

The Afghan intervention in a security perspective

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Introduction

After more than three decades of war and conflict, Afghanistan is back on track towards becoming a functioning state again. Although security and stability have not taken root yet, the first results of peace are tangible. The quality of governance, the judicial system and the development of a durable economy demand much attention. Reconstruction is a process that requires stamina, certainly after all that has taken place in the country. Over the past ten years the Afghans have had to deal with two revolutions and an occupation. Apart from a state that has to be built up, a peace must be established, and this requires economic progress and a perspective of prosperity.

Afghanistan has potential, but it can only be mobilised with external support and the cooperation of the region. Peace in Afghanistan is closely bound up with security in the region and the exploitation of the natural resources, in particular, the oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Sea basin and in Kazakhstan. In order to export these raw materials, stability in Afghanistan is essential.² Relief of the humanitarian need and democratisation of the country are instrumental in this. Establishing and maintaining peace through the operations *Enduring Freedom* (OEF) and *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) are the consequence. The two operations can be characterised as enforcing 'order' (by OEF), and creating the preconditions for the transition to a just society (by ISAF). This contribution discusses the role of the military instrument, the geo-political dimension of the conflict and the importance of stability for the intervening actors.

The problem

The history of Afghanistan is a turbulent one.³ The country has a long history of heavy fighting, resistance against invaders and foreign rule. The influence of outsiders is great and often inspired by self-interest.⁴ The result is a chaotic situation that is becoming increasingly structural. At this moment in time, the country is rife with corruption, war lords and illegal militias, who have little to gain by a legal order and stability.

After three decades of war the damage is enormous. In 2002 the World Bank estimated the costs of the material reconstruction at \$25 billion, not taking into account a drastic overhaul of an economy that is buoyed up by drugs.⁵ Countless families are dependent on the narco-economy,⁶ while for many also the illegal weapons trade and other contraband is a major source of income.⁷ The social development is lagging behind due to a lack of education and prospects.

A functioning government is a prerequisite for a durable society and that makes it the most important objective of the reconstruction.⁸ Almost all public services have dissolved and reconstruction in Afghanistan begins at level zero. To illustrate this: there has been no postal system since the departure of the Russians. Bombed to smithereens, forbidden by the Taliban, burned or disbanded, the postal network simply did not exist anymore. And this is only one of the many services taken for granted in most places on the globe. Afghanistan lacked many basic services: the central bank did not exist anymore, just like the water works, roads, factories, the police force – the Afghans are used to not having them. The good news, though, is that in the mean time the foundations for most of these facilities have returned.

In order to build up the public services there has to be a functioning (formal) economy and a governmental levying of taxes to be able to finance these communal facilities. Breaking the spiral of the narco-economy is essential; the manner in which this is to be done is the subject of serious discussions as a consequence of the many dilemmas attached to it.⁹ Agriculture might be able to offer an economic alternative, but the irrigation systems of the fields in this extremely arid country have to be repaired or expanded, in order to make agriculture economically viable to some extent. The situation with regard to the industries is little better in a country that is facing a chronic shortage or even absence of infrastructure or electricity. On top of that, the lack of stability creates an unfavourable investment climate, which makes it hard to get reconstruction, and, with that, the trust in the authorities on the way.

Building up a functioning state is a challenge. In the views of many Afghans, democratisation is at odds with modernisation; it is seen as a source of polarisation. For the West the opposite is the case: through democratisation citizens become emancipated, which is essential for the stability of the country. All parties, however, agree that the state should function with a maximum participation for the citizens.

Complexity of peace

There was a time when peace missions seemed ‘simple’.¹⁰ The warring factions, war weary, would conclude an agreement; the international community would hasten to help with troops – often blue helmets with a classic peacekeeping mandate – to monitor the compliance with the agreement to which the parties had committed themselves. This relatively safe environment would attract several aid organisations to get the reconstruction off the ground and fairly soon the afflicted countries would be able to fend for themselves again, making the presence of foreign military superfluous. Present-day practice, however, is more recalcitrant.¹¹ Thus, violence was needed in Bosnia to force the parties to the negotiation table, and ten to fifteen years after the conclusion of the Dayton Agreement foreign troops are still necessary.¹² The use of military force has its limitations. Winning wars is easy; it is winning the peace that is difficult.

Generally speaking, gaining military superiority is not the greatest problem for the western high-tech armies, but that does not mean that the war is won. Development, peace and security are interdependent.¹³ Building up a local and provincial government is not a traditional military task, nor, for that matter, is making an economy work. Prioritising security, stability and continuity of the reconstruction mission causes a dilemma. Moreover, if there is no security and reconstruction, there is no chance of stability. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities the focus lies on the stabilisation role.¹⁴ of the armed forces.¹⁵ Soldiers, however, are not development workers, although it is true that the more reconstruction becomes tangible, the sooner people are inclined to really lay down arms, and the building of a durable stability can begin. After all, they will have something to lose if they take up arms again.

According to Rupert Smith, present-day war fare is not about winning battles anymore, but it has the character of a “war amongst the people”.¹⁶ It is “a continuous criss-crossing between confrontation and conflict, regardless of whether a state is facing another state or a non-state actor. Rather than war and peace, there is no predefined sequence, nor is peace necessarily either starting point or end point: conflicts are resolved, but not necessarily confrontations”.¹⁷

Conflicts must be managed, not necessarily resolved, as creating stability takes more than success on the battlefield.¹⁸ The concept may look simple; practice, however, is different. Even if the parties see such an approach as the best alternative, it is still a treacherous road full of pitfalls. After a war, certainly in the beginning, the distrust between the parties is great, with every party deeming it necessary to keep up a protection against the other, and, if need be, defend itself. This spiral must be broken.

Intervening at the ‘right’ or ‘ripe’ moment with the help of an independent ‘third party’ is the approach many interventions take,¹⁹ with the creation of stability, the maintaining and embedding as key concepts. Stability means that, “changes occur only within known limits. In other words, the misfortune of individual actors or relations does not trigger damaging chain reactions that threaten the system as a whole. ‘Known limits’ can be interpreted as socially acceptable or calculated risks”.²⁰ Peace is more than making the weapons go silent, it is about creating a lasting peace, which is directly related to the foundation of a durable, stable society.

Johan Galtung has drawn up a comprehensive peace concept which has brought more insight into the spectrum of war and peace.²¹ Peace encompasses various stages and components, in which conflict handling takes the centre stage. A conflict or an unresolved contrariety is a situation in which two or more parties use methods, strive for goals or adhere to values, which, actually or perceived by the parties, are irreconcilable, making them come into conflict with each other. With his “conflict triangle”, Galtung provides an insight into the complexity of a conflict, introducing the operative concepts conflict, behaviour and attitude.

Galtung’s peace concept contains eight components, in which power in four guises (military, economic, political and cultural) is linked to the two forms of peace. Negative peace is characterised by the absence of violence - a self-supporting peace – while positive peace “is characterised by the presence of activities to bring relief for past or present violence and to prevent future violence”. The four components and their relation with positive and negative peace are summarised in the table presented below.

	Negative peace	Positive peace
<i>Survival</i> : absence of direct violence cause by military power	Absence of direct violence: cease-fires, disarmament, prevention of terrorism and state terrorism, non-violence	Life-enhancing cooperation and prevention of direct violence: peace-building, conflict transformation, reconciliation and reconstruction
<i>Development</i> : absence of structural violence I cause by economic power	Humanitarian aid, food aid, alleviation of poverty and misery	Building a life-sustaining economy at the local, national and global level in which everyone’s basic needs are met
<i>Freedom</i> : absence of structural violence II caused by political power	Liberation from oppression, occupation, dictatorship	Good governance and participation, self-determination, human rights
<i>Peace culture (identity)</i> : absence of cultural violence cause by cultural power	Overcoming prejudice based on nationality, race language, gender, age, class, religion, etc.; elimination of the glorification of war and violence in the media, literature, films, monuments, etc	Promotion of a culture of peace and mutual learning; global communication and dialogues; development of peaceful deep cultures and deep structures; peace education; peace journalism

Table 1: Eight Components of Peace. Source: Fischer, D. (2007), ‘Peace as a Self-regulating Process’, in: Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, London: Routledge, p. 188.

The left-hand column contains the “human needs”: survival, economic well-being, freedom and identity (their opposites being death, misery, oppression and alienation) which are threatened by four forms of violence: direct violence (hurting and killing people with weapons), structural violence I (the slow death from hunger, preventable diseases and other suffering caused by unjust structures of society), structural violence II (deprivation from freedom of choice and from participation in decisions that affect people’s own lives), and cultural violence (the justification of direct and structural violence through nationalism, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and prejudice). These four forms of violence correspond with roughly the four forms of power: military, economic, political and cultural power.

Military power dominates survival; development workers are the main actors in development, but, in contrast to the military, they have no role in survival. Creating and maintaining a negative peace as a precondition to creating a positive peace, therefore, is a typically military matter. In other words, the soldier is at the basis of the peace process and the stabilisation of the situation. He lays the foundation on which diplomats and development workers can build. For this reason, the presence of diplomats and development workers right from the planning and execution phases of the interventions is essential. After all, they have to build from the foundation. Incidentally, it must be remarked that the military do not only enforce a negative peace, but they also make a start with the process towards the positive peace. Apart from enforcing the negative peace, the military should also ensure that the population have trust in the good intentions of the intervening parties; a trust that is only too easily betrayed by an overuse - or tolerance – of violence and abuse of “lootable resources”, such as diamonds, wood, opium, oil, coal and other natural resources/minerals and metals.²²

Peace process

In the first stages of the peace process the trust in good intentions needs to be consolidated. A start must be made with making the state function and closing the “sovereignty gap”. According to Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart this is a “glaring gap (that) exists between the *de jure* sovereignty that the international system affords such states and their *de facto* capabilities to serve their populations and act as responsible members of the international community”.²³ The extent to which this happens can be measured with the “sovereignty index”,²⁴ with which the ten functions²⁵ of the state can be assessed.²⁶

In pre-modern states, such as Afghanistan, governmental chaos and corruption are rife.²⁷ Openness and transparency of the administrative machinery are the most impor-

tant remedies against corruption, but that is hypothetical in such states.²⁸ A stabilisation strategy directed at restoring law and order²⁹ and the introduction of a market mechanism will work as a catalyst and tool.³⁰ A negative peace can be (temporarily) enforced and maintained by the intervening parties, but the process from negative to positive peace can only be supported with foreign aid. Whether this happens or not is not a matter of idealism alone; geo-political interests form a prerequisite, all the more so, because of the enormous costs involved in an intervention and reconstruction. In practice a government has to determine whether the economic and idealist interests of the intervening state are sufficient to enforce a peace and to establish a durable stability. Incidentally, there has been no conflict in the 21st century that can be considered purely intra-state: the regional dimension has always been very present.

The Afghan geo-political plaything

Afghanistan is a typical example of a pre-modern state. This is a result of the protracted war, the bad accessibility of the country and the poor infrastructure, along with the great diversity in population, languages and cultures.³¹ Whether Afghanistan is a unified state, is a matter for discussion for many.³² There are quite a few myths about the coming into existence of the Afghan nation. Among the Pashtun, for instance, the father of the fatherland is Ahmad Shah Durrani, a (Pashtun) Popelzai, who reigned from 1747 to 1773, but he does not enjoy that reputation among non-Pashtun.³³ Especially among the Tajik and the present-day National Front, Ahmad Shad Massoud plays a uniting role, something the Pashtun find somewhat exaggerated.

Afghanistan is not so much founded on a constellation of common ideas expressed in writings and institutions as is normal in western nation states, but on geostrategical invention. It is a stumbling block between large empires, whereby the peoples in the area of the present-day Afghanistan share an unwillingness to bind themselves to any of these large states. It is a state founded on a smooth and subtle interaction between collective structures combined with a strongly developed sense of freedom and a strong aversion to subjection.

The state borders of the Asian states were delineated in the nineteenth and twentieth century by European colonial states.³⁴ While Great Britain expanded and strengthened its hold on India in the nineteenth century, its policy towards India's northern neighbour, Afghanistan, was whimsical,³⁵ with repeated drastic changes of course. The British were looking after their own interests; those of the local population were not even subordinate, leaving them no option but to rebel against foreign rule.³⁶ Geo-political division

was dominant at the beginning of the twentieth century in this area, and it determined what was acceptable behaviour of the colonisers in the pursuit of their own interests.³⁷

For the British the most important threat was a Russian expansion,³⁸ the conservative Tories considering this threat an 'attack' on their crown colony, India, and they reacted in an alarmist and warlike fashion. The best way to keep the Russians away from India was to create a buffer zone, or a forward defence, and in this view it was necessary to advance in northerly direction and to occupy Afghanistan, wholly or partially. In practice, this British 'forward policy' led to one of its most crushing military defeats.

The British Liberal Party, on the other hand, took the Russian threat more lightly and proposed a political solution: stay in India, befriend an acceptable Afghan leader and have him and his fervently independent people, act as the gate keeper of the sub-continent. This course, also copied by the Americans up to the nineteen-seventies, proved to be successful in fending off the Russian military advance into Afghanistan up to 1979. Although it may seem simple on paper, such an approach works out differently in practice. The first blunder the British made was their interference in the old rivalry between the Popalzai and the Barakzai, the same Pasthun tribes that had been locked in a power struggle since the founding jirgah.³⁹ But did the British have a choice if they wanted to control a puppet emir? The British blunder does not stand on its own; also the Soviets and the Americans would be faced with the same dilemma.

By the end of the nineteenth century the British had hopes of solving the problems by delineating the borders between the Indian and Afghan kingdoms. In 1901 Sir Thomas Holdich⁴⁰ wrote: "We have contributed much to give a national unity to that nebulous community we which call Afghanistan...by drawing a boundary all around it and elevating it to the position of a buffer state between England and Russia".⁴¹ Holdich was referring to the borders as they were agreed upon by the Foreign Secretary of British India, Sir H. Mortimer Durand, and the Afghan king Abdul Rahman Khan.⁴² The British intention was, on the one hand, to divide the Pasthun over Afghanistan and British India (the area of the present Pakistan) and the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmenians over Afghanistan and several central-Asian republics, on the other. Abdul Rahman Khan did not like having the Treaty of Gandamak forced through his throat, but had no other option than to sign this treaty so humiliating for the Afghans.⁴³ Many Afghan tribes revoked the ratification of the treaty and the subjection to the British, swearing allegiance to the Barakzai dynasty. Great Britain had no way of controlling the country in such circumstances without a massive invasion to colonise it. The Afghans drove the British out, just like they would do a century later with the Soviets: by melting away and employing guerrilla-like tactics and low-intensity conflicts, for which the country is perfectly suited. The poor

infrastructure and the inaccessibility make it difficult for intervening powers, also today, to concentrate their troops locally in order to control and subjugate.⁴⁴ This put the Abdul Rahman Khan dynasty in jeopardy.⁴⁵ It was threatened directly by its rival Ayub Khan, who advanced from his base in Herat on Kandahar a few weeks prior to Abdul Rahman Khan's inauguration, destroying half of the British force opposing him. The British debacle was to the advantage of the newly-inaugurated Abdul Rahman Khan, who had the ambition to unite Afghanistan. The affair had the effect of boosting the Liberal posture in London: the British decided to withdraw their troops. It took the new king ten years of fierce, brutal fighting and forced migrations – ethnic cleansings – to force his stubborn compatriots into submission to him. When the job was done, it was, in his view, “paramount that first a border line were drawn around all of Afghanistan”.⁴⁶

The largest ethnic group, the Pashtun gained power in Afghanistan, incidentally, without ever forming the majority. As long as the British interests in the region were secure, or rather, not threatened, the Pashtun leaders could basically do whatever they liked. But that did not make the country or the region stable. The great ethnic and cultural diversity made it virtually impossible for a single ethnic group to stabilise and rule the country.⁴⁷ On top of that, the Afghan government, to begin with Abdul Rahman Khan, never recognised the border with British India and later Pakistan, the Durand line. It is still a bone of contention today, also as the discussion is linked to the founding of Pashtunistan, i.e. the reunification of the Pashtun people on both sides of the border.⁴⁸ In 1947 India became independent of British rule and the Muslim areas in the north were violently and painfully cut off in order to form the new state of Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan inherited the decades-old tensions regarding the border, which was unpopular with the Afghan as well as the Pakistani Pashtun.⁴⁹ Afghanistan is a geo-political plaything for the empires in its region, on which it is dependent for its own security and prosperity.⁵⁰

Buffer and insulator states

Afghanistan is an *insulator state*, “A state or mini-complex standing between regional security complexes and defining a location where larger regional security dynamics stand back to back”.⁵¹ In Barry Buzan and Ole Waever's regional security complex theory this is essentially different from a *buffer state*, “a state or mini-complex within a security complex and standing at the centre of a strong pattern of securitisation, whose role is to separate rival powers”.⁵² As an insulator, Afghanistan lies between the Asian Super Complex, the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex and the post-Soviet Regional Security Complex, and as a result, it is directly influenced by all three.⁵³ The consequence of this is that, “political turbulence and instability in Afghanistan will be a durable fea-

ture, sometime muted by a weak government, sometimes not. The divisions within the country run deep, and its warrior culture makes internal conflict frequent and easy to instigate. The various factions all have outside supporters in neighbouring territories, where kin and substantial refugee populations are to be found”.⁵⁴ In *Descent into Chaos* Ahmed Rashid in fact arrives at a similar conclusion.⁵⁵ The consequence of the insulator status is that the country is influenced by the three neighbouring Regional Security Complexes (RSCs). This is the recurrent theme in the history of the region. Time and again, Afghanistan has fallen prey to the whims of clashing empires and their interests. It is directly influenced by its environment, with all the ensuing consequences for the state and the nation.

The characterisation of Afghanistan as an insulator is striking. Since World War II and the departure of the British as colonisers Afghanistan has become increasingly dependent on foreign support, which is a source of frequent instability.⁵⁶ One example is the Kanjaki dam complex in the Helmand province, the Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA).⁵⁷ The dams were built in the nineteen-fifties, with American aid, in particular, in order to win the ‘hearts and minds’ in the Soviet backyard.⁵⁸ HAVA was a means to extend the power and prestige of the Daoud government and to foster Afghanistan as a Pashtun-dominated nation.⁵⁹ This was only a partial success; the area that was flooded was traditional Pashtun nomad country. In part they left for areas where Tajiks and Hazaras lived, an opportunity for the government to use the nomads as “a death squad to crush the uprising of the non-Pashtun people”.⁶⁰ Another part went to the Northwest Frontier Province and Balochistan in Pakistan, where many were accustomed to spending part of the year. Pakistan considers this area a ‘buffer’ between Pakistan and Afghanistan, so their arrival was seen as a security risk. Pakistan’s fear of a renewed ambition for a Pashtunistan flared up again, all the more so, as Daoud began to concentrate troops on the Afghan side of the border.⁶¹ In 1963 Daoud was dismissed as Prime Minister, and king Zahir Shah immediately tightened relations with Pakistan, which defused the situation somewhat for the time being, but did not put an end to the clashes of Afghan peoples and cultures supported by their brethren on the other side of the border. Another project the king embarked upon was the modernisation of the state and the democratisation of the administration. The Afghans pursued an independent course with their king, who in any case enjoyed the broad support from all ethnic groups, and, thus, could count on the support of both the Soviets and the Americans. In hindsight this appears to have been an exceptional period in the history of Afghanistan.

Geo-political puppet regimes are the rule rather than the exception in Afghanistan as a client state. What Shah Shuha (1839-1942) was for the British, and Mohammad Najibullah for the Soviets, Hamid Karzai (2000-present) is for the Americans: a Pashtun

with strong ties with his foreign patrons. They were de facto installed by decree after their predecessors had been deposed and are kept in the saddle by a relatively large and powerful force of occupation. However, so far the intervening countries have failed with the country.

For a decade the Soviets conducted a deadly battle during which countless cruelties and reprisal actions were committed by all parties, and repeated decimating of civilians and their possessions were the order of the day.⁶² When the Soviet debacle was over, the support from the US, USSR, Saudi-Arabia and others continued, while at the same time these countries incited the neighbouring countries and the rivalling factions against each other. In the obsessive context of the Cold War the probable consequences of the radicalisation were ignored by countries that supported the Mudjahidin: Pakistan and the US.⁶³ In particular the most important ally, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar - the most radical fundamentalist among the rebel leaders – was even considered as a reason for taking up arms against the atheist communists. Such a strategy against Afghanistan, incidentally, is strikingly consistent in Pakistan: the use of religious fanatics to gain control over the country, or at least, create instability.⁶⁴

Karzai is an example of an American puppet. His name appears almost from nowhere in October 2001.⁶⁵ That Karzai was a surprise for outsiders is not so strange: up to the summer of 2001 his name did not appear once in the prominent American media.⁶⁶ After the American bombardments Karzai is the 'influential Pashtun Chief', which is certainly an exaggeration. Better still, Karzai is tolerated precisely because of the fact that he is not so influential and in fact has no power base in Afghanistan, nor blood on his hands.⁶⁷ In the nineteen-eighties he closely cooperated with the Americans, in 1992-1993 he was Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs for a year in the Mudjahidin government in the virtually out-of-control, anarchistic country. In 1994-1995 he joined the Taliban, but renounced them in 1997. In the period that followed he worked from Pakistan, with American help, to topple the Taliban regime. In November 2001 the Taliban were chased from power, not beaten, with considerable, crucial American help, by the Mudjahidin of the Northern Alliance, whose leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, had been murdered only days before.

The Bonn Treaty

On 5 December 2001, during the conference in the German city of Bonn⁶⁸ the Bonn Treaty was concluded on the instigation of the Special Representative of the United Nations, Algerian Lakhdar Brahimi.⁶⁹ The goal of the conference was to give substance

to “the agenda for Afghanistan’s future”, with no place at the negotiations for the Taliban. At the conference the international community pledged support and resources.⁷⁰ The challenge was the foundation of an Afghan nation which would be supported by the many dozens of ethnic and religious groups, but who had been waging a terrible war with each other over the past decade.⁷¹

Afghanistan was to get a “broad based, gender sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative” government.⁷² During the conference an interim president was chosen. At first the most support seemed to go to Professor Abdul Sattar Sirat, an Uzbek from the camp of the former king, Zahir Shah, who lives in exile in Rome, and Minister of Justice in the king’s last government. Within the Northern Alliance there was much discord about the insignificant and unknown Karzai, who was pushed by the American envoy Khalizad, at the expense of former Northern Alliance politicians, such as Abdullah Abdullah, Yunus Qanooni and Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president of the Mujahidin government (1992-1996). The latter soon fell from grace when it appeared that he had held secret talks with the director of the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI), Lieutenant General Ehsan-ul Haq in the United Arab Emirates. Bit by bit Karzai gained not only the trust of the Northern Alliance – also because of their internal division – but also of Iran, Pakistan and Russia.⁷³ In spite of the king’s popularity, Sirat was not acceptable to the Northern Alliance and he would therefore constitute a threat to the peace process. Pressured by the UN, Sirat withdrew his candidacy, which opened up the way for the American candidate, Karzai. According to the New York Times,⁷⁴ “all the delegates understood that the Americans wanted Mr Karzai ... so on Dec. 5, they finally chose him”.⁷⁵

Although Karzai is in power, he is troubled by the powerful war lords, who also actively challenge his presidency and cannot just be laid off, if only because their power base among the population is too strong. Gul Agha Shirzai, Ismael Khan – arguably the most powerful of all, and openly supported by Iran -, the opportunistic general Abdul Rashid Dostum – who during the ‘nights of the Mujahidin’ built up a reputation of brutality, just like Hasar Mohammed Mohaqeq and Tajik Mohammad Ata. Throwing these powerbrokers out, would mean a blood bath; keeping them on, was the other side of the dilemma, as their own interests profited by instability. The reconstruction of a modern administration, a task assigned to the UN in the Bonn Treaty, therefore, became a de facto impossibility, unless the war lords were side-tracked or assumed co-responsibility in governing the country. Whether UNAMA and ISAF could ever call them to account in this respect is a different matter and is in fact the crux in the first stage of the peace process.

UNAMA

The United Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), “supports and assists the Afghan government as an independent monitor of the implementation of the Bonn process; a fund-raiser; a coordinator of massive humanitarian aid, relief and reconstruction efforts; and a standard-bearer and enforcer for human rights and gender issues.”⁷⁶ It is remarkable that the Security Council laid down the provision that the support of the UN was dependent on “where local authorities contribute to the maintenance of a secure environment and demonstrate respect for human rights”. In other words, there are conditions attached to the modernisation process of the Islamic state, which traditionally does not have a separation of the powers of the state. It is obvious that a form of administration ensuing from this differs from that of a western democracy, if only because religion is often used (abused, according to some) by the social – often conservative – top layer as a means to maintain its position. The introduction of administrative innovations must come across as logical and rational and be presented with the help of and reference to the Koran. UNAMA acts as the coordinator for the UN and other aid organisations and facilitates aid programmes especially directed at embedding human rights in the society and reconstructing the economy.⁷⁷

Subversive activities are interfering with the functioning of the state, and division can be found up to the level of the government, which makes it impossible for government and parliament to govern, whereas the ambition should be to govern in unison and decide together on a future for which they all feel responsible. A possible reason for this is the absence of a multi-party system in combination with the non-transferable votes system of individually elected members of parliament.⁷⁸

ISAF

The adoption of Resolution 1386 on 20 December marks the beginning of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The mission was given a mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (peace enforcing) to maintain the conditional peace and, thus, enable reconstruction. ISAF is focused on restoring confidence in the state and that cannot be enforced with weapons, though it supports the disarming of militias, the training and professionalisation of the police and armed forces, the education and support of the local administrative machinery and organisation of elections.⁷⁹ The sense of security must be provided by embedding stability: the parties should have something to lose by digging up the hatchet.

The intention is to maintain the negative peace and to make a start with the reconstruction, most certainly in areas where the security situation is fragile. Although this was quite a task, the necessary numbers of troops and materiel did not materialise, and

the room for manoeuvre was at first limited to Kabul, followed in 2004 by the northern and eastern regions, and since 2006 ISAF has covered the entire country.

The initial, multi-national ISAF mission was directed at increasing the security in and around the capital Kabul, under British, Turkish and German-Dutch command, consecutively. In August 2003 command was transferred to NATO, which conducted a phased expansion of the mission over Afghanistan. ISAF began to work with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) - on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 1510 (13 October 2003), 1563 (17 September 2004) and 1707 (12 September 2006) - in order to facilitate the execution of the mandate outside Kabul.⁸⁰ The PRTs were a stop gap, as there were hardly any countries willing to send troops to Afghanistan. There were various reasons for this, ranging from a lack of confidence in the future of the country, to obligations elsewhere (Iraq), to lack of interests and interest in the country and the region. Incidentally, the question remains, certainly in hindsight, whether ISAF was in need of substantially more troops anyway in the northern region; after all, the region was reasonably stable, by Afghan standards.

The PRTs were to be the backbone of the mission, which would only come to full bloom in a situation of negative peace. Northern Afghanistan is a fairly secure region with a reasonable economic growth, where infrastructure and administration are being built up successfully.⁸¹ The question, however, is how well the ethnic entities will be able to keep on cooperating. The activities of, for instance, Hekmatyar and Dostum in this region, in combination with the rule and power of Governor Mohammad Ata are not very encouraging. In the south and east the presence of a negative peace is by no means guaranteed, with a rebellious population, whether or not incited by the Taliban, everywhere. Furthermore, ISAF and OEF are locked in a struggle with the military exponents of the Taliban and al Qa'ida-linked factions. Anyone who considers the Taliban an outsider in Afghanistan underestimates how deeply talibanism (corporal punishment, subordinate position of women, conservative interpretation of Islam) is embedded in the culture.⁸² The political movement of the Taliban, whose ideology comes very close to al Qa'ida's, however, is mainly fuelled by foreign powers, such as Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia. The traditional distance that has always been there between the Pashtun areas with their own norms and tribal regulations, and the central authority in Kabul, has increased since the Taliban were driven from Kabul.

There are two questions that present themselves. Does the modernisation of the traditional, Islamic society provoke resistance and where does this strong desire of the intervening countries to modernise and democratise this country come from?

Modernisation

In the traditional, rural Afghan society the drawing up of a constitution as a driving force for the modernisation process is a difficult but essential task in the process of democratisation. Attempts that were made in the past were both hopeful and disappointing. Whenever the modernisation seemed to take some hold, religion was used to set the clocks back. Afghanistan has a love-hate relationship with modernisation. One major problem is the paradox between the Sharia and the norms dictated by the human rights for the constitutional state, on the one hand, and the common law, the Islam and democratisation, on the other.⁸⁴ There is no separation between mosque and state in Afghanistan, and attempts at separating them have always ended in debacle over the past century. The efforts made to create openings for modernisation and liberalisation through changes in the constitution, resulted in a temporary and local increase of liberties at best.

The modernisation of a traditional society, such as the Afghan one, requires a population that is itself aware of the necessity of these changes. This, in turn, presupposes the presence of strong, convincing administrators on all levels. Besides, an effective juridical system is indispensable to silence dissonance. In a centrally governed country, which Afghanistan still is, and in which more than eighty per cent of the civil servants still reside in Kabul, police officers are corrupt, judges barely trained, and governors avoid difficulties almost by definition, all the ingredients are in place for blocking any adjustments to the traditional life style.⁸⁵

Religion is always used in Afghanistan as a 'weapon' against innovation, but the roots of the rejection are vested in tradition. In the course of history resistance against innovation in the provinces has always assumed whimsical forms. Over the centuries the radicalisation of the traditionalists has developed from a religious-traditionalist mutiny of Tajik 'bacha-e saqqaw' to the most extremist clan-cultural Pashtun tyranny of the Taliban. In order to break through this, persuasiveness, mutual respect, time and patience are required. The reality is also that tradition and common law are necessities in an illiterate Afghan society, in which, moreover, offending someone's honour is an extremely sensible issue. The Islam holds a prominent position in the present constitution, which makes it an obstacle to innovation. An interpretation in a more liberal-Islamic sense would offer possibilities for modernisation, where a stricter one, along the lines of the Sharia, would scarcely do that.

The prominent position of the clergy, in combination with the omnipresent illiteracy, low level of education of the population and the traditional tribal relations, also cause a

dominance of religion and common law in practice. For that reason the Afghans living outside the major cities are scarcely susceptible to changes in their traditional way of life, let alone a modernisation of fundamental values, such as the liberalisation of the position of women. Apparently, it is the task of the intervening countries to take away precisely this type of obstacle.⁸⁶ The challenge in this area is immense, with the Taliban and the drugs barons, who are often also the war lords, finding each other united on this point.⁸⁷ They benefit from insecurity and the failure of the national government, as they thrive best in a situation of lawlessness and anarchy. The trick for ISAF and UNAMA is to break through this downward spiral.⁸⁸

The weak provincial and local government organisation needs to be professionalised, and a strong administration requires a powerful middle-class, which at this moment is absent. The creation and education of this middle-class will probably take two generations. Whether this justifies an almost total absence of delegation of responsibilities from Kabul is quite doubtful. If the involvement of officials in the provinces remains low, there is no motivation to modernise and educate them, let alone lend integrity to a position of authority. In the mean time, the authority and administration vacuum that was traditionally filled by the clergy and tribal leaders, is now being filled by the war lords.

One chance the country has to increase the pace of modernisation is to improve its energy positions and to exploit its natural resources and minerals to the furthering of the living standards in one of the poorest countries in the world outside Africa. It is precisely on these points that the main intervening players have shared interests with the Afghan government.

Regional interests

The Central-Asiatic Caspian Sea Basin (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and parts of Russia and Iran) holds approximately one-fifth of the world's oil reserves and one-eighth of the natural gas reserves.⁸⁹ Afghanistan is an 'energy bridge' – a geographical link between central and southern Asia, mainly from the Turkmenistan Daulatebad gas field – which gives it a strategic importance in the exploitation of the oil and gas fields in the area and a major motivation for especially American activity there.⁹⁰ In September 2007 Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, stated, "One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so energy can flow to the south...and so that the countries of Central Asia are no longer bottled up between two enormous

powers of China and Russia, but rather they have outlets to the south as well as to the north and the east and the west".⁹¹

The energy bridge through Afghanistan is the TAPI pipe line, which in due course is to connect Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. This pipe line has played a major political role for some time now, whereby two consortiums have been vying for the rights: American Unocal and Argentine Bidas.⁹² The American government supports Unocal, which negotiated with the Taliban administration for the rights between 1997 and 2001.⁹³ Initially, George W. Bush was convinced that the combination of regime and oil pipe line would lead to enough prosperity and stability, provided the Taliban formed a government of national unity. Bidas negotiated independently with the Taliban and their opponents, but disappeared from the Afghan stage after 2001. The American administration is still negotiating with the Afghans, and there are several reports that president Karzai entertained long-lasting and close ties with Unocal, just like the former American ambassador in Afghanistan (2003-2005), Zalmay Khalizad, who used to work as a liaison between the Taliban government and the American administration.

The TAPI project is coordinated by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the Philippines, which carried out a technical feasibility study in 2003.⁹⁴ This dug-in gas pipeline is going to measure some 1,700 kilometres in length, transporting an annual 33 billion cubic metres of gas. Annually, Afghanistan can purchase a maximum of 5 billion cubic metres, and India and Pakistan 14 billion cubic metres each. In 2008 the costs were estimated at \$7.6 billion. The pipe line roughly follows the Afghan ring road from Dauletabad (Turkmenistan) to Herat, via Helmand and Kandahar to Pakistan. As it happens, this is also one of the most turbulent areas in Afghanistan, where Italian, British and Canadian ISAF units are stationed.

In 2006 a donor conference was held in New Dehli, India, where the TAPI project featured high on the agenda (New Dehli Declaration 2006).⁹⁵ Representatives of 21 countries participated, among which the USA, Russia, Great Britain, Canada, Italy, France and Germany and the regional super powers, India, Pakistan and Iran. Afghanistan also took part, just like the ADB, the IMF, the EU and the World Bank. The interest of the TAPI pipe line for the region was reiterated and concerns were voiced with regard to the bad security situation in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

The importance of the TAPI project is recognised in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013.⁹⁶ The transfer of gas alone will yield \$160 million, i.e. half of the Afghan national budget.⁹⁷ This makes it essential for the development of the economy and employment, and, consequently, for the stability of the country. The

region profits as well, all the more so, as TAPI will lead to more stability between the two arch-rivals India and Pakistan. However, in spite of the obvious advantages of the project for the stability of the region, the costs are fairly high and the chance of success relatively slight as a consequence of the instability and insecurity. Besides, there is an alternative, the Iran-Pakistan-India pipe line, which exports natural gas along a relatively safe route. The costs of the IPI-pipe line are estimated at some \$7.5 billion, as expensive as TAPI.

With its length of 2,775 kilometres, the IPI pipe line can transport 5.5 billion cubic metres of gas and will take four years to complete.⁹⁸ The building is carried out and financed by the three countries, while TAPI is a 'corporate venture'. It is an open question whether the IPI line will actually be built, with the US being vehemently opposed, due to the role Iran will be playing in the region and as a result of interests that the British BP and Russian Gazprom have in the Pakistani part, and on which the American can exert little influence.⁹⁹ Besides, participation of India in the project is still unclear, all the more so, as the United States is exerting strong pressure on both India and Pakistan to withdraw from the project and to fully focus on the TAPI project, which, according to US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher, also testifies to the "fundamental strategic interest in Afghanistan" as well as the importance of stability in the region.¹⁰⁰ By the end of May 2008 a declaration of intent was signed to begin the construction of the TAPI pipe line, aiming for operational use in 2014. The big question is in how far the current rising tensions between India and Pakistan, also as a result of the assault in Mumbai (November 2008), are going to influence the process.

Petro-politics

The world energy reserves do not look good, according to the data published by the International Energy Agency in its Medium-Term Oil Market Report in November 2008.¹⁰¹ The present oil and gas wells are yielding seven per cent less oil and gas every year. According to the IEA, it would take a quantity four times the present production of Saudi-Arabia, to counter the effect of the depleting oil fields, with a demand staying constant. That extra production is not going to happen. Temporary price drops and large set backs for the oil companies in combination with the credit crunch, cause the IEA to predict a structural shortage of oil on the short to medium term. This has major consequences on a global scale: stronger authoritarian states, an increasing interference of large countries in oil rich regions and a rising risk of wars fought over raw materials.¹⁰²

As energy plays a central role in global economy, the imminent oil shortage has created new strategic priorities in the western countries and a number of emerging econo-

mies: energy security.¹⁰³ The bulk of the oil may be traded on the 'world market', but no one strong or wealthy enough to make matters go their way are relying on that. In this respect, the history of the Middle East gives little reason for confidence, as the region has been the focal point of foreign interference, with staged coups, arms deals and manipulation, since oil was first discovered there.

The tussle over the Middle East has subsided somewhat. It is unclear how large the Saudi reserves really are and how long the marriage of reason between Riyadh and Washington will last.¹⁰⁴ The scenarios for the future of the Iraqi oil fields are uncertain as a consequence of the insecurity and political instability in the country. The competition goes between Iran and the US.¹⁰⁵ The matter is complex, as a number of issues are intertwined, such as the Iranian support to factions like Hezbollah, the Iranian nuclear programme and the large energy reserves in Iran. India, Pakistan and China are eager for Iranian natural gas; Tehran is wavering, Washington is resisting. It has become a matter of intense and open geo-political manoeuvring between European countries, Russia, the US and China, to mention a few.¹⁰⁶ It is remarkable that Washington requested the support of Beijing to isolate Iran's economy further because of its nuclear programme. The Chinese, however, concluded a gas and oil deal with Iran, worth \$100 billion. This, incidentally, should surprise no one, with 43 per cent of the new oil demands coming from China - the biggest energy consumer in 2015, according to the IEA. American and Chinese interests are at odds in this respect.

Exploiting the oil and gas fields in Africa and around the Caspian Sea is of vital importance. The Baku-Tbilisi-Cey (BTC) oil pipe line, initially ran through the mountainous and insecure area of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, while Azerbaijan could as easily export via Iran. This is an illustration of how stringent the situation is, but also of the geo-political struggle that is involved with it.¹⁰⁷ The BTC pipe line made it possible to export oil without interference from Russia or Iran, but it is merely an example of The New Great Game in Central Asia.¹⁰⁸ In connection with this, Afghanistan, as an insulator state, is once more a hub in the geo-political tussle over natural resources in the region.

In this respect the Americans have drastically changed their strategic priorities. They need the Europeans badly to secure their energy interests, if need be to fight for them. After all, these are vital interests that also change the power structures in the international arena. The power of new energy exporters, such as Russia, Iran and Venezuela, is steadily increasing. The situation, however, is fragile. Thus, the Iranian state budget is mainly founded on the oil export.

The high oil price also makes oil producing countries more powerful, their exorbitant profits rendering them less dependent on western oil companies. These profits allow them to hire companies like Halliburton, which can deliver complete oil extraction installations, including the drilling rigs, and protect them. The future of the once so omnipotent oil giants, such as Shell, BP, Exxon, Unocal, has become a tenuous one. But things can be a lot worse; in the current credit crunch western economies have to be rescued by state funds, in which many oil producing countries deposited the enormous money surpluses of the past few years. It has given them strategic importance, as they are buying up the stocks of the decaying western business world. On the one hand, the desire for oil will have to be pushed back, while, on the other, vital regions will have to be controlled firmly. Central Asia offers opportunities, but at the same time it is an enormous challenge to make the area secure and stable. The western countries have vital interests in the region and in the stabilisation of the Afghan energy bridge.

Conclusion

The western intervention in Afghanistan is driven by a mutually dependent combination of idealism and vital economic interests. After all, if there is no secure and stable environment in Afghanistan, the Central-Asian natural resources are difficult to export. In connection with this, it must be considered a blunder that the Taliban were only driven from the country, and were allowed to regroup in Pakistan. The exploitation of the natural resources, the primary objective of the intervention, next to apprehending Osama bin Laden and rounding up al Qa'ida, has come under pressure as a result. The fact that ISAF was slowly deployed over the entire country did not do the stabilisation process much good. For too long, the American troops were engaged in 'the hunt for bin Laden', ignoring that creating a negative peace was at least as important a condition for the peace process.

Military successes do not count if a durable peace is not gained. Peace is not 'won' by defeating an enemy on the battle field, to disarm and demobilise him, but precisely by stimulating reconstruction, restoring infrastructure, facilitating good education and health care, promoting good governance, training the police and the legal system, getting the economy going and by taking away mutual feelings of hatred. A reconstruction mission, therefore, is crucial in an area where there has been much intra-state conflict and civil strife. Here, the battle does not take place between the standing armies, but between a governmental armed force or a militia and one or more groups of insurgents. This type of conflict is characterised by an intense, deeply rooted hatred, which makes crisis control operations fundamental in trying to stem the tide. Creating a negative

peace is the starting point, and it is a precondition for the reconstruction of state and society. The process towards a durable, positive peace is a long one, because none of the ethnic groups may be favoured over the others, the improvements must benefit all. The intervening parties should act as principal mediators with indirect interests in the peace process.

Reconstruction missions have an integrated military, political and reconstruction approach. During their execution there is a close cooperation in many western countries between the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Overseas Development. This is known as the DDD- triangle - Diplomacy, Defence and Development. Diplomacy aims at the improvement of the local, regional and national governance; Defence relates to maintaining the negative peace, with a view to enabling the positive peace; and Development is directed at durable development. Stability is of the essence, with a functioning civilian authority being indispensable, respect between the parties and a prospect for the future. It can be said that the more hostility, measured in casualties and refugees, and the more limited the local capacities, measured in lagging development and restricted diversity of the economy, the more the need for (international) support in order to achieve a positive peace.

In Afghanistan all the ingredients for stability are in place, albeit at present with foreign help. The same is true, however, for all ingredients for a renewed flaring up of the war, which also takes foreign support. The ISAF concept, in combination with the activities of UNAMA, has an added value, as it contributes to the restoration of an administrative infrastructure on a provincial, district and municipal level. Stimulating large infrastructural projects is of paramount importance to get the economy going, and along with it, the democratisation process. The crux of the reconstruction process and the success of the ISAF mission is getting the narco-economy under control and the corruption that comes with it. In spite of all the efforts made so far, the Afghan economy still floats on the poppy cultivation and opium production, which keeps war lords and power brokers, such as the Taliban and al Qa'ida in the saddle. They benefit from a weak government. The reality, however, is that the narco-sector generates the bulk of the real national income, which suggests that the power in the country does not lie with the central government.

Creating a real economy, whereby the TAPI project will offer a solution, is a precondition for the eventual success of the intervention of November 2001. The fate of the Afghans lies in foreign hands; all they can do is take the opportunities that are presented by their environment. Western countries with idealistic goals and vital interests in the region also owe it to the Afghans to offer them prosperity. The Europeans must join in

the creation of stability in Afghanistan and the region, but should also reap the fruits, which the Americans seem to be claiming only for themselves. Only in this way can the long march towards a stable Afghanistan be sustained and will the country not sink back into the fate that the course of history had bestowed upon it.

Notes

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- appeared in the New York Times in the article 'For Afghans, a Major Goal is Credibility'.
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