interviews and is used in the report as a shorthand reference to the political relations, power sources, rules of political competition and agreements on resource distribution that can be said to make up 'politics'. In this study, a political settlement denotes the implicit or explicit understanding between (part of) a country's elites regarding the division of power between them. This is expressed in the form of a set of (in)formal representation, control and distribution rules that guide governance and resource allocation. Such understandings evolve over time and are grounded in underlying agreements *within* particular elite groups that enable and constrain the settlements that can be reached *between* different elite groups.³ The term 'donors' in this analysis refers to donors interviewed for the report (see Annexe 1). The broader group of donors that is brought together in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is referred to as 'OECD donors'. Donors that are not members of this organization, such as Turkey or China, are excluded from the study.

Section 1 provides a schematic overview of the nature and development of Afghanistan's political settlement and of the headline effects of donor engagement with Afghan politics. Section 2 subsequently offers a brief analysis of the tools donors use to understand Afghan domestic politics, what internal constraints they face in their efforts to do so, and how they translate political analysis into development programming. Section 3 offers recommendations on how OECD donors could improve their support for inclusive and legitimate politics.

3 See for example: Parks, T. and W. Cole, *Political settlements: Implications for International Development Policy and Practice*, Occasional paper no. 2, The Asia Foundation, 2010; Laws, E., *Political Settlements, Elite Pacts and Governments of National Unity: A conceptual study*, DLP Background Paper 10, 2012; Menocal, A., *Inclusive political settlements: Evidence, gaps and challenges of institutional transformation*, Birmingham, UK Department for International Development, 2015.

1 Contemporary Afghan domestic politics in historical perspective

This section explores Afghan domestic politics from the perspective of how power has typically been distributed and effectuated. It distills key elements from a headline review of Afghanistan's history, focusing on the post-2001 period.

Selected features of Afghanistan's political settlement

Despite its current negative international image as a nation embroiled in permanent strife, deep corruption and entrenched social conservatism, the past hundred years or so of Afghan history feature both stability (e.g. 1929–78) and instability (e.g. 1979–2001), peaceful ethnic co-existence and vicious ethnic strife (especially in the 1990s), warlordism and relatively effective central rule, Islamic radicalism as well as moderate Islamic practices. In fact, from the rule of Emir Abdur Rahman in the late nineteenth century up to today, Afghanistan has seen the pendulum of stability, centralization and foreign influence swing back and forth a couple of times, to create tremendous upheaval and change at each passing.⁴

For example, in the early 1970s Afghanistan's economy was growing – partly because of a significant influx of foreign aid and investment, its educated population was increasing and basic nationwide infrastructure had just been completed (the Salang Pass of 1964 and the Great Ring Road [Highway One]). In contrast, by the late 1990s Afghanistan lay in ashes after two decades of intense fighting that had left the south under the control of the religiously conservative Taliban movement, which was largely composed of destitute refugees from madrassas in Pakistan, and the north under the control of an assortment of warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ismail Khan.⁵

At the risk of serious simplification, a number of features of Afghanistan's political settlement can nevertheless be identified from even a cursory review of the country's

⁴ Barfield, T., *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁵ Giustozzi, A., *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan*, London, Hurst & Company, 2012; Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*

political history.⁶ Since these are relevant for understanding the present political settlement and donor engagement with it, they merit a brief discussion.

Feature 1: A fading certainty about who has the right and ability to rule

Until 1929 the default position was that the rulers of Afghanistan originated from the elites of its Pashtun Durrani in the south and south-east. Only membership of this narrow social group provided, as it were, the right to compete for rightful rule. While success provided no guarantee of enduring legitimacy, having different social origins fatally compromised popular acceptance. However, after 1929 a Tajik, Peshawar Pashtuns (from Pakistan), Marxist-oriented Ghilzai Pashtuns, another Tajik, Taliban and, finally, another Pashtun Durrani 'ruled' Afghanistan. In short, as the accepted rules of succession were loosened or discarded, opportunities for competition for power (and the associated rewards) multiplied for those with the resources to pursue them. Although the notion of a Durrani 'right to rule' lingered (which helps explain, according to some, the 'choice' of Hamid Karzai as Afghanistan's president in 2004), this development triggered a long crisis of legitimacy that has been deepened by the patronage practices, abuse and corruption that resulted from the ensuing fights for control. At the same time, these extended periods of violence not only reduced the legitimacy of (aspirant) rulers, but also gravely weakened their ability to actually rule. This further reduced the quality of governance, which in turn hindered recovery from conflict and facilitated prolonged state capture by small elite groups. The lack of a history – and thus experience – of changing power peacefully at the top (see next point), left Afghanistan unprepared for the introduction in 2001 of a democratic system in which the right to rule is established through electoral competition that assumes a basic equality of voters, parties and contenders for office.

Feature 2: Violence as an acceptable method to acquire or resist power

In connection with the point above, it should be noted that violence has been a generally used and accepted method of pursuing two political ends since at least 1901. First, succession issues around Afghanistan's top job (whether labelled Emir, King or President) have historically been settled by force. Such episodes of violence used to affect small Durrani Pashtun elite groups, their followers and their allies

6 The five building blocks that follow are largely based on the following works: Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*, Giustozzi (2012), *op.cit.*; Chayes, S., *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, New York, Norton & Company, 2015; Borovik, A., *The Hidden War*, New York, Grove Press, 1990; Hameed, S., H. Brown and E. Harpst, *Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia: Afghanistan's Role*, CSIS, 2014, [online](#) (accessed 02/12/15); Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Transition Without End, An Analytical Narrative on State-Making*, Crisis States Working Papers Series No. 2, London, CSRC, 2008; Saferworld, *Afghanistan's transition: challenges and opportunities for peace*, C4P briefing, London, 2015; Nixon, H., *Achieving Durable Peace: Afghan Perspectives on a Peace Process*, Oslo, Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2011.

throughout Afghan society, which limited the destruction they wrought. However, the social impact of these episodes gradually broadened as the result of the changes in the rules of succession discussed above, modern technology and the disruption of social fabric through conflict, urbanization and external influences. Second, encroachment on local authority, privileges and ways of life (whether domestic or foreign in origin) that is perceived as illegitimate (that is to say, most intrusions into local affairs save the occasional bit of taxation and conscription) has historically been resisted with force by local Afghan elites and communities. When the times, purpose and popular sentiment allowed, the fight against such encroachment was sometimes cloaked in the powerful evocative frame of jihad.

Feature 3: Foreign influence as a permanent feature of power and governance

Notwithstanding such jealous guarding of local self-governance and lifestyles, Afghanistan has historically experienced a significant amount of foreign influence. Between the Mongol, Safavid, Persian, Mughal, Russian and British empires, Afghanistan has not necessarily been considered worthy of conquest from a resource point of view, but its location as transit territory between empires guaranteed their interest in securing it as a buffer zone. The more astute empires exercised their influence subtly by co-opting local elites and re-orienting their loyalties away from Kabul. Even today, Iranian influence in Herat, Pakistani influence in Kandahar and Nangarhar, and Central Asian/Russian influence in Mazar-e-Sharif is palpable. A key consequence is that foreign assistance has generally been available to groups seeking to resist the central government in Kabul and vice versa. On the positive side, this has enabled Afghan governments to play foreign nations off against each other, such as the Russians and the Americans in the 1970s, or Western countries against China, India and Pakistan today. On the negative side, it has also enabled insurgent groups such as the mujahideen and Taliban to take up arms against the central government. Remarkably, however, it has not created significant centrifugal tendencies, i.e. no regions or groups have sought to break away from Afghanistan entirely.⁷ A consequence of such pervasive foreign influence is nevertheless that peace and development in Afghanistan today can hardly be secured without, at a minimum, a series of informal bilateral agreements that accommodate the interests of the country's neighbours.⁸

7 For a more in-depth treatment of this issue, see: Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*

8 See for example: Barakat, S. and S. Zuck, 'Afghanistan's Insurgency and the Viability of a Political Settlement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, pp. 139-210, 2010; Stepanova, E., *The Path to a Political Solution in Afghanistan*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 190, Washington DC, George Washington University, 2011; Grare, F., W. Maley and A. Mattoo, *Beyond the Great Game: Towards a National Political Process in Afghanistan post-2014*, Chanakya Paper no.1, Melbourne, The Australia India Institute, 2014. For an interesting view on the role of the US as the key player in the present conflict, see: Nixon (2011), *op.cit.*

Feature 4: A consultative and reciprocal relationship between centre and regions

Historically, the greater the distance from Kabul and the country's main urban centres, the weaker the writ of Afghan governments has tended to be. There have been several causes of its limited reach, including the existence of powerful local elites, adjacent foreign empires, strong tribal structures, the absence of infrastructure adequate for the country's rugged geography and at times inhospitable climate, and limited ability to project military power. While some of these factors have been overcome in the course of time, many remain. This has created a society in which power relations between national, provincial and local elites have tended to be established through negotiation and compromise rather than by decree and (administrative) enforcement.⁹ Although the make-up of local elites has profoundly changed during Afghanistan's different episodes of (civil) war, communities continue to expect an appreciable measure of autonomy and self-governance.¹⁰ The limited reach of the state combined with local expectations of autonomy also mean that policies, laws and degrees emanating from Kabul do not necessarily gain traction outside of the capital, let alone outside of the country's major urban centres. This allows the government in Kabul to be more progressive than Afghanistan is on average (for example, in terms of social affairs), but it also restricts such progressiveness to the capital. A final effect of Kabul's relative political isolation is that it turns the capital into an echo chamber of sorts, in which government and donor narratives, arguments and views continue to circulate without being exposed to the realities of the country beyond Kabul.

Feature 5: A steady undercurrent of religious influence on the affairs of state

In Afghanistan, social and religious conservatism overlap and exercise a strong hold over the 70+ per cent of Afghans who live in rural areas, and of whom most are illiterate. The clergy have substantial influence not just over matters of family life and social behaviour, but also in terms of the general legitimacy they can confer – or take away – from policies and rulers on the basis of their interpretation of the Islamic faith. While the religious establishment has been a faithful servant of the state at times, at other times it authorized jihad against it. In short, religious influences on politics are profound and the desire for, or even the idea of a need for, a separation

9 Thomas Barfield (1984) aptly puts it as follows: 'Enforcement of decisions by the administration depended on force because the population did not see themselves as objects of the administration.' In: Giustozzi, A., *The Eye of the Storm: Cities in the Vortex of Afghanistan's Civil Wars*, Working Paper No. 62, London, LSE Crisis States Research Centre, 2009.

10 This was arguably confirmed by The Asia Foundation's recent perception survey which suggested Afghans have greater confidence in local governance and dispute resolution mechanisms than in national ones. The Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2015*, Kabul, TAF, 2015.

between the two is alien to many.¹¹ However, given its generally moderate nature, sense of superiority¹² and ubiquitous presence, religion represents not a cleavage but, rather, a background influence that pervades all aspects of social and political life. Even the rise of the Taliban should not predominantly be perceived as support from the Afghan population for a very conservative, sometimes radical, interpretation of Islam. Many accounts suggest instead that the Taliban's popularity in the late 1990s derived largely from its ability to re-establish daily security and justice after 20 years of warfare and conflict, in a fast, efficient and corruption-free manner.¹³ Echoing the past, most interviewees ascribed the Taliban's current popularity to government failure, frustration with entrenched corruption and patronage, and a lack of economic prospects.¹⁴

These five features have, in different combinations, produced an array of elite pacts as temporary manifestations of Afghanistan's political settlement over the last century. A remarkable factor in this equation is, since 2001, the unprecedented amount of foreign influence on Afghan politics in the form of troops, dollars and diplomatic pressure. While the British Raj and the Soviets sought to control Afghanistan politically, the US and its Western allies (have) arguably attempt(ed) to reweave Afghanistan's social fabric to an extent not seen before. Despite the resources they have mobilized in support, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that even their influence remains shallow. One only needs to consider the growing insecurity, the inability to reach a negotiated settlement between the government, its international sponsors and (parts of) the Taliban, the unresolved Kabul bank scandal and associated deep corruption, or the mutual dependency created by the need to provide the country with an international lifeline for the next decades.¹⁵

11 The same survey found popular support for the involvement of religious leaders in politics in the range of 50–70 per cent. TAF (2015), *op.cit.*

12 Many Afghans seem to consider their form of Islam as superior to that of others. This appears to be based in part on their continued relative independence during times of colonization and in part on their successful jihad against the British. See: Barfield (2010), *op.cit.* on this matter.

13 That effective governance amounts to more than creating stability and upholding sharia law was reflected in the movement's declining popularity towards the end of its rule when its inability to improve service delivery and stimulate economic growth had become all too apparent. Stapleton, B. and M. Keating, *Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001–2014: An Incoherent Approach*, Afghanistan: Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 10, London, Chatham House, 2015.

14 This view is echoed in a recent study on Afghan perspectives on a durable peace process among a much wider set of interviewees (n=122). See: Nixon (2011), *op.cit.*

15 See for example: Chayes, S., *CIA Buys Trouble in Afghanistan*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Op-Ed, 3 May 2013; Stapleton and Keating (2015), *op.cit.*

Effects of international engagement on Afghan domestic politics since 2001

Notwithstanding the warning that ‘nothing is as problematic as sorting through recent events’,¹⁶ these five features offer a very rough framework for gauging the nature and effects of international engagement on Afghan domestic politics since 2001. In doing so, two considerations need to be taken into account.

The first is that 2001 was early days for the international community’s peace- and statebuilding agenda: the entire vocabulary, logic and suite of corresponding interventions had yet to be developed. Neither the New Deal nor a focus on ‘inclusive and legitimate politics’ existed. Also, salutary lessons about the limited ability of external actors to initiate and fast-track processes of political and economic change in other societies – let alone engage in wholesale social engineering – had yet to be taught. In consequence, looking back at international engagement with Afghan national politics through the prism of the New Deal and PSG1 assumes a level of knowledge that was not necessarily present at the time this engagement took shape.

The second consideration is that the original US-led intervention was driven more by motives of revenge and anti-terrorism than by objectives of statebuilding and development. This suggests that assessing early international (US) engagement in Afghanistan in respect of the extent to which it promoted inclusive and legitimate politics would introduce objectives alien to the initial engagement. In fact, pursuing an anti-terrorism agenda logically creates a short-term focus on security and stability that is not necessarily compatible with improving qualitative aspects of domestic political processes.¹⁷

The way round these dilemmas is simply to assess the effects of international engagement with Afghan domestic politics in respect of their level of inclusivity and legitimacy *without* pretending that such engagement sought to increase it.¹⁸ At least four main effects are easily distinguished.

16 Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*, p. 273.

17 For a more detailed assessment of the incoherence of the many – and often competing – priorities of international engagement in Afghanistan, and of the US’s engagement in particular, see: Stapleton and Keating (2015), *op.cit.*

18 It should also be noted that certain fundamental insights into the challenges of peace- and statebuilding were already available at the time, in the form of decades of UN peacekeeping as well as experience that was accumulating against the framework of the Dayton Agreement of 1995, UN Security Council resolution 1244 on Kosovo of 1999 and UN Security Council resolution 1272 on East Timor of 1999.

First, excluding the Taliban – and their mostly Ghilzai Pashtun support base – from the Bonn agreement created a permanent group of potential spoilers. Although its rise commenced in Afghanistan's Pashtun-dominated south, an increasing array of militias, warlords and tribal groupings came to support – often opportunistically – the Taliban movement as it inched closer to victory between 1995 and 2000. In time-honoured fashion, much of these 'new allegiances' were thin and based on perceptions of relative strength. They could easily be transferred to another party should it seem more successful. In any case, the usual practice in a context in which many different factions compete for power and where violence is commonplace, is to hedge one's bets. For all these reasons it was a mistake to exclude both the Taliban and its supporters from the Bonn negotiations, and this was aggravated by not giving the movement a stake in the future of the Afghan state as per the terms of the Bonn peace agreement.¹⁹ While this might have been understandable from the perspective of the quest for revenge on those that had hosted the architects and perpetrators of 9/11, it was an act of exclusion that accumulated international experience with peace processes has shown to be generally self-defeating.²⁰ This initial 'error' was compounded by a prolonged international refusal to enter into a meaningful process of negotiation with the Taliban and its Pakistani allies from a position of strength – but with real room for accommodation. Predictably it has become more difficult to initiate such a process over time as the strength of the insurgency grew, popular hopes for a rapid peace dividend were disappointed, government performance lagged, life-prospects for the average Afghans deteriorated and the insurgency fragmented.²¹

Second, pushing for an ambitious electoral calendar in 2001 that focused on establishing the procedural aspects of democracy entrenched existing power brokers and interests. The Bonn agreement laid out an ambitious dual timeline for re-establishing legitimate and inclusive government in Afghanistan. On the one hand it prescribed that elections should take place within two and a half years of the installation of an Interim Authority as detailed by the agreement. On the other hand it stipulated that a Constitutional Loya Jirga should convene within two years of the installation of the same Interim

19 On this point see also: Giustozzi (2008), *op.cit.*

20 Zahar offers an insightful account of the motives of insiders and outsiders (spoilers) in peace negotiation processes and peace agreements: Zahar, M-J., 'Reframing the Spoiler Debate in Peace Processes', in: Darby, J. and R. Mac Ginty, *Contemporary Peacemaking*, 2nd edition, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008; see also: Hartzell, C., *A Comparative Perspective on an Afghan Peace Process: Why, When, Who and What?*, Afghanistan Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 7, London, Chatham House, 2014.

21 For some recent analysis on the prospects for effective negotiations, see: Van Linschoten, A. and F. Kuehn, *Rebooting a Political Settlement: Engagement and Mediation after the Afghan Elections*, London, Chatham House, 2014; Waldman, M. and M. Wright, *Who Wants What: Mapping the Parties' Interests in the Afghanistan Conflict*, London, Chatham House, 2014; Nixon (2011), *op.cit.*

Authority to decide on a new constitution.²² The electoral calendar that resulted from these provisions included presidential elections in 2004, 2009 and 2014, parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2010, and a range of provincial elections. It consumed, in the view of one interviewee, much of the diplomatic attention of the international community – as well as USD 1 billion – to the neglect of greater priorities such as better service delivery, governance and more security.

Arguably, however, two further consequences were much more serious from the perspective of this research. The first was that the tight timeline prioritized ‘legitimacy’ over inclusivity, because it was only possible to stick to this election schedule by working on the basis of an extremely procedural understanding of democracy. In turn, this enabled existing power brokers using their resources, connections and, at times, coercive capacities, to secure their interests via the elections. This gave a range of strongmen and warlords a new political life and facilitated their hold on power, with consequences that persist today.²³ A second consequence was that the elections, as several observers noted, provided the Afghan population with a welcome opportunity to express their views, but did not necessarily confer legitimacy on successful candidates. Perceptions of legitimacy have depended, historically and at the present time, much more on the question of whether the new ruler/government was able to expand services, provide security and create better economic prospects.²⁴ From this viewpoint it proved a critical omission not to offer incentives to armed groups and/or warlords to develop more representative political organizations with ideas on Afghanistan’s future beyond entrenching their existing interests through electoral competition.

Third, creating a centralized government disempowered other layers of governance and, paradoxically, created an impression of government weakness that reduced its legitimacy. Fearing that a federation might result in a north–south split, the international community (UNAMA and US officials in particular) saw a strong state as the solution to many of Afghanistan’s governance problems – despite a history of decentralized governance.²⁵

22 See: *Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions*, Bonn, November/December 2001, [online](#) (accessed 02/12/15). For an amusing reflection on the innovative – but ahistorical – use of the *loya jirga* concept to legitimize the proceedings laid out in the Bonn agreement, see Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*

23 Giustozzi (2012), *op.cit.*; for provincial-level analysis, see: Jackson, A., *Politics and governance in Afghanistan: The case of Kandahar*, Working Paper 34, London, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2015a; Jackson, A., *Politics and governance in Afghanistan: The case of Nangarhar Province*, Briefing Paper 9, London, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2015b.

24 Giustozzi (2008), *op.cit.*; Barfield (2010), *op.cit.* In other words, the international community prioritized ‘input legitimacy’ over ‘output legitimacy’ while the Afghan population did the reverse. On the distinction between these several forms of legitimacy, see: OECD, *The State’s Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2010.

25 Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*

In consequence, the 2004 Afghan constitution established a strong executive presidency in particular – mostly by granting it very extensive powers of appointment (article 64) – and stayed largely silent on the competences of subnational governance bodies such as provincial and district councils (articles 139–141). This created a lack of clarity on the role of these bodies vis-à-vis both the national government and informal governance bodies that still exists today.²⁶ Problematically, the 25 years of violence that preceded the 2004 Afghan constitution had starkly reduced the relevance and effectiveness of the central government while increasing popular expectations of, and appetite for, greater regional autonomy and self-rule. The centralized nature of the new government thus created permanent tension with regional interests and aspirations. While the international community might have been capable of supporting the central government in increasing its institutional presence across Afghanistan’s provinces, it has generally been careful not to alienate the warlords and strongmen whose support it deemed critical in the fight against the Taliban. Unsurprisingly, this created both a popular backlash – international support for a cast of unsavoury characters was not exactly what Afghans had in mind as a hoped-for ‘peace dividend’ – and an impression of a weak central government because of its inability to deliver much beyond core urban areas. In short, the internationally promoted centralization of governance arguably reduced the central government’s ‘output-legitimacy’. It also decreased inclusiveness as the president distributed the wide range of jobs at his disposal to cement alliances and co-opt enemies under a constitutional veneer of inclusiveness and legitimacy.

Fourth, focusing the international military on fighting terrorism came at the price of stimulating corruption and warlordism that reduced the legitimacy and inclusiveness of governance. Available evidence suggests that the prioritization of the fight against the Taliban by the international community (the US in particular) in the period 2006–2012/14 had rather negative effects on governance. The combination of a large military presence, an emphasis on force protection, prioritizing the war on terror and flooding the country with funds that were beyond the capacity of the Afghan state or society to absorb effectively,²⁷ created a situation in which both international and national accountability remained low, local allies against the Taliban were given a free hand to pursue their other interests²⁸ and the access and quality of governance beyond Kabul were largely

26 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *The Constitution of Afghanistan*, Kabul, ratified 26 January 2004, [online](#) (accessed 02/12/15); Jackson (2015b), *op.cit.*

27 One only has to skim through the many reports produced by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to get a feeling for the fraud, corruption, waste and harm that the massive influx of US expenditure in pursuit of anti-terrorist/anti-Taliban priorities alone must have done to development and governance in Afghanistan. [Online](#) (accessed 03/12/15). Consider also that the budget execution rate of the Afghan government hovered around 50 per cent for a number of years including 2015.

28 The low number of US forces in Afghanistan between 2001–03 also played a role. In anticipation of its invasion of Iraq, the US resorted to recruitment of local militias as auxiliaries. See: Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*

ignored.²⁹ It can reasonably be argued that the short-term benefit of putting up a more effective fight against the Taliban and keeping international soldiers out of harm's way as much as possible, came at the price of further informalizing governance, entrenching existing power brokers and deepening corruption.³⁰ Paradoxically, it also meant that local violence increased in many places, as it made the opportunity to compete for power and (international) resources more attractive. 'Control' over international dollars through construction and security contracts, border crossings, poppy eradication programmes and road check-points became vital revenue-generating strategies for local power holders, stimulating collusion between government official and warlords in the process.³¹ This, in turn, increased support for the insurgency that many Afghans came to see as the only alternative to the local violence and corruption they continued to face.³² Starkly put, in this permissive environment legitimacy amounted to seizing power through guns and violence; inclusiveness to joining already well-armed power brokers to share in the profits.

Despite such negative effects of international intervention on Afghan domestic politics, the current state of affairs is much improved compared with the pre-2001 situation, on a number of fronts. As one interlocutor graphically noted: 'Overnight, we went from not being allowed to shave our beards to being able to sell drinks on the street.' Besides civil liberties, much else has improved: health and education services, electricity, infrastructure and women's rights are but a few examples.³³ Moreover, the foundations for a functional central government have been laid, and it is operating – albeit in a limited manner – in at least some localities. Yet, insecurity, poverty, inequality, poor economic prospects and poor governance remain. Before turning to the question of how donors actually seek to understand governance in Afghanistan, a brief synopsis of the country's current elite pact will help to bridge past and present.

The country's current elite pact considered in terms of its legitimacy and inclusiveness

The present government of national unity is best seen as a big-tent coalition that rests on a Pashtun/Uzkebe pillar of support around President Ghani and a Tajik/Hazara pillar

29 Jackson (2015a), *op.cit.*; Jackson (2015b), *op.cit.*; Barfield (2010), *op.cit.*; Chayes (2015), *op.cit.*

30 See for example: Chayes, S., *Turning Afghanistan over to Criminals*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Op-Ed, 5 March 2013; TAF (2015), *op.cit.* pp. 97–100 shows how the majority of Afghans perceive corruption as a major problem in the country as well as in their daily lives.

31 Jackson (2015a), *op.cit.*

32 See for instance: Giustozzi (2008), *op.cit.*

33 For good trend analysis of these issues: TAF (2015), *op.cit.*; see also: World Bank and Afghan Ministry of Economy, *Poverty Status Update: Overview*, Kabul, World Bank/MoE, 2015.

of support around CEO Abdullah. Most interviewees considered the composition of the government to be adequately inclusive of the major ethnic groups. While it firmly remains a traditional elite deal, it was also seen by most as more inclusive than previous governments.³⁴ Moreover, it is Afghanistan's first coalition government, and this in itself can be considered an achievement of sorts, despite the continued lack of a legal basis for the position of CEO. However, the downside of this situation is that the government essentially represents a fragile balance of many different players and interests. It is not configured for, or capable of, designing and delivering ambitious reforms – which is what donors somehow have come to expect of it.

Excepting the Taliban, the only major faction that at present is really excluded from the government is what several interviewees referred to as the 'jihadi council'. This is a group of opposition figures (many of whom served as former government officials or ministers, and some of whom have a background as warlords), that has president Karzai as its titular head. This group was thought not to have much more in common beyond a shared interest in agitating against the government and seems to be somewhat of an 'anti' force without presenting an alternative to the present government. Nevertheless, it should be noted that its statements and lobbying consume some of the narrow bandwidth available to most donors for political analysis, messaging and receiving. On a final note, while its support outside of Kabul was considered to be limited, this 'council' has shown itself more receptive than the government to the country's traditional power structures, and such support might therefore grow.

It is unfortunate that the current government is also the result of the disputed and inconclusive 2014 presidential elections that suffered from heavy international interference. When the two protagonists contested the results of the second round, a UN-supervised re-count of the vote was initiated. The results of this exercise were never made public because, in parallel, the US stepped in to persuade both candidates to join forces in a national unity government with the aim of mitigating the risk of sustained electoral violence and – one might add – avoiding putting at risk the calendar for international military withdrawal. Unsurprisingly, the confidence of the average Afghan in electoral democracy, and in particular in all bodies associated with the elections, dropped to an all-time low as a result of these events.³⁵ If the various elections

34 One could argue that an elite deal that excludes a major group – the Taliban (although it is best considered a 'network of networks' (Nixon [2011], *op.cit.*) – means that a political settlement at national level does not really exist. Instead, it might be more productive to look at governance in Afghanistan as consisting of a patchwork of local political settlements. While a multi-layered analysis is certainly needed to properly understand governance in Afghanistan, the fact remains that the current national unity government reflects a deal between major elite groups that strongly influences how power is exercised at the national level and how resources are distributed – hallmarks of a political settlement.

35 TAF (2015), *op.cit.*, pp. 10, 96 and 115–116.

in Afghanistan had started to instil a sense of civic pride and electoral awareness in ordinary Afghans, the massive, behind-closed-doors international intervention in the 2014 elections seems to have undone at least some of these efforts.³⁶

While this suggests a somewhat ominous start, the sense among both interviewees and a number of analysts is that most Afghans were initially happy to give the government the benefit of the doubt, but that their trust has eroded rapidly as a result of two factors.³⁷ The first is that it took the new government a year to become operational, which created a discontinuity of performance that was noted across the country. A number of interviewees ascribed its lengthy formation to a combination of political naivety in the circles around President Ghani, a lack of upfront thinking about suitable candidates for ministerial posts and the need to accommodate two different constituencies that had both been made promises in exchange for their support. The result has been a slow start to a new cycle of governance including much-delayed appointments to critical positions such as those of defence minister and attorney-general, and a number of key provincial governors. This dysfunction has arguably been amplified by the governing-by-decree style of the current government which seeks to impose its writ from the centre, leading, predictably, to considerable difficulties. The second factor is that both the security situation and the economic outlook have weakened significantly on the current government's watch. While neither issue is necessarily under its control,³⁸ the capture of Kunduz by the Taliban in September 2015 strengthened the growing popular perception of governmental weakness.

As the insurgency shows no sign of abating and efforts to negotiate peace with the Taliban have hardly progressed, many Afghans, especially in the countryside where most of the population remains concentrated, do not appear to hold out great hope for short-term improvement in this situation at the moment.³⁹ This forces them to continue to look to alternative power structures for protection and a livelihood. Those that can afford it leave.⁴⁰ In terms of legitimate and inclusive politics, the international community is thus faced with a catch-22: it can continue to focus on security at the expense of governance but improving the security situation probably requires greater attention to governance. As neither can be improved through short-term fixes, what seems really required is a long-term engagement with an associated strategy.

36 See for example: Coburn, N., *Afghanistan: The 2014 Vote and the Troubled Future of Elections*, Afghanistan: Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 8, London, Chatham House, 2015.

37 International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan's Political Transition*, Asia Report No. 260, Kabul/Brussels, ICG, 2014.

38 Yet the government cannot solely blame external circumstances as, for example, the lack of a defence minister and delayed or unsuitable appointments of provincial governors surely played a role in the deteriorating security situation.

39 See also: TAF (2015), *op.cit.*, pp. 16–17.

40 It is indicative that UNHCR currently classifies c. 2.6 million Afghans as refugees out of a population of roughly 32.5 million. [Online](#) (accessed 9/12/15).

2 How do donors seek to understand Afghan domestic politics?

With the benefit of the broad-brush-strokes picture painted above of the effects of international engagement on the inclusivity and legitimacy of governance in Afghanistan, it is possible to turn to the question of how donors actually seek to understand Afghan domestic politics and how they feed such knowledge into their development programming.

To ground this analysis in the PSG1 frame that drives this research inquiry, a brief prior reflection on the status of the New Deal in Afghanistan is useful. In general terms, Afghanistan has been an enthusiastic driving force behind the New Deal (mostly its Ministry of Finance), viewing it as an instrument that can help bring greater alignment about between government and donor priorities, as well as ensure larger on-budget donor contributions to strengthen the administrative capacities of the Afghan state. Several interviewees indicated that the relevant staff at the Ministry of Finance are savvy, skilled and have sought to use the New Deal as leverage to get donors to rally behind government priorities and spending mechanisms. This, however, has been difficult sailing as many donors pursue their own foreign policy interests in Afghanistan that do not necessary align well with government priorities, face parliamentary restrictions back home and/or have doubts about the administrative and fiduciary capacities of the Afghan government. In general, support for New Deal type measures and proposals seems to have been higher amongst smaller donor countries.

An additional factor that has complicated New Deal 'implementation' is that the country already featured a rich array of strategies and frameworks with particular interests and momentum behind them. One could consider the several Afghan National Development Strategies (ANDS: 2005–08 and 2008–13), the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF: 2014–24) and the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF: 2015–19).⁴¹ As noted in a recent assessment of New Deal implementation, 'the New Deal appears to have weakest resonance in countries with multiple political

41 The SMAF integrates the TMAF and the reform agenda of the Ghani government into a single document. See for example: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework*, Kabul, 5 September 2015, [online](#) (accessed 04/12/15).

priorities and frameworks'.⁴² This is definitely the case in Afghanistan and therefore the majority of the interviews carried out for this report did not use the PSG1 or New Deal lens to inquire into donor support for legitimate and inclusive politics. Although the New Deal is generally known across the donor community in Afghanistan, it is not implemented in programme-type fashion. Rather, some of its elements are pursued through other frameworks, such as the TMAF, while others are not really taken up at all. For example, the TMAF can be considered as a 'compact', in New Deal parlance. However, if one understands compacts as country-specific translations of the entire New Deal package, the TMAF is a partial compact only.⁴³ A key difference from the perspective of this report is that the TMAF restricts its understanding of 'legitimate and inclusive politics' to elections and the accountability of the administrative apparatus of government, thus largely ignoring issues such as parliamentary oversight, the quality of political leadership, civil society voice and engagement, the role of media, informal/non-state governance mechanisms, conflict resolution methods and peace negotiations.⁴⁴

The tools that donors use to make sense of Afghan politics – and their limitations

Helpfully, the interviews consistently pointed to the same set of tools that donors use to gain a better understanding of Afghan politics. It was impressive how frank many donor interviewees were about the limitations of the tools at their disposal and how committed they were to doing as good a job as possible in spite of this. The level of self-reflection that could be observed was high. At least five such tools could be identified:

- **Bilateral diplomatic conversations:** These are typically the bread-and-butter conversations that diplomats at embassies have with government officials, politicians, opposition leaders, civil society representatives, tribal leaders, journalists and other leading social-political figures. The interviews indicated that such conversations are typically ad hoc, incident- or inquiry-driven and that the knowledge they generate tends to remain within a limited circle of individuals, although some of it obviously finds its way back to capitals in the form of code cables. A particular problem in Afghanistan is the combination of two conflicting factors. On the one hand, the number of interlocutors one needs to speak with to

42 Hearn (2016), *op.cit.*

43 A full comparison of the content of these documents is beyond the scope of this paper but it is worth referring to the following: Midgley, T., 'Afghanistan, the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and the New Deal', Paper for the Sida Helpdesk on Human Security, submitted 15 May 2015; Ruder, T., *Lessons and Opportunities from the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework*, Special Report 378, Washington DC, United States Institute for Peace, 2015.

44 Midgley (2015), *op.cit.*

gain an understanding of domestic political developments is high, owing to the present fragmentation of power. On the other hand, the range of interlocutors that most donors can actually speak to is significantly restricted, because of mobility and hosting constraints (largely government officials and other donors).

- **Occasional countrywide conflict or political-economy analysis:** Most donors commission a form of broader conflict or political-economy analysis every so often to generate a big-picture understanding of what is going on in the country in political, security, economic and social terms. While useful, especially for staff who are new to diplomatic representations (of which there are many, given the high turnover), such analyses were regarded by many donor interviewees as being merely one-off exercises, based on partial information, owing to the tight timelines under which they were produced and/or the poor quality of information available more generally. According to the interviewees, these analyses lacked a thoughtful and structural link with broader strategic, policy and programming design processes. The latter requires, for example, the ability to really understand complex analytical products and then turn (some of) their recommendations into action. Such capabilities are rare among donors, given the severe constraints in terms of either staff, skill or time.
- **Project-specific political-economy or conflict analysis:** Nearly all donors conduct conflict sensitivity, do-no-harm or political-economy analysis at the inception or design phase of new development programming initiatives as a matter of course. This tends to produce a snapshot that informs programme design, flags some risks and leads to inclusion of some mitigating measures. The problem here is that such analysis is usually done once, at the start of a programme, and not repeated, whereas the political context in which a programme operations, or which it may seek to influence, changes. Moreover, there is a significant shortage of scenario-planning type analysis that can support programme development during its lifetime by thinking through different political events and their implications for programming up front. In a country like Afghanistan that features a rapid pace of political events, change and reversal, this means donor programmes are typically ill equipped to respond to political events, let alone to anticipate them. Finally, several interviewees indicated that even when the analysis is of good quality, it still takes highly skilled programme managers to make effective use of it. These skills were generally considered to be in short supply;
- **Employment of local staff:** All donors employ local Afghan staff in an effort to complement and compensate for the knowledge issues that result from the high turnover rates of their expatriate staff and their general lack of deep knowledge of Afghan domestic politics. Some donors even rely entirely on such staff, given the mobility restrictions that their expatriate staff face. However, in general little thought seems to have been given to taking account of the interests, bias and/or agendas such local staff themselves are bound to have, their potential vulnerability

to corruption and/or the reliability of their own knowledge base. Moreover, the knowledge of local staff seems to be used mostly through personal interactions and task-driven group discussions, without much attention being paid to how their knowledge can be used in more structural fashion and be better triangulated.

- **Intelligence:** A number of donors have access to unusually high volumes of intelligence resulting from their military-diplomatic presence. In many cases, this presents a rich trove of information that could inform development programming. Yet in practice much of this intelligence indirectly promotes a military framing of issues, focuses on security matters and in particular on the fight against the Taliban – thus limiting its usefulness for development. As one analyst noted: ‘Any battalion-level intelligence shop could produce a sophisticated “network diagram” for the main local Taliban group [...], but where were the network diagrams for the district governor or the provincial police chief?’⁴⁵

Instead of conducting analysis to develop a better understanding of Afghan politics themselves, donors could also choose to outsource it. As a matter of fact, there is no real shortage of high-quality analysis of many aspects of Afghan politics, with local organizations or local branches of international organizations such as The Asia Foundation (TAF), The Liaison Office (TLO) and the Afghanistan Analysts’ Network (AAN) leading the charge. According to the interviews conducted, key challenges for donors in making good use of the work that such organizations produce are at least threefold. First, donors themselves have limited absorption capacity. Many donors were very frank about their modest ability to absorb analysis in the daily flurry of headquarter requests, visiting missions, bureaucratic requirements and responding to events – especially as much of this falls on the shoulders of the same understaffed political affairs units. Second, donors tend to engage research-type outfits such as those above on the basis of specific activities or incidents rather than on a structural basis, which removes an incentive for deeper and more regular cooperation. Third, donors do not tend to make a dedicated effort to feed the analysis produced by such outfits into their activity on an ongoing basis. In short, outsourcing of political analysis in its present form generates a limited return. For this situation to improve, there is a need for more dedicated and structural processes that link analysis to activities, as well as greater substantive ability on the part of donors to manage and steer research contracts in ways that make them useful to their own policies and programmes.

The interviews suggest that the result of applying all these tools – in terms of understanding Afghan domestic politics – is perhaps best compared to a tourist walking around in a new city, taking snapshots of the main sights and objects of interest. It tends to produce a photo album that references relevant landmarks, some key persons, some

45 Chayes (2015), *op.cit.*

idea of connections and a few idiosyncrasies. It does not generate a series featuring the same persons in different situations and actions, let alone a movie providing a more sophisticated narrative over a longer, continuous period of time. In the words of one interlocutor, 'it creates a situation in which you develop a picture of what is going on politically, but you may miss 70 per cent'. In short, it seems that very few donors take a structural approach to building an increasingly refined understanding of Afghan politics that is subsequently leveraged for political and development-related purposes.

As a result, an essential step for more effective support to PSG1 in Afghanistan is to develop a broader and more fine-grained understanding of the inner dynamics and relations of Afghan politics. The interviews suggest that increasing support to PSG1 without improving the level of political understanding first runs a substantial risk of doing harm instead of good. As a matter of fact, the donor emphasis on increasing 'input legitimacy' that resulted from the 2001 Bonn agreement, i.e. the procedural aspects of electoral democracy, can in all likelihood be explained as least in part as a function of such limited knowledge of how Afghan politics really work.

Internal constraints donors face when trying to understand Afghan politics

Before succumbing to the temptation to make the call for better political analysis the central recommendation of an agenda that seeks to increase donor support for PSG1, two additional issues must be considered. First, what are the internal constraints that donors face in developing a better understanding of Afghan politics and how amenable to change are these constraints?⁴⁶ Second, how much knowledge is actually enough for good diplomatic initiatives and good programming? These issues are taken up in this section and the next. Table 2 below inventories the main internal constraints across those donors that were interviewed. No doubt more such constraints can be identified, but those below came through most strongly in the interviews conducted. More importantly, the table's two right-hand columns suggest to what extent the constraints feature beyond Afghanistan and to what extent present donor policy and development discourse suggests the constraint is amenable to change.

46 External constraints that arise from the sheer complexity of Afghan domestic politics are of course also manifold, and largely reside in the personalized webs of power relations across Afghanistan that are usually based on a patronage-type logic with little by way of mitigating institutional 'buffers' that link national with subnational elite interests, political with financial interests (including criminal ones) in the context of a strong religious and tribal texture as well as strong legacy effects of 25 years of conflict. Such external issues are noted but largely left out of account – except for the headline overview provided in section 2 – due to the report's focus on donor constraints.

Table 2 Overview of key internal donor constraints on understanding Afghan politics, including aspects of legitimacy and inclusiveness⁴⁷

Constraint	Origins	Impact on ability to support inclusive and legitimate politics	Constraint unique to Afghanistan?	Likely to change in medium term?
Strategic internal constraints facing donors				
(1) An attitude that considers a high level of foreign interference in Afghan governance as normal	This is mainly a function of the large international military, financial and diplomatic presence	It reduces the level of accountability donors believe they have towards the Afghan government and Afghan citizens, which sets a poor example when seeking to stimulate PSG1	There are few other countries where international engagement is so extensive	No, given a continuous dependency on foreign aid /military support
(2) A clear prioritization of fighting the Taliban as overriding policy objective	This is a function of the war on terror that led to the initial US engagement and was broadened through ISAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It puts development and governance initiatives in the service of achieving security objectives and short-term stability It accept(ed)(s) levels of poor governance and corruption that have boomeranged back to feed the insurgency 	OECD donor support is similarly dominated by security considerations in Syria and Iraq	No, given the continuation of the war on terror and attacks in Paris and Brussels
(3) A significant level of micro-management by donor parliaments	This is mostly the result of a decade of a large international military presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It results in 'pet provinces' that enjoy greater support without adequate consideration of how they are governed or what their relation is to the central state It increases the expectation of quick results and reduces strategic patience 	Such scrutiny is usually limited to outbreaks of violence and sustained for short periods only	Yes, as aid and military presence decrease
(4) A clear focus on the central government and its agents, institutions and priorities	This is the default setting of most diplomatic activity and development initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It reduces support for PSG1 at the subnational level It reduces appetite for supporting 'social contestation' – i.e. stimulating actors or initiatives that resist non-representative or self-enriching elite capture of the state 	No, it is a standard phenomenon across the globe	While this approach reflects global norms, it can be extended to subnational level

⁴⁷ This table is largely based on the responses of Kabul-based donor representatives (11 interviews) to the relevant interview questions. The two right-most columns are not. They are based on the author's general knowledge of the international development agenda and its progress over the past decade.

Constraint	Origins	Impact on ability to support inclusive and legitimate politics	Constraint unique to Afghanistan?	Likely to change in medium term?
Organizational internal constraints facing donors				
(5) High staff turnover	Donor employees seem to spend, on average, about a year in-country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It fatally impairs the ability to accumulate political knowledge about Afghanistan by reducing both incentives and exposure • Poor knowledge management by most donors compounds this issue • It allows some Afghan power brokers to play an effective waiting game or take a divide-and-rule approach 	No, this is the case in many conflict-affected postings	No, neither location appeal nor donor budget cuts show signs of improving
(6) Poor language skills	By far the majority of donor staff do not speak Dari, Pashtun or Tajik and rely on either English interlocutors or on translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This increases a risk of narrative and framing capture by Afghans with experience abroad, which drowns out local voices • It makes it difficult to support PSG1 meaningfully beyond Kabul 	No, this is typical for many countries where English, French or Spanish is not widely spoken	It could be changed if greater resources were allocated
(7) Significant aversity to personnel risks	Most donors err on the side of caution in protecting the lives of their staff. Most cannot venture outside of Kabul – or even its diplomatic areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It limits the range of interlocutors, opinions and interpretations of political developments that donors are exposed to • It limits the flow of people and information between donors • It facilitates rumour and reduces access to alternative narratives 	This is common only in countries with high levels of daily violence	Better risk-assessment capabilities could enable a more nuanced approach

Constraint	Origins	Impact on ability to support inclusive and legitimate politics	Constraint unique to Afghanistan?	Likely to change in medium term?
Internal constraints facing donors, that result from (broader) aid practices				
(8) A limited interpretation of PSG1	Support for political processes has been focused mostly on electoral democracy and 'input legitimacy'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It prevents questioning how level the playing field for electoral competition actually is • It creates electorally legitimized power distortions • It largely ignores informal governance mechanisms • It prioritizes technically successful but expensive electoral cycles 	No, but the level of ambition and speed of the electoral calendar has been extraordinarily high in Afghanistan	The toolkit can be expanded, but powerful conventions militate against changing this paradigm
(9) Facing significant spending pressures	The need to spend donor budgets drives a substantial part of what development units or agencies do	It reduces the bandwidth available for politically informed development programming and interventions to support PSG1	No	Unlikely as long as aid budget allocation cycles are not made more flexible
(10) Successive short-term plans drive international engagement	Development operations remain driven by short-term planning and funding cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Operating for 14 years on the basis of 14 one-year plans' has hindered change efforts that address deeper governance issues needing more time to bear fruit • It introduces significant fluctuation in government budgets. This reduces its effectiveness, in turning reducing its legitimacy 	Somewhat, if one takes account of the long period and intense level of international engagement in Afghanistan	It requires longer planning, budget and accountability cycles on the part of most donors

Table 2 suggests that the range of constraints that stand in the way of improved OECD donor support for PSG1 is both significant and not very likely to change in the medium term. Unless there is considerable mobilization of political energy and capital to rebalance the overall strategic approach to development in Afghanistan (e.g. less security-focused and less central-state-focused), a reallocation of resources from programmes to programme enablers (such as more/better human resources and more sophisticated approaches to risk) and a push to implement some longstanding aid commitments (such as longer programmes), the constraints listed in the table severely limit what OECD donors can realistically do to improve their support for PSG1.

On a final note, one constraint that might have been expected relates to restrictions on the range of Afghan interlocutors donors are allowed to speak with, but this did not feature in interviews. More specifically, the research was unable to identify any legal, political or policy constraints barring donor representatives from speaking with, for example, (former) warlords with very poor human rights records, former Taliban supporters/sympethizers who now hold formal positions within the Afghan government or even Taliban commanders/representatives themselves. Whether such conversations do take place in reality is a different matter altogether, however, as security measures significantly restrict donor mobility. In addition, being allowed to speak with such Afghan interlocutors does not mean that donors actually seek out such conversations.

Transmitting political knowledge into development programming

With the possible exception of project-specific conflict/political-economy type analysis, political analysis and development programming are still largely separated lines of thinking and activity for many of the donors interviewed – despite donor interviewees generally pointing to relatively good collaboration between their diplomatic and development staff/units in-country.⁴⁸ In other words, it would appear that there are few structures, procedures, incentives or human resource arrangements that systematically stimulate the use of knowledge generated by general diplomatic activity and development analysis. Neither would it seem that the vast experience and network of contacts that result from development activity is harnessed for the purpose of diplomatic engagement.

A practical challenge that could be identified in this regard concerns the level of specificity of information. Knowledge acquired through general diplomatic analysis or country-level conflict analysis will tend to be fairly general and abstract, while development activities require information on political power and relations at the sector, issue or area level. When they generate this themselves, such information is typically not aggregated upwards in a way that makes it of interest beyond the purpose for which it was originally created.

A more fundamental problem that was identified is that programming cycles are generally too short and rigid to benefit from good analytical inputs. For such inputs to be meaningful, after all, it must be possible to modify the purpose, structure and implementation parameters of programmes. Although some donors are able to do

48 Some donors pointed to significant advances in intra-organizational collaboration between different units, especially in Kabul itself, that would have occurred as a result of their prolonged presence. Yet few suggested that such lessons were being applied beyond Afghanistan.

this, the interviews suggest that many are not.⁴⁹ One example is that few development programmes in Kunduz were proactively adjusted, despite local networks having already provided credible early warning signals in June/July that a Taliban offensive would shortly be on the way (Kunduz fell to the Taliban for two weeks around the end of September 2015). Apart from raising the moot question of whether development programmes should have the nimbleness to respond quickly to such major security events, it also suggests a certain bureaucratic 'slowness' to respond to evidence that does not fit the prevailing – or perhaps desired – understanding of the state of play at a particular point in time. In the view of some interviewees, poor programme adaptability is aggravated by the trend, at least among smaller donors, towards outsourcing programming to multilateral organizations. While this does facilitate donor coordination and brings advantages of scale, it also makes it more difficult for programmes to adapt, since there are more interests that have to be aligned.

Feeding understandings of Afghan domestic politics into development programming thus encounters three sets of problems. First, there is often a lack of fit between the specifications of supply of, and those of demand for, analysis. Second, bilateral development programmes are not necessarily nimble enough to accommodate deeper political insights. Third, multilateral development programmes are slower in responding to such insights as they represent pooled resources. In consequence, it is worth considering whether they should aim to benefit from higher-quality analysis up front, or else focus on issues that are relatively less sensitive to political relations and events – which is already what happens, to some extent.

Consequences of limited understanding, internal constraints and partial transmission

The previous sections have noted the limitations of the instruments that donors deploy to deepen their knowledge of Afghan domestic politics, the internal constraints they face in trying to improve this situation and the issues that impede transmission of political knowledge into development programming. What are the consequences of this state of affairs for the ability of donors to improve their support for PSG1 in Afghanistan? A few issues stand out for consideration:

49 It may even be the case that the heavy operational workload that comes with the need to deliver programmes within two to three years, high-spending pressures and the need to be able to report tangible 'results' fairly quickly, results in donors not seeking out information or interlocutors that might make it obvious that programme design or implementation is inadequate. This would not necessarily be a process of conscious exclusion, of course; it might well be a function of limited capacity.

First, donor knowledge about Afghan politics is largely limited to the formal aspects of the national government in Kabul: The average donor staff member develops a limited range of contacts across a few selected ministries in Kabul, fewer civil society organizations and a good number of fellow donors. He/she will spend about a year in Kabul so that when he/she is up and running, it is about time to leave. Yet, over the past decades, formal and informal governance structures in Afghanistan have fused to a significant degree at all levels of governance. Knowledge of this state of affairs is difficult to acquire, but it is essential for getting things done.

Second, Kabul may be a political bubble, but it also is a resource hub: The political reality of Kabul is not the political reality of most of the rest of Afghanistan. It is hard for donors to get a sense of the real state of governance, socio-economic prospects and security throughout the country. Basing activity on impressions, knowledge and analysis acquired in Kabul can create a limited or even distorted picture of what is going on nationwide. This paradoxically may increase the temptation to seek refuge in the more predictable and more recognizable interactions with the formal aspects of the Afghan national government. However, Kabul does remain the site where important resources are distributed. The relative isolation of the donors of these funds creates significant scope for potentially ill-informed decisions about allocations – for example, on the basis of ‘facts’ that have become truth through repetition, or on the basis of narratives that are not exposed to challenge.

Third, direct support for PSG1 is focused on establishing the procedural parameters of electoral democracy: Most of the efforts of the international community to bring about more legitimate and more inclusive politics in Afghanistan have been guided by the ambitious electoral parameters of the Bonn agreement of 2001. This has served the dual logic of improving the ‘input legitimacy’ of Afghan politics (against the historic evidence of the sort of legitimacy that matters most in the country: see section 2) and facilitating a gradual international exit – despite well-known and longstanding flaws in the post-Bonn electoral system.

Fourth, indirect support for PSG1 via improvements to the performance of the institutions of government probably takes insufficient account of the realities of ‘power fusion’: The apparatus of the national government – in particular, sensitive ministries such as those of the interior, justice and defence – represents and executes decisions by elected national politicians only to a certain extent. The fusion of formal and informal power stalls performance improvement initiatives when these threatens vested interests. Interviews suggest that, on average, donors have only a modest grasp of such realities.

Conclusion: Ideas for improvement

The purpose of this report is not only to outline the present 'state of play' in respect of how donors go about understanding Afghan domestic politics and stimulating their inclusiveness and legitimacy. It also aims to develop ideas on how donors might do a better job of promoting these aspects of political processes. Given the array of historical legacy issues, internal constraints and other intervening factors discussed above, the question arises as to what in fact can be done that is both helpful and realistic.

Before some thoughts on this matter are offered, a final issue deserves brief discussion. Several interviewees thoughtfully wondered aloud how much – and what type of – knowledge would actually be required in order to obtain a meaningful understanding of Afghan politics. Explicitly, or implicitly, some seemed to indicate that working with representatives of the state to strengthen its capability and legitimacy was a viable long-term strategy to resolve conflict and initiate development. In short, would knowledge of the key political players at national level, and of the performance of the main institutions of government, not suffice for effective development engagement? It should be clear from the preceding analysis that this position contains dangerous assumptions in a country where formal and informal power have fused and re-created the DNA of most government institutions on several occasions in the recent past, and where the political reality of Kabul can diverge considerably from the political reality elsewhere in the country. In short, if one follows such reductionist statebuilding logic, unintended consequences are a distinct possibility, or, more negatively, the risk of doing harm is significant. A governments in a fragmented society with conflict legacies – past or present – is not, once reconstituted through elections, just a benign agent that can be nurtured through development programming and technical assistance. It may act as such at times, but it also remains another tool for the defence of parochial interests and a route for obtaining procedural legitimization of the unfettered power and private interests of armed groups, elites and strongmen.

With a view to feasibility, this report will not repeat general recommendations already made elsewhere, such as better application of whole-of-government approaches, improving donor coordination, increasing the length of postings or balancing security objectives better with those concerning development. The reality is probably that these issues are not open to change in the medium term in Afghanistan. Continuing to push for such change is likely to generate another trail of good intentions, fine rethoric, disappointing practice and lingering frustration. A better question might be what is possible within donors' operating parameters as discussed above.

Two sets of recommendations suggest themselves to OECD donors from this perspective: one pertaining to the enablers that are needed to develop a deeper understanding of Afghan domestic politics, the other pertaining to the instruments necessary to cover PSG1 more fully.

Developing conditions that enable a better understanding of Afghan domestic politics

- 1. Create greater domestic political acceptance for the higher cost of obtaining good-quality data in conflict-affected environments:** Such a cost does not just consist of the financial expense of commissioning the applied research necessary for understanding the 'power complexity' of conflict-affected countries, but also refers to the opportunity costs of donor staff shaping and using such research to good effect, as well as the political cost of creating a culture that is more appreciative of the value of locally grounded analysis.
- 2. Improve the living conditions of expatriate staff to make longer postings more attractive:** Many donor expatriate staff accept postings in countries like Afghanistan because it fast-tracks their career. However, this does not seem to be sufficient to induce more experienced staff to agree to these postings go or to bring about longer stays. In fact it might even reduce the length of stay as it seems to become somewhat of a 'tick in the box' exercise in some cases. A key factor suggested by a number of interviewees is how pleasant it is to stay in a particular country in terms of the quality of housing provided, the level of amenities available within housing compounds, the scope for social activity and how easy it is to somehow manage family life. These issues could be given greater consideration by human resource departments. A positive side effect would be that a greater ability to engage in social activity might also expose expatriate staff more to Afghan society, facilitating a basic understanding of how it functions and what issues Afghans face on a daily basis.
- 3. Develop standard approaches for creating external capacity that can systematically deliver high-quality political analysis:** As it seems unlikely that donors themselves will be able to develop such capacity in-house, standardized approaches to creating external capabilities for analysis should be considered. A first option might be for a donor to make a long-term arrangement (e.g. six years or more) with a reputable Afghan research body such as AAN or TLO that enables the development of a relationship of confidence, mutual awareness of needs and capabilities, and a regular stream of interactions that is necessary to put analysis to good use and vice versa. A second option might be to pool resources with other internationals to create a dedicated research body (it could even be set up in

the form of a development programme for analysis, or something of that nature). This has the additional benefit that it might also lead to greater donor alignment.

- 4. Develop more sophisticated risk-management practices and accept higher risk-mitigation costs:** From the outside it looks as though donors' risk policies in Afghanistan err too much on the side of caution by applying similar mobility restrictions to international and national staff alike, and by basically restricting their movement to international and governmental premises in Kabul. The practice of the German Risk Management Organization (RMO) suggests that a more sophisticated approach to risk is possible that permits greater mobility. Created as a programme in itself, the RMO combines local relations management, security assessments and early warning systems with crisis-management functions in the service of German development cooperation staff.⁵⁰ OECD donors could benefit from a more in-depth discussion about its possibilities, limitations and cost.

Broadening the suite of instruments to stimulate inclusive and legitimate politics

- 1. Build greater insight into how elite transitions can be facilitated by encouraging fresh talent and leadership to enter the political arena:** Many (post-)conflict countries show high levels of elite continuity throughout conflict and post-conflict periods, with the consequence that vested interests remain in place and older generations mortgage younger ones by keeping alive a legacy of violence and conflict. Little attention has been paid so far to how the quality of political leadership in conflict-affected countries can be enhanced without resorting to a 'pick-the-winner-approach' that predictably has a low chance of success. University-level postgraduate educational programmes, study visits and fellowship programmes are possible examples of what could be done, as long as they are based on local needs, have critical mass and are combined with opportunities to apply acquired knowledge in local development efforts.
- 2. Develop a better understanding of how institutional and personalized forms of governance can be combined in federally oriented governance hybrids:** The 'fiction of the neutral central state' is one of the more dangerous pitfalls of donor support to PSG1. Many conflict-affected countries are fragmented along ethnic lines, are characterized by low levels of inter-group trust, and feature politics that are highly personalized. Afghanistan is no exception. Hence, a major challenge

50 GIZ, *Reconstruction work – safely and effectively: Facilitating development projects in crisis countries and minimising risk*, Eschborn, GIZ, 2014.

is how the personalized, vested interests of the present can be complemented by institutionalization that gradually enables a future broadening of access to services and rights at various levels of governance, with firm guarantees for elite groups that it will not result in a zero-sum game for them. From the perspective of supporting PSG1, the question might be what sort of approaches are thinkable/have been tried and what would be required to enable donors to operate in a way that supported the development of such hybrids.

- 3. Explore what incentivizes warlords and armed groups to compete politically for their interests in a peaceful manner:** What are really the incentives for letting go of control over lucrative assets for private or group enrichment such as border control points, poppy production facilities or the civil service payroll? What would attract armed groups to develop meaningful political organizations and parties that attract a following beyond their area of origin? In assuming that power brokers will happily surrender their interests in the service of the Bonn agreement and the road to democracy, the international community was probably somewhat naive. However, what is even less understandable is why answers to these questions remain elusive 15 years later?

Annex: Methodology

The analysis is based on limited desk research of relevant literature concerning Afghanistan’s political settlement and on 21 extended interviews with representatives of donors, Afghan government officials and civil society representatives. Their perspectives on the two questions of how donors seek to understand Afghan domestic politics and how they attempt to use such knowledge in their longer-term programming have been triangulated with each other and existing literature. Eleven of the interviews were carried out in Kabul, ten by phone or over Skype. They each lasted about an hour on average.

A few limitations of the case study should also be noted. First, as time for desk research was limited, the study offers only a rudimentary analysis of Afghanistan’s ‘political settlement’ at the national level. This obviously does not do justice to the complexity and multi-layered nature of governance in Afghanistan. It is hoped, however, that it does offer a rough interpretative frame against which donor efforts can be gauged. Second, only a few interviews took place with Afghan government representatives and none with Afghan power brokers outside of government. This is due to restrictions of movement (Kabul only), having only five days available for field work and because the research focus was on factors internal to donors. Third, interview(ee)s have not been cited throughout the text as they were conducted on the basis of non-attribution, which reduces the study’s replicability. Section 3 leans most heavily on interview findings. Fourth, the appreciable variation in the size and nature of donors whose representatives were interviewed makes generalization difficult. It is therefore unavoidable that some statements fit certain donors better than others. The table below provides a short characterization of the interviews:

Table 3 Overview of the number of respondents across categories

<p>(1) Donor representatives based in Kabul (field) UNDP, EU, World Bank, The Netherlands, Germany, UK, USA, Canada, Switzerland</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>(2) Representatives of the Afghan government Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior, Office of the President for Reform and Governance</p>	<p>3*</p>
<p>(3) Donor representatives based in headquarters (HQ) Netherlands, Germany</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>(4) Representatives of Afghan/international NGOs Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), Free & Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), Afghan Women’s Network, The Asia Foundation, Human Rights Watch</p>	<p>5</p>

* Efforts were made to conduct interviews with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, but despite willingness to engage, a suitable moment could not be identified.

References

- Barakat, S. and S. Zyck, 'Afghanistan's Insurgency and the Viability of a Political Settlement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, pp. 139–210, 2010
- Barfield, T., *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010
- Borovik, A., *The Hidden War*, New York, Grove Press, 1990
- Chayes, S., *CIA Buys Trouble in Afghanistan*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Chayes, S., *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, New York, Norton & Company, 2015
- Chayes, S., *Turning Afghanistan over to Criminals*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Op-Ed, 5 March 2013
- Coburn, N., *Afghanistan: The 2014 Vote and the Troubled Future of Elections*, Afghanistan: Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 8, London, Chatham House, 2015
- Dahl, R., *Modern political analysis*, 5th edn, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall International, 1991
- Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Transition Without End, An Analytical Narrative on State-Making*, Crisis States Working Papers Series No. 2, London, CSRC, 2008
- Giustozzi, A., *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan*, London, Hurst & Company, 2012
- Giustozzi, A., *The Eye of the Storm: Cities in the Vortex of Afghanistan's Civil Wars*, Working Paper No. 62, London, LSE Crisis States Research Centre, 2009
- GIZ, *Reconstruction work – safely and effectively: Facilitating development projects in crisis countries and minimising risk*, Eschborn, GIZ, 2014
- Grare, F., W. Maley and A. Mattoo, *Beyond the Great Game: Towards a National Political Process in Afghanistan post-2014*, Chanakya Paper no.1, Melbourne, The Australia India Institute, 2014
- Hameed, S., H. Brown and E. Harpst, *Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia: Afghanistan's Role*, CSIS, 2014
- Hartzell, C., *A Comparative Perspective on an Afghan Peace Process: Why, When, Who and What?*, Afghanistan Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 7, London, Chatham House, 2014
- Hearn, S., *Independent review of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, New York, New York University CIC/IDPS, 2016
- International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan's Political Transition*, Asia Report No. 260, Kabul/Brussels, ICG, 2014
- Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework*, Kabul, 5 September 2015, online: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000102254.pdf> (accessed 04/12/15)
- Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *The Constitution of Afghanistan*, Kabul, ratified 26 January 2004, online: <http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf>
- Jackson, A., *Politics and governance in Afghanistan: The case of Kandahar*, Working Paper 34, London, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2015a

- Jackson, A., *Politics and governance in Afghanistan: The case of Nangarhar Province*, Briefing Paper 9, London, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2015b
- Laws, E., *Political Settlements, Elite Pacts and Governments of National Unity: A conceptual study*, DLP Background Paper 10, 2012
- Menocal, A., *Inclusive political settlements: Evidence, gaps and challenges of institutional transformation*, Birmingham, UK Department for International Development, 2015
- Midgley, T., 'Afghanistan, the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and the New Deal', Paper for the Sida Helpdesk on Human Security, submitted 15 May 2015
- Nixon, H., *Achieving Durable Peace: Afghan Perspectives on a Peace Process*, Oslo, Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2011
- OECD, *The State's Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2010.
- Parks, T. and W. Cole, *Political settlements: Implications for International Development Policy and Practice*, Occasional paper no. 2, The Asia Foundation, 2010
- Ruder, T., *Lessons and Opportunities from the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework*, Special Report 378, Washington DC, United States Institute for Peace, 2015
- Saferworld, *Afghanistan's transition: challenges and opportunities for peace*, C4P briefing, London, 2015
- Stapleton, B. and M. Keating, *Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001-2014: An Incoherent Approach*, Afghanistan: Opportunity in Crisis Series No. 10, London, Chatham House, 2015
- Stepanova, E., *The Path to a Political Solution in Afghanistan*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 190, Washington DC, George Washington University, 2011
- The Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2015*, Kabul, TAF, 2015
- Van Linschoten, A. and F. Kuehn, *Rebooting a Political Settlement: Engagement and Mediation after the Afghan Elections*, London, Chatham House, 2014
- Waldman, M. and M. Wright, *Who Wants What: Mapping the Parties' Interests in the Afghanistan Conflict*, London, Chatham House, 2014
- World Bank and Afghan Ministry of Economy, *Poverty Status Update: Overview*, Kabul, World Bank/MoE, 2015
- Zahar, M-J., 'Reframing the Spoiler Debate in Peace Processes', in: Darby, J. and R. Mac Ginty, *Contemporary Peacemaking*, 2nd edition, London, Palgrave MacMillen, 2008