Winning Hearts and Minds? Reconstruction, governance and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan

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1. Introduction

Few would dispute that governance, however defined, has been at the heart of the Afghan wars and attempts to build peace. One way of understanding conflict in Afghanistan is to see it as a battle over governance involving groups who hold competing notions of justice, the role of the state, local autonomy, resource distribution and so forth. The word governance – *hokomatdari* in Dari -- continually crops up in analyses and narratives about conflict and intervention. Commentators frequently bemoan the pathologies of 'bad governance' suffered in Afghanistan. Counter insurgency specialist David Kilkullen has characterized the Taliban as an armed 'rule of law movement', whilst American academic Thomas Barfield argues for a 'governance-centric' (rather than government centric) strategy to counter the insurgency (Barfield & Nojumi, 2010). Anti-regime actors seek to make large swathes of the country ungovernable, whilst the state is encouraged and cajoled by international advisors and donors to extend its remit into the countryside in order to provide public goods, including security and 'good governance'(*hokomatdari khoob*).

It appears to be fairly self evident that security, development and good governance are at the heart of a virtuous circle that produces a legitimate and capable state. An awful lot of money has been invested in Afghanistan based upon the assumption that good governance is the precursor of, or precondition for development and statebuilding. Similarly, faltering efforts at statebuilding have been blamed on the lack of progress in the area of governance, particularly the rule of law. Many view the 2014 transition with trepidation. What are its implications for the now rapidly receding international agenda around statebuilding, good governance and democracy? For the supporters of this agenda, the transition has been marked by a flight to expediency, in which the benchmarks of success have been progressively lowered in order to justify and expedite withdrawal.

To what extent are these fears justified? What evidence is there in Afghanistan, and more broadly, of a causal relationship between good governance and statebuilding? What have been the track record and impacts of governance programmes in Afghanistan? How will the transition influence governance and vice versa? In this paper I intend to first examine wider debates on governance and its relationship to development, statebuilding and counter-insurgency. Second, I provide a broad overview of shifting governance arrangements within Afghanistan in response to the different phases of intervention, as well as various international initiatives aimed at promoting 'good governance'. Finally I conclude by outlining the implications of the 2014 transition for governance arrangements within Afghanistan and the lessons for international actors.

2. Background

Governance is understood here as the various institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding roles or to provide collective goods (Borzel and Risse, 2010). Governance consists of both *structure* and *process*; structure refers to the institutions and actor constellations, and process refers to the modes of social coordination by which actors engage in rule making and implementation and the provision of public goods (Borzel and Risse, 2010, 114). It includes hierarchical steering by state actors, but also the involvement of non governmental actors in the provision of collective goods through non-hierarchical coordination. Even if the state is not the direct provider of public goods, its role remains central; 'A shadow of hierarchy is important for governance with(out) government because it generates important incentives for cooperation of non state actors' (*ibid*, p 116).

In the following section, I briefly outline the evolution of critical debates on governance in relation to development, statebuilding and counter insurgency.

Good governance and development
Good governance emerged as part of the so-called post-Washington consensus in the late Cold War period and early 1990s. The focus in development discourse shifted from government to governance, based on notions of institutional pluralism, public-private partnerships and an enhanced role for civil society. In spite of differences in emphasis and variations over time, the underlying principles and model of good governance have remained relatively consistent. It was no longer about getting the prices right but 'getting the institutions right'. Mushtaq Khan (2009) characterizes this as 'market enhancing' governance, with the state's role being one of enforcing property rights and the rule of law, limiting rent seeking and corruption and achieving political accountability.

In spite of the rise and rise of good governance in policy circles, it has generated a growing critique, largely from political economists. Broadly it is argued that good governance neither describes what is happening in many developing countries and nor does it explain development successes in such contexts (Hickey, 2012). As noted by Mushtaq Khan rich countries can sustain democracies and poor countries cannot. Whilst democratization may be desirable, the economies of developing countries are such that democratization is unlikely to deliver real benefits to a broad range of social groups till a minimum level of economic development has been achieved. Consequently, rather than seeing patron-client networks as dysfunctional, the economic characteristics of developing countries make them both 'rational for redistributive coalitions and effective as strategies for achieving the goals of powerful constituencies within these coalitions' (Khan, 2009) Therefore, Khan's argument is that certain levels and types of economic development are a precondition for good, better or growth enhancing (rather than market enhancing) governance – unlike aid donors who believe that the causal relationship runs in the opposite direction. The evidence of successful East Asian developers of the last five decades and of China over the last three decades shows that the governance capacities that mattered were very different from the good governance capabilities (Khan, 2009: 5). Political economy analyses point to the centrality of informal processes and networks and the determining role of elite politics. Institutions fail, not because they lack technical capacities, but when there is an inappropriate match between internal political settlements and the institutions and interventions though which states attempt to accelerate transformation and growth (Khan, 2004: 168). The emergence of high growth states is as much a task of political engineering as it is of institutional engineering (ibid). This again is at odds with the donor tendency to 'prefer technical fixes to political

engagement and to exaggerate the role that can be played by the introduction of formalized processes and spaces within contexts where informal modes of politics tend to predominate' (Hickey, 2012, p1232). In addition, the underlying theory of political agency, with its assumptions about citizen voice, has limited explanatory power in contexts where patronage-based networks predominate. As Hickey (2012) argues there is a need to identify actual rather than ideal forms of politics that work in particularly settings.

Statebuilding and governance
During the 1990s and 2000s there was a growing convergence between notions of good governance, statebuilding and humanitarian intervention. This found an ideological home in the United Nations, and became known as the 'New York Consensus' (Kahler, 2009). Paradoxically as the complexity and transformational ambitions of the UN grew in relation to 'fragile' and 'failing' states, the template for intervention became increasingly rigid and detailed. In broad terms this involved the simultaneous pursuit of conflict resolution, market sovereignty and liberal democracy (Pugh and Cooper, 2004). And within this template an ever expanding gamut of measures were incorporated including constitutional reform, elections, transparency and anti corruption measures, rule of law initiatives, security sector reforms, public administration reforms etc. Underlying these initiatives was an assumption that all good things come together – statebuilding, good governance and peacebuilding were viewed as mutually reinforcing. The desired end goal were states that could serve as 'governance managers; woven into the net of international norms and control mechanisms (de Guevara, 2012:3). This involved a focus on the functional side of rule, moulding non western states into modern 'governance compliant entities (ibid). Central to this model was the notion of a Lockean social contract, the legitimacy of the state being bound up with its ability to deliver or facilitate the delivery of welfare and services.

Liberal peacebuilders privileging of 'governance' (the rules of the game) over 'government' (local political processes or 'the game itself'), has been contrasted with the interventions in Germany and Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War where external administrators engaged with the local population and won high levels of legitimacy (Chandler, 2010). By not engaging with the politics of transition, current approaches ultimately undermine the process of political liberalisation by failing to generate legitimacy for new institutions.

The classical political economy literature on statebuilding and state formation shows that early statebuilders did not consciously set out to build states, which were instead the unforeseen product of bargaining and contestation. Violence and war making played a foundational role and profoundly shaped the political settlements and institutions that were imposed or negotiated at war's end. There were many different trajectories of state formation, but good governance was never a precondition for success -- indeed there are no examples historically in the European experience or with late developers of following good governance principles. And there is a growing body of research which shows the perverse effects of attempting to promote such models in fragile or post conflict states. For example Amundsen et al (2004) in their work on state formation in Palestine shows that technocratic 'good governance' approaches to peacebuilding often inadvertently stifle productive statebuilding processes such as the emergence of rents and the associated rent-seeking activities, through attempts to stamp out corruption etc. He argues that these processes of political bargaining are 'essential for political stabilization', yet were unintelligible to a liberal peacebuilding framework.

These ideas are developed by North et al (2009) in their analysis of 'limited access orders in the developing world'. They contrast advanced industrial countries – 'open access orders' characterized by open competitive multi-party democratic political systems and a secure government monopoly over violence – and 'limited access orders' in the developing world in which the state does not have a monopoly on violence and society organizes itself to control violence among the elite factions. A common feature of limited access orders is that political elites divide up control of the economy, each getting a share of the rents. Since violence may reduce rents, incentives are oriented toward social order – but this order is fundamentally different from open access orders – it requires limited access and competition. The implications of this analysis for peacebuilders is the need to think carefully about the creation and distribution of rents in order to secure elite loyalty to the system – 'rent creation provides the glue that holds the coalition together' (p 6). Attempts to introduce more open competition, through elections for example may force the renegotiation of the distribution of rents and prompt an outbreak of violence. Institutionalization, bureaucratization and transparency reforms work against the logic of, and underlying interests of network-based forms of governance. In insecure, high risk environments where there is generalized lack of trust (or bridging social capital), patrimonial networks are more adaptive, can respond more quickly and deliver social goods compared to formal bureaucratic structures. Technocratic solutions may appear to 'work', but usually this is only because they are supported by underlying informal practices.

International interventions can dynamise local power constellations and though state institutions may adapt a western form under the influence of internationalised norms, they keep functioning according to other social logics. There is a large gap between the formal facade and the social reality of the state. In many respects the Afghan state can be characterized as a rhizome state (Bayart, 1993), in which underground or parallel power structures symbiotically co-existed with the visible and formal offices of the state.   Informal practices do not necessarily aim at purposely weakening the state, but instead to establish themselves in niches unfolding during intervention (de Guevara, 2012). Illiberal statebuilding may in the long run have developmental outcomes, and indeed conforms more closely to the historical experience of state formation, rather than the liberal version.

War, counter insurgency and governance
Counter terrorism and counter insurgency (COIN) doctrines have given a harder edge to statebuilding and governance interventions. This has contributed to a shift away from the grand transformatory ambitions of liberal peacebuilding to a more pragmatic and modest discourse -- from the language of liberalisation to stabilization and from good governance to 'good enough governance' (Grindle, 2007). The universalizing goals of democracy and human rights have been replaced (or at least de-emphasized) with more contextualised and pragmatic goals, which prioritize 'security first', supporting the core functions of the state and embracing local hybrid orders.   The military have become far more significant players in the area of governance. For soldiers, COIN is based on a fundamentally different understanding of the relationships between war and politics. Classically the use of armed force within a military domain seeks to establish military conditions for a political solution (Simpson, 2012: 1). Violence was therefore meant to clear the ground to enable politics to take over. But COIN involves the use of armed force that directly seeks political, as opposed to military outcomes (ibid). Again, there is very little empirical evidence to support the assumptions of COIN experts about the links between governance and success in counter insurgency. States that have succeeded in defeating insurgents, have never done so by

following good governance principles – relatively high capacity regimes have pursued highly coercive and often brutal strategies over an extended period of time, the Burmese and Sri Lankan states being two contemporary examples. Therefore effective counter insurgency depends upon a relatively coherent, high capacity regime, yet exogenous statebuilding undermines the potential for such a regime to emerge (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2013).

To conclude this section, governance has become a point of convergence for very different sets of actors with contrasting and perhaps conflicting goals. It has been seen by aid donors as the vehicle for promoting development, by statebuilders as the means of legitimizing post war regimes and by the military as the ingredient to stabilize societies and counter terrorism. As this section has attempted to show, there is very limited empirical evidence to support such assumptions and assertions.

3. Overview of statebuilding/governance initiatives and developments

We now turn from these wider debates on governance to a brief overview of the changing dynamics of governance and intervention in Afghanistan. It is impossible to provide a comprehensive account, and therefore I will highlight a few critical issues, which touch upon the wider literature already mentioned. Governance itself is frequently so broadly defined that it covers most facets of international engagement in the country. For example in a US Department of Defence report to Congress in July 2013, an assessment of 'governance' included the following; reconciliation and reintegration; national and sub-national governance; judicial reform and rule of law; anti-corruption and human rights. In total, up the end of June 2013, the US had provided nearly $24.7 billion to support governance and economic development in Afghanistan.

Pre-War Governance
An extensive treatment of pre-war Afghan governance is not possible here, but several points can be stressed:

First, the literature on the history of the Afghan state highlights its limited and uneven presence. Zones of consolidated statehood were restricted to key urban centres and in peripheral, sparsely populated, upland areas which the state could not profitably administer, it ruled indirectly through local elites. Far from being a monopolist, it was a brokering or mediated state which franchised out the means of violence and authority to peripheral actors. It was also for most of its history a rentier state which depended upon external subsidies, rather than internally generated resources to build up the means of coercion and provide limited services to the population. According to some commentators, international interveners have failed to appreciate the historical lesson that successful Afghan statebuilders were sensitive to the autonomy of the tribes and thus worked with the grain of Afghan society, rather than trying to rule the countryside directly (Barfield, 2004). It is true that the post 1929 political settlement which eventually broke down in 1978, was based upon an understanding between the royal regime, the landed notables and the clergy and brought an extended period of stability to Afghanistan. Yet it was also a conservative settlement that traded stability in the countryside for the transformative changes required for growth-enhancing development. It also helped create the contradictions that finally exploded in the Saur revolution.

Second, extended conflict in Afghanistan has been profoundly transformative. And calls to recreate the status quo ante based upon communitarian principles and a limited, mediating state fail to sufficiently recognize that these 'traditions' belonged to a different epoch, and provided answers to problems that no longer exist in their current form. The structures, networks and leadership that emerged in war time, were never going to simply dissolve back into the Afghan socio-political landscape after 2002. They have become a permanent feature of the Afghan political economy; they are a product of a polity and society that have been adjusted by war – these transformations include the monetization of the economy, new processes of primitive accumulation of resources and power, leading to the creation of new classes and owners of capital; rapid urbanisation and the transnationalization of governance and welfare (Monsutti, 2012). Calls for bottom up statebuilding and local governance based on pre-war traditions fail to appreciate how society has moved on and how Afghan expectations of the state are different from when Dupree (1980) wrote about Afghan communities building up a metaphorical mud curtain to keep the predatory state at bay. Afghans, it appears, want more state, not less, though many would like a state that is more legitimate and capable than the current regime (Hakimi, 2013).

Third, arguably the Taliban, when in power, were proto-statebuilders intent on achieving a monopoly of the means of violence. Quite unlike their successors, the movement focused on consolidating the means of coercion and providing rudimentary law and order. Welfare and service delivery was largely franchised out to the international community; they were decidedly Hobbesian rather than Lockean statebuilders. Paradoxically, external intervention overthrew a relatively stable limited access order (under the Taliban), and replaced it with an inherently unstable and violent order, based upon an exclusive and, for many, illegitimate political settlement. Intervention thus interrupted a brutal process of state formation, and the occupation stimulated a new round of war and state failure – very different from the official narrative of a war to peace transition.[1]

The Afghan state and the domestic political settlement

The Bonn Agreement was supposed to pave the way for a legitimate political authority in Afghanistan. But far from being a transmission mechanism for the liberal peace template, it was the result of messy compromises between internal and external players, and contained distinctly illiberal and non-democratic dimensions. Rather than constituting a 'Grand Bargain' for peace, the end result was an exclusive elite pact, composed of those who fell on the right side of the war on terror. It failed to address underlying power uncertainties, sidelined the interests of the Taliban and Pakistan, and disproportionately reflected the interests of the Northern Alliance, the chief allies of the U.S.-led coalition.

A light footprint and local ownership were invoked by the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Lakhdar Brahimi, and the resulting strategy led to the incorporation of military strongmen into the new political settlement. The state became the main arena for accumulation, and control over state structures ensured access to domestic and international resources (Suhrke and Hakimi, 2012). At the heart of the post-Bonn political

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[1] Although this mainstream narrative has been increasingly questioned. See for example Malkasian (2013) who in his penetrating study of Garmser argues that if the US had not intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 and the Taliban had remained in power it is highly unlikely the war would have resumed in Garmser. Between 1995 and 2001 the Taliban governed the district as well as the rest of southern Afghanistan fairly effectively (p xxii).

settlement was the nexus between international money – largely in the form of military and development spending – and Afghan politics (Aikins, 2012)

Yet in hindsight, the period 2002 – 4 may have constituted a brief window of opportunity to bring about lasting peace. The political landscape was still relatively fluid and open, there was a level of congruence between important constituencies within the international community, domestic elites and societal groups. There was an international tailwind and a domestic demand for statebuilding, development and good governance. Compared to many other post war contexts, Afghanistan could point to real achievements that appeared to mark the beginnings of a sustainable war to peace transition; the holding of the emergency and constitutional Loya Jirgas, the creation of a transitional administration, a new constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections, strong economic growth rates, flag ship national development programmes delivering tangible services including health care, education and local infrastructure, the rolling out of DDR programmes, fiscal reforms which led to steady progress in domestic resource mobilization.

These successes were possible because of the more benign security environment, strong societal support for an international presence, and possibly because jihadi power structures were less firmly entrenched, giving more policy space for reformers and centralizers such as Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani and the Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Haneef Atmar. Significantly the key developmental success stories occurred long before the surge, and can be attributed to a combination of strong leadership, policy space and relatively modest but consistent international funding.

However, the donor strategy of focusing on the formal institutions of the central state created its own set of tensions and opportunity costs. Formal institutions, policies and programmes were underpinned by informal power networks. Internationally supported statebuilding created the façade of a modern democratic state, but these formal institutions were always secondary to, and out of line with, the configuration of power in the country. Technocrat-led ministries, such as the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Ministry of Finance, were relatively well-funded, whereas faction-dominated ministries were underfunded and unreformed, creating competition and instability across the administration (Goodhand and Sedra, 2007, 2009). Islands of success were created, but largely through importing, rather than building durable capacities. The Priority Reform and Restructuring Programme (2002–05), which was intended to restore administrative capacity in key departments, was in many cases used to increase salaries rather than to restructure the unit or reward merit (Lister, 2007: 10). A technocratic approach to reverse engineering a state bureaucracy led to a hybrid form of governance, consisting of an unstable coalition of armed or partially disarmed competing factions and foreign-supported technocrats.

The Afghan constitution, which created a highly centralised presidential system and weak political parties, was out of line with de facto power structures that were extremely fractured and decentralised. Shock therapy centralisation only served to accentuate long-standing tensions between centre and periphery.[2] Whilst aid donors provided funding to the central state and attempted to build formal institutions, CIA operatives and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) supported networks and structures outside and sometimes inimical to the state.

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[2] This manifested itself, for example, in tussles over revenues generated in the provinces through customs duties, particularly in Kandahar, Nangarhar and Herat, which have thriving cross-border trading economies.

Elections tended to destabilise and shorten the cycles of deal making and alliance building, and reinforced identity and regional power bases (Giustozzi and Orsini, 2009). They became a point of contention between the executive and the legislature, as shown in the standoff with parliament over the 2009 presidential elections. The underlying assumption of donors that performance based legitimacy -- promoted through service delivery, good governance reforms and elections – was central to state consolidation has proved to be ill founded. The state failed to deliver on its core function of providing security, something that progressively deteriorated as NATO moved from a peacekeeping to a war fighting mandate. At the same time, the legitimizing discourses of nationalism and religion that were deployed by the Taliban appeared to resonate with the wider population far more than the promise of development – which in any event became increasingly difficult to deliver in the conflict-affected provinces.

Inconsistent Western engagement failed to produce either a more consolidated clientelistic system, or a more institutionalised administration. At one moment money was being pumped into the central state, deflating the cost of buying the loyalty of peripheral elites, and at another, the funding of warlords inflated the cost of buying local elites' allegiance to the state (de Waal, 2009). In this environment, local power-brokers maintained a high degree of autonomy and resisted attempts to extend the writ of the state. Instead of throwing in their support to the centre, they engaged in a process of hedging or spot bargains (Suhrke, 2011).

Over time, Karzai's strategy shifted towards building a power base more independent of the West. Technocrats were increasingly squeezed out, and there was a narrowing of Karzai's patronage networks.[3] To some extent the U.S. strategy appeared to reinforce this approach, for instance by supporting the president's brother Ahmed Wali Karzai in Kandahar and Gul Sherzai as the provincial governor of Nangarhar. The military and civilian surge and the COIN strategy championed by Patraeus reinforced the growing tendency to by-pass formal state structures. Over time the statebuilding narrative changed. In 2002 it was the absence of a strong, centralised state that was seen to be the source of the problem of terrorism and insecurity. By 2008, an overly centralised, corrupt and illegitimate state was seen as the problem that was helping catalyse the insurgency (Barfield, 2012). Statebuilding based on good governance principles, was clearly not working. It was seen to be too top down, too bureaucratic and slow and perversely leading to the creation of a corrupt, rentier state. The Taliban increasingly appeared to be 'outgoverning' the Afghan government and NATO forces in much of the country (Kilkullen, 2011). The interests of the hosts and guests appeared to be rapidly diverging. This led to a search for more local, bottom up solutions to the perceived problems of governance and insecurity. The valorisation of local traditions, and recognition of more hybrid and pluralized forms of authority appeared in some ways to be a welcome departure from liberal fantasies of the Weberian state. Yet celebratory accounts of embedded governance and hybrid orders were also extremely naive or disingenuous, and did not necessarily reflect Afghan popular expectations of the state. Local forms of authority are not necessarily more legitimate or embedded, and decentralization may be a recipe for a return to warlord rule. Localization can also be seen as a vehicle for passing on responsibility to local actors, evading accountability, masking underlying power relations and ultimately justifying withdrawal. On top of this, aid workers, PRT advisors and Special Forces units were easily coopted or manipulated by local intermediaries. In seeking accommodations with local elites, international actors were sucked into games they scarcely

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[3] See, for example, Aikins (2012) on the crucial role played by the Karzai–Fahim alliance in stabilising relations between north and south.

understood, with external aid being converted into the political currency of patronage (Mayall and de Oliveira, 2011: 26). The paradox of 'intermediary rule', became increasingly evident, with the interveners attempting to assert control over the state, yet in practice progressively losing control over the statebuilding process. To a great extent liberal peacebuilding failed because it was undermined as much by its sponsors as by its recipients (Goodhand and Sedra, 2013).

War, governance and transition

War generates sets of interests and social groups who seek to exploit lawlessness and uncertainty. These include mercenaries, profiteers, contractors, violence specialists and smugglers (Giustozzi, 2012; Goodhand, 2005). To a great extent these groups, which emerged in wartime, have continued to benefit from a lawless and violent 'peace'. Afghanistan experienced something of a 'post-conflict rebound' after 2001. The World Bank estimates that since 2002 some $55 billion of aid has flowed into the country,[4] and there has been significant year-on-year economic growth (averaging around 9%). Yet this was not broad-based growth; the main beneficiaries were the new oligarchy comprised of politico-military networks protected by leading politicians. Large inflows of funding accentuated long-standing structural tensions that contributed to the outbreak and perpetuation of the Afghan wars, including urban-rural conflicts and rentier statehood. Afghanistan is now hugely dependent on aid. A World Bank analysis finds that only Gaza, the West Bank and Liberia have been so reliant. In the year to September 30th 2011, aid was the equivalent of Afghanistan's entire GDP (*The Economist*, 2012).

The Kabul Bank scandal, resulting in losses of $900 million, gives an indication of the levels of corruption at the highest level of government. However, corruption is only a symptom of a deeper problem. In a context of uncertainty, violence and large inflows of poorly monitored resources, channelled through a fractured and highly informalised political system, divvying up rents according to prevailing power relations is predictable and rational. What aid officials called 'corruption' was not an excess that could be eliminated, but a central feature of governance (Verkoren & Kamphuis, 2013). As Coburn (2011) argues, in his study of political networks in the Afghan parliament, the Wolesi Jirga has provided the necessary political protection needed for most politicians-turned-businessmen to maintain themselves within the system. Bargaining and exchange are 'not considered corruption, but rather a survival strategy that has become normalized in an environment of uncertainty, elite distrust and malfunctioning state institutions' (Sharon, 2013: 346). On a grander scale, international strategies helped create and reinforce this criminalised political economy. For example, central to the Pentagon's counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy was the outsourcing of the supply chain for the war effort to private contractors. This was meant to free up troops to conduct offensive operations and also to stimulate the local economy (Gregory, 2012).[5] In 2009 a USAID internal report confirmed reports of contractors paying protection money to insurgents, with an estimated $5.2 million of USAID money finding its way to the Taliban (cited by Giustozzi, 2012: 40). It is important to note that, these kinds of off budget resource flows are likely to have had a far greater impact on de facto governance relations, than donor investments in 'good governance' initiatives. Furthermore it is also clear that many

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[4] However, billions of it has flowed out again to pay the salaries of foreign staff and profits to foreign contractors. The World Bank estimates that, in projects that use foreign contractors, only 10–25% of funds given are spent on the ground in Afghanistan (*The Economist*, 2012).

[5] The Host Trucking agreement was introduced in May 2009 with the aim of streamlining the Pentagon's purchasing agreements with individual local contractors into a single consolidated contract divided between eight companies (Gregory, 2012).

international actors have not held themselves accountable to the good governance standards that they have at least rhetorically demanded of their Afghan partners.

As David Keen (2012) argues, seeing war as a contest between government and rebels takes attention away from the agendas of those who position themselves within the counter-insurgency effort. In Afghanistan, the war has become systemic in the sense that many groups benefit economically and politically from a 'durable disorder'. Therefore, a war system which claims to be eliminating the enemy actually depends upon reproducing the enemy (Keen, 2012: 238).

Therefore, although the international strategy initially was based on the idea of a light footprint, the scale of international commitments mounted and deepened over time, revealing growing contradictions and pathologies within the statebuilding and governance project. The central contradiction was the attempt to pursue a war whilst simultaneously building peace. Escalation has served to amplify problems not remedy them (Paris, 2013). It has produced an extremely volatile and fractured political economy in which the political elite jockey for external rents – this can be characterized as a 'fragile natural state' (North et al, 2009), in which commitments within the dominant coalition are fluid and unstable, shifting rapidly and dependent on the identity of coalition members. Small changes in the situation of coalition members including shifts in prices, the strategies of neighbouring countries, external funding flows and international policies, can upset the coalition. All politics is real politics; people risk death when they make mistakes (North et al, 2009: 42). The coalition successfully provides order when the political interests of coalition members are balanced by their economic stakes in the existing order (ibid). But members of the coalition cannot credibly commit to rules or constitutions when the month to month reality is of constant flux within the coalition (ibid). Furthermore the dominant coalition does not incorporate key wielders of violence, principally the Taliban, but also local strongmen who may oscillate between pro- and anti-government positions to extract concessions and rents from the state. Clearly the level of state presence and political (dis)order varies from area to area. Coburn (2011) for example in his study of Istalif, shows how sub-national political coalitions or 'secondary political settlements (Cole and Parks, 2011) can emerge in spite of, or in the shadow of the state, as a result of the unique configuration of political and economic interests within the town. Similarly other provincial level studies show how order may emerge in the provinces based upon complex bargaining and rent sharing agreements between central state and local elites (Mukhodpadhya, 2009; Goodhand and Mansfield, 2011). The point about these local 'experiments' is that they do not conform to the policies and practices of 'good governance' manuals, and neither do they stand as examples of autonomous, 'traditional' home grown governance.

A central paradox concerning international intervention and the 2014 transition is the fact that exogenous statebuilding has helped generate a highly volatile and extroverted political order. And yet, the sudden withdrawal of external resources and an international presence is likely also to have very deleterious effects. How a reduced presence of troops and funding will impact upon this war system is unpredictable, but it is likely that a sudden reduction in both will lead to a shift in the current equilibrium, and intensified violent competition for increasingly scarce resources. The political economy has adjusted to, and become dependent on, external rents. The optimistic view is that a phased and gradual reduction of the international presence will enable a process of adjustment and in the end lead to a more stable limited access order. A less intrusive presence may open up spaces for Afghans to negotiate new political settlements at the national and sub-national levels. There is some evidence that

in areas where there is an ANSF lead, local conflict management agreements have occurred. Furthermore, it appears that the Taliban, or at least elements within the movement, recognize the need to boost its political role post 2014 and this is reflected in the allocation of more resources towards strengthening its governance functions. This is not altogether surprising, and as Barfield notes, historically regional or ethnic factions have preferred to seek political settlements with one another rather than engage in prolonged fighting (2012: 125). The primary sources of rents are the security sector, international aid and the drugs economy. The first will see a significant decline after 2014, and the second will decrease more gradually. Continued insecurity in rural areas coupled with the tailing off of external funding will likely increase the significance of the drugs economy. This does not necessarily imply increased conflict or state collapse; revenue streams from the drugs trade may play a stabilizing rather than conflict-producing role (Goodhand, 2008; Goodhand and Mansfield, 2010).

Conclusions and Implications

One can identify three different narratives about international intervention in Afghanistan, which draw different lessons from the exercise and lead to differing proscriptions for the future in relation to statebuilding and governance (Goodhand & Sedra, 2013). First, there is the imperial argument that intervention had nothing to do with the liberal peace in the first place; it was less about good governance than national security and geopolitical interests. Intervention could never have 'worked' according to the liberal template, as that was never the goal. The implication of this position is that external powers should stop meddling in the internal affairs of poor, unstable countries because their actions will always be tainted by self-interest. Certainly there is lots of evidence of illiberal interests and realist agendas. The post-Cold War experiments in liberal peacebuilding may be a less useful reference point for Afghanistan, than the late colonial wars of the Cold War period (Feichtinger et al, 2012). Indeed it is the historical lessons of Malaysia, Algeria and Vietnam that foreign militaries and counterinsurgency experts in Afghanistan have turned to as a guide for action, rather than more recent interventions in Cambodia, East Timor or the Balkans. As the international drawdown goes through its final phases the pre-eminent concern of international actors is not with liberalisation, but with legitimizing international exit. This suggests that rather than taking good governance or security sector reform at face value, they should instead be treated as ideologies of North-South relations – they reveal more about the way Western powers try to present themselves than about how they operate on the ground (Giustozzi, 2011:4). Western peacebuilders' notions of 'virtuous state building' (Giustozzi, 2011) can therefore be best understood largely as a legitimizing narrative rather than a template for exogenously supported statebuilding.

Second, there is the window of opportunity narrative. This states that although there were early successes, the statebuilding agenda got side tracked by the war against the Taliban, poor integration, bad coordination and the lack of funding and fire power early on. According to this position, a heavier, better coordinated and more strategic footprint particularly in the initial stages could have made a positive difference. Conversely a sudden reduction in foreign troops and aid will have deleterious effects and could lead to another outbreak of civil war. The broader lessons drawn from this position is that 'bargain basement' statebuilding (Ottoway, 2003) does not work and a more sustained and heavier international footprint is required to help states recover from and rebuild after war. Furthermore timing is everything, and the good governance agenda could have worked if pursued more consistently and robustly when there was an opening for, and receptiveness to this agenda. A variant on this

argument is that presented by Barfield and Nojumi (2010), which is that shock therapy centralisation worked against the grain of Afghan governance structures. The governance formula in his view was over-centralised and under-resourced. Consequently there is a need to rebalance the relationship between central government and informal solidarity structures, so they are more in line with Afghan governance practices and societal norms of the past. This narrative has been a surprising point of convergence for COIN experts, the military and those championing local peacebuilding. However, this discourse which is reproduced in notions of resilience, local traditions and embedded authority, masks underlying sets of interests and power relations. There is frequently a failure to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate local orders and a tendency to blur the question of whether non state systems are desirable because they are locally acceptable or because they are cheaper (Meagher, 2012: 1078). The failures of statebuilding and the consequent search for societal solutions may not lead to better outcomes for Afghans: 'Peacebuilding interventions working on the ontological basis of hybridity would merely institutionalise lower expectations and horizons, allocating responsibility for this to local agency. Failure would be represented as success, both in recognising local agency and in rejecting the 'hubris' of the liberal past' (Chandler, 2013:32).

A third argument is that the project was doomed to failure from the outset. Statebuilding was built upon shaky foundations, including an illegitimate political settlement, the absence of a convincing political track to reconcile or incorporate the Taliban and the large inflow of resources and military fire power which produced massive contradictions and perverse effects. According to this thesis, exogenous statebuilding could never have worked as it was always part of the problem. However, this conclusion leads to a more optimistic prognosis on the transition, since as Suhrke argues (2011) it may open up new spaces for Afghans and regional actors to negotiate a more inclusive political settlement. The wider implications of this view are that liberal peacebuilding is unlikely to work in circumstances where the political settlement is exclusive, the national elite are fragmented, and external intervention is mixed in with a range of geostrategic and geo-economic interests. This does not mean to say that external support cannot play a supportive role on the margins, but it must be strategic, well timed and respond to local realities. And for this position, the challenge is less about good governance than state consolidation and developmental change.

Putting aside normative questions – few would dispute the inherent desirability of good governance, democracy and human rights – the key issue is whether such goals are practicable and appropriate in particular settings. Good governance does not give political elites a workable reform agenda, as it does not address the daily problems of accumulation and political management (Khan). Statebuilding, development and democratization have little chance of success where the government is almost entirely dependent on rents, either through foreign aid or the illicit economy. The challenge to be faced now is not one of good governance, but how Afghanistan can move towards becoming a more stable limited access order, and at the margins how to create policy/political space for more progressive and developmental initiatives.

Overall the *inteqal* (transition) approach still overemphasizes the military aspect of the problem, and neglects the political track. The military led approach has distorted intervention in Afghanistan. Far too little effort has been focused on the politics and when it has been the focus it has been through the distorting lens of 'good governance'. Evidently there are risks associated with a more political approach; 'there is a danger that getting the institutions right may morph into efforts to 'get the politics right' despite the fact that politics is not subject to

technical fixes (Hickey, 2012: 1244). But undeniably there is a need to think about how a new political settlement and secondary political settlements can be renegotiated which are more in line with local configurations of power. This means perhaps, prioritizing less reforms of formal institutions than looking more carefully at the structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underpin them.

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