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## Alternative views for Afghanistan

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### Abstract:

In Central and South Asia 'the terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan is perceived to be growing, with foreign fighters who have returned from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq increasing their numbers in Afghanistan'.<sup>1</sup> SADF has dedicated a great deal of research papers to the challenges facing Afghanistan, for instance its Policy Brief n°2 titled 'Combatting Jihadism in Afghanistan'. The present Working Paper n°14 builds on said SADF Policy Brief n°2 by reiterating the importance of confronting jihadism beyond the prism of security measures and the futility of engaging in peace talks with the Taliban. Reconstruction and state building in Afghanistan are emphasised as a realistic alternative to the present peace talks with the Taliban.

### Keywords:

Afghanistan, state building, Taliban, peace talks, terrorism, Pakistan, Iran, transitional justice, civil society, rural populations, Afghan security forces, the Durand Line

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## **PART 1: Introduction**

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has suffered from constant war and violence for decades. State building needs to be a top priority and receive continuous attention, including substantial long-term investment on training and equipping Afghan state security forces. In this respect, scholars hold that the ‘lack of an overarching state-building strategy by the international donor community has resulted in channelling the bulk of funds through NGOs with lack of proper oversight mechanisms and accountability, prioritisation of short-term projects over long-term ones and lack of coordination among different donor agencies’ (Pasoon, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, ‘Afghan and international political figures and analysts still consider peace talks as the only viable and realistic option for long-lasting peace and stability in the country’ (Pasoon, 2017). However, peace talks with the Taliban are unavailing as there exists no such thing as a democratic or moderate Taliban. As SADF has continuously underlined and as researchers such as Ali Ahmad Pasoon (2017) argue: ‘calls for peace talks with the Taliban are inspired not by genuine belief and rational calculations that the talks would bring peace to Afghanistan but by desperation and disillusionment with military operations against the Taliban’ (p. 33). Achieving cooperative peace with a fanatic movement that is embedded in terrorist networks and continues to conduct terrorist attacks is unrealistic. Moreover, violence in Afghanistan continues because of some of the region’s countries’ support to the Taliban and other armed groups. More concretely - Afghanistan, with the help of the international community, needs to take action so as to ensure that support and funding to the Taliban by both Pakistan and Iran cease once and for all. Afghanistan remains a top destination for terrorist fighters in the region, and it is of the utmost importance that the international community remain engaged in long-term assistance to the country.

## **PART 2: State building and reconstruction**

Reconstruction of a country is a ‘complex transition from a state of war to a state of peace with concurrent security, economic and social aspects, manifested through an assurance of the rule

of law, building of economic institutions, construction of primary infrastructure and respect of human rights' (Váňa, 2012, para 1). Former US Secretary of State Robert Gates (2008-2013) stated that

our lack of understanding of Afghanistan, its culture, its tribal and ethnic politics, its power brokers, and their relationships, was profound... twenty years later, I came to realise that in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, having decided to replace the regime, when it came to “with what?”, the American government had no idea what should follow (Saikal, 2018, p.27).

According to Pason (2017)

in the early years of American involvement in Afghanistan, international focus on state building was minimal. Considering that in late 2001 the US inherited an Afghanistan which had no functioning government institutions, more funds should have been directed towards state building than military deployments (p.34).

Learning from past failures is an integral element in avoiding repeated erroneous strategies. Mohammad Masoon Stanekzai (2009) highlights that because Afghanistan is ‘unique in terms of its geography, social structures and history, a cut-and-paste state building approach will not work if it is not understood and owned by the Afghan people’ (p.40). In other words, ‘the international community should assist in state-building in such a way that provides a sense of security and justice to all Afghans. For example, the process of modernisation should not widen the gap between the rural and urban population’ (Stanekzai, 2009, p.40). Furthermore, it is crucial to establish effective leaders in the reconstruction process whose ‘management of funds for state-building must follow an Afghan agenda, and not that of donors’ (Stanekzai, 2009, p.40). Stanekzai explains that ‘many donors in Afghanistan earmark their funding to locations where they are sponsoring Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and as a result, this skews distribution away from the poorest and most isolated areas’ (2009, p.40). Thus, Stanekzai advises aid programmes to be implemented through the ‘Afghan government’s national priority programme, as they have achieved better results, both in delivery of services and building up state capacity, than programmes implemented outside the government structure’ (2009, p.40).

The next chapters will shed light on the two main elements necessary for Afghanistan to undergo a successful reconstruction process: (1) long-term commitment and consistency from the international community and (2) putting an end to the regional power play in Afghanistan.

### **a) Long-term commitment and consistency from the international community**

Building a strong, viable state requires a substantial amount of time and investment, especially if militant groups are to be truly defeated. According to Pason (2017), ‘in the short term, this may require increased international military involvement and substantial long-term investment on training and equipping Afghan security forces’ (Pason, 2017, p.30). Four main points concerning the strategies followed by international community in this endeavour will be examined: (1) obtaining transitional justice, (2) letting go of rigid withdrawal timelines, (3) focusing deeper on rural communities, and (4) developing a strong civil society.

#### *Transitional justice*

Transitional justice is ‘an umbrella term for the often temporary judicial and non-judicial mechanisms used to address legacies of war crimes and human rights violations after major regime changes or prolonged conflict’ (Gossman and Kouvo, 2013, p.2). Transitional peace processes can be described as

recognising the suffering of victims through documentation, truth-seeking and symbolic measures; holding perpetrators accountable and ending impunity through retributive and restorative justice methods (these can include prosecutions and reparations); laying the ground for institutional reform through disarmament, security sector reform and vetting; and reconciling through all the above and additional measures (Gossman and Kouvo, 2013, p.2).

Of all the processes of transitional justice, the one that was the most emphasised for Afghanistan’s reconstruction efforts was security sector reform. However, it seems that ‘side-lining accountability undermined key elements of security-sector and wider institutional reform’ (Gossman and Kouvo, 2013, p.19).

Transitional justice, an integral element in long-term stability and peace, was missing. In fact, transitional justice was purposefully omitted altogether. According to Gossman (2009), ‘international actors steering the state-building process after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan saw the pursuit of accountability for human rights crimes as potentially destabilising’ (p.3). International forces believed that holding powerful players accountable for their crimes would hinder the state building process. Nevertheless, not only were perpetrators of violence able to escape facing justice, they were also awarded positions of power regardless of their past crimes. According to Qaane and Kouvo (2019), ‘the absence of transitional justice has been evident from the adoption of the Bonn agreement’ (p. 13). The Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001 characterised the commencement of the transition from a violent regime to a peaceful Afghanistan (Winterbotham, 2010, p.6). However, ‘in an attempt to avoid upsetting faction leaders present at the Bonn Conference, some of whom were implicated in human rights abuses but whose cooperation was considered vital to secure an agreement, the UN mediating team dropped all attempts to include references to dealing with war crimes and human rights violations’ (Winterbotham, 2010, p.6). The suffering of millions of victims was muted, with no attempt to bring perpetrators to justice. Ironically, signatories at the Conference agreed to ‘end the tragic conflict and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in the country’ (Mani, 2003, p.9). Yet holding perpetrators accountable, ending the culture of impunity, and bringing justice to victims is essential so as to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Proponents of justice, victims of war crimes, and the human rights community felt especially defeated when the Amnesty law was adopted in December 2008 (Kouvo, 2010, p.1). The law, which is formally titled “the National Reconciliation, General Amnesty and National Stability Law” states that its aim is to ‘strengthen reconciliation and national stability, ensuring the supreme interests of the country, ending rivalries and building confidence among the belligerent parties’ (Article 1) (Kouvo, 2010, p. 3). However, ‘the method for reconciliation is blanket amnesty for all those involved in past and present Afghan conflicts’ (Kouvo, 2010, p.3). This law largely undermines transitional justice, as well as Afghanistan’s commitments under international law, and hampers prospects for peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Furthermore, ‘the main government vehicle adopted for transitional justice after the Bonn Agreement, the

Afghan Transitional Justice Action Plan (2006-09), was never fully implemented and there was limited political will to do so' (Qaane & Kouvo, 2019, p.13). Short-term stability considerations have repeatedly trumped justice in Afghanistan.

### *Rigid timelines and investing in Afghan Security Forces*

According to Pason (2017), in order for the US to 'devise a long-term winning strategy for Afghanistan, it is imperative for them to learn from the mistakes of previous administrations and consider the priorities and suggestions of the Afghan government in its policy making' (p.35). This entails letting go of rigid withdrawal timelines and properly investing in Afghan security forces. Regarding the former issue, according to SADF Policy Brief number n<sup>o</sup>2 (2015), 'the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan started too soon: a stable environment was not present, and the Taliban had not been defeated. Providing the Taliban with concrete timetables of reducing troop levels only helped their cause in becoming more capable' (p.23). Thus, 'the insurgency became emboldened by the drawdown of U.S. and coalition military forces' (SIGAR, 2017, p. 107). Additionally, 'Obama's decision to withdraw from Iraq was seen by many as a disastrous mistake that led to the rise of ISIS and his withdrawal timetable from Afghanistan has also been roundly criticised by military and political experts (Pason, 2017, p. 37). Now, Trump is also following in the same footsteps, agreeing to troop withdrawals in exchange for a peace deal. Regarding Afghanistan's security forces, according to a study conducted by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (2017), 'despite US government expenditures of more than \$70 billion in security sector assistance to design, train, advise, assist, and equip the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), the Afghan security forces are not yet capable of securing their own nation' (SIGAR, 2017, p.3). The report further explains that the United States 'failed to understand the complexities and scale of the mission to construct the Afghan security forces in a country suffering from 30 years of war, government misrule, and significant poverty and underdevelopment (SIGAR, 2017, 172). In addition, 'NATO efforts in Afghanistan consistently suffered from shortages of personnel to train, advise, and assist the ANDSF. From 2009 to 2014, nations contributing troops to the NATO Training Mission for Afghanistan (NTM-A) struggled to fill the personnel requirements set forth in the NATO Combined Joint Statement of Requirements (CJSOR), NATO's capabilities-based document that identifies requirements for NATO operations. These

shortfalls hindered ANDSF development, undermined NATO credibility, and curtailed ISAF-led training, advise, and assist operations (SIGAR, 2017, p.73).

A long-term, committed investment intended to develop a security force capable of defending Afghanistan against both internal and external threats is crucially needed. SIGAR (2017) suggests several recommendations for this to be achieved, including the advice that ‘developing and training a national police force is best accomplished by law enforcement professionals in order to achieve a police capability focused on community policing and criminal justice’ (p. 177). It is also held that ‘The U.S. Congress should consider mandating a full review of all U.S. foreign police development programmes, identify a lead agency for all future police development activities, and provide the identified agency with the necessary staff, authorities, and budget to accomplish its task’ (p.182).

### *Focus on rural communities*

In 2018, ‘fighting in Afghanistan killed more people than any other conflict worldwide, most of it occurring in rural areas of the country’ (Osman, 2019, p.2). Afghanistan’s rural population have lived in perpetual war and extreme poverty. In this context, Feroz states that ‘many people also tend to forget that Afghanistan is predominantly rural, not urban’ (Feroz, 2019, para 3). Not only are rural communities more vulnerable to the Taliban’s influence, but they also suffer the most from airstrikes launched by foreign and government forces. According to Osman (2019) ‘the nine months that followed the 2018 ceasefire brought a record-breaking 5,914 airstrikes to Afghanistan, more than a 50 per cent increase from the same period a year earlier’ (p.1). Rural communities bear the brunt of fighting and violence, in addition to insurgents taking control of their territories and forcefully sheltering themselves among residents. It is of the utmost importance for the international community to build capacities at subnational levels – especially regional, local and rural – instead of focusing as tradition goes mainly at the central level.

Kugelman (2019) suggests that ‘Afghan security forces with the support from US forces need to be out front taking more offensive positions: this entails not just going around killing the bad guys, but also building relations and trust with local communities’ (para 10). Kugelman further states that ‘with the US mission having become defined more as a counterterrorism



mission over the last few years, such efforts to win hearts and minds have lost popularity amid American planners. As a result, the Taliban have been able to gain support and new recruits based on its own efforts with rural populations. This in turn has enabled the Taliban to gain footholds and influence in areas far from their traditional strongholds’ (Kugelman, 2019, para 10).

According to the European External Action Service, ‘Any action that improves rural livelihoods would deepen the legitimacy of the Afghan government and public sector in general’ (EEAS, 2019, para 2). As the ‘agricultural sector<sup>1</sup> employs about 40% of Afghans overall and more than half of the rural labour force works in the sector, reducing levels of extreme poverty, and providing rural communities with universal access to basic services is essential’ (EEAS, 2019). These services include: ‘health and education needs, as well as funding infrastructure investments (improved roads and access to electricity). Also, small-scale irrigation projects are important for rural communities’ (EEAS, 2019). The Taliban’s grip on rural populations also negatively impacts the education sector. In addition to parents being too scared to send their children to school, ‘the school system suffers from shortages of school buildings, books and supplies, as well as lack of access to public schools in remote areas’ (EEAS, 2019).

### *A strong civil society*

The European Union defines civil society as ‘all non-state, non-profit structures, nonpartisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic’ (EEAS, 2018, p.9). According to the Bureau for Rights-Based Development (BRD), ‘along with the government and private sector, civil society is an important and legitimate actor in peacebuilding and democratisation (2018, para 5).

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<sup>1</sup> ‘While the sector’s share of the overall economy has declined in the last decade, agriculture still makes substantial contributions to Afghanistan’s licit economic growth. However, rural areas also feed the illicit economy through opium poppy-cultivation. To find alternatives to poppy cultivation, other vegetable production is encouraged. Grape orchards, pistachio cultivation and pomegranate production are new licit high-value crops that open new opportunities for exports. The EU promotes the handling of saffron for exports by funding a processing centre for local farmers in Balkh province’ (EEAS, 2019)

Additionally, ‘strong civil-society institutions, interacting with the state, can create innovative solutions to complex social and economic problems. A vibrant and diverse civil society can also provide an atmosphere of accessibility so that poor and marginalised citizens are able to participate in their own social, economic, cultural, and political development (BRD, 2018, para 5). Ghani (2009) opines that ‘only when the government feels there is a strong opposition or a strong public demand for the delivery of services will it start being competitive and start performing’ (Ghani, 2009, p. 43). In a 2009 Oxfam survey of ordinary Afghans, ‘more than half said that corruption and the ineffectiveness of their government were to blame for the continued violence in the region’ (Seitz, 2017, para 2). For these reasons, ‘the role of Afghan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has never been more crucial’ (Seitz, 2017, para 2). Seitz (2017) explains that ‘tribal and religious councils are the most traditional organisations in Afghanistan but were not officially acknowledged as CSOs until the second Bonn Conference in 2011. Today, CSOs in Afghanistan are growing and becoming more recognised in both the national and international community’ (para 3). Building up and supporting a strong civil society from the grass roots level is an important factor in the reconstruction process.

Since 2011, ‘the international community has played a significant role in providing moral, material and technical support to Afghan civil society’ (EEAS, 2018, p. 19) Throughout 2015, ‘a vibrant civil society was committed to advocating for the rights of citizens. For example, CSOs and activists marched on the streets of Kabul and in several provinces to urge the government to take action to put a stop to ethnic violence and violence against women’ (USAID, 2015, para 4). According to USAID (2015), ‘during the year, CSOs also promoted various laws and amendments impacting the CSO sector, including the Access to Information Law, the Law on Associations, the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and tax incentives for donations’ (USAID, 2015, para 4). While there has been some success and progress in the development of Afghan’s civil society, some challenges remain. For example, ‘NGOs based in Kabul, with a better access to the donor community and knowledge of the development jargon, remain the primary interlocutors of the international community and beneficiaries of funding’ (EEAS, 2018, p.19). Unfortunately, there is a rift between rural and urban Afghanistan in terms of issues and accessibilities (Seitz, 2017). A major challenge lies in the ‘lack of systemic interactions between civil society and the government on policy

development’ (EEAS, 2018, p.25). The EEAS (2018) describes that ‘there are no regular consultative mechanisms to actively engage civil society in policy making and reform. This is attributed both to ‘vagueness in the legal framework surrounding the definition of civil society and its legitimacy in effectively participating in policy formulation, and persistent mistrust between civil society and the government’ (p.25). Having said this, the international community should continue to aid and collaborate with Afghan CSOs.

## **b) Ending the regional power play in Afghanistan**

Sufism ‘has shaped Afghan society and politics for much of the country’s history; making Afghanistan the cradle of a moderate and sensitive Islamic culture’ (Brehmer, 2015, p. 1). Traditional Islam in the Khorasan region - which encompasses modern Afghanistan - ‘focused on people’s harmonious relation with God, nature, humanity, and its embodiment within themselves’ (Ansari, 2018, p.39). Tolerance and acceptance were common values in the writings of religious scholars of Khorasan. This was the moderate character of Islam in Afghanistan before the 1970s. However, the subsequent four decades of war and violence in the country led to the using and abusing of Islamic militancy by different state and non-state actors in the pursuit of their goals (Ansari, 2018, p. 37).

### Pakistan

Pakistan has found it convenient to use fanatic ideas and jihad as an ideological weapon. It has successfully manipulated jihadi groups for decades in order to gain strategic depth in Afghanistan. According to Wolf, ‘the persistent involvement of Pakistan in cross-border terrorism led to the resurgence of the Taliban and destroyed chances of sustainable peace and reconciliation’ (Wolf in Terrorism Revisited, 2017, p.126). Moreover, according to Jones (2008), Pakistan providing shelter to the Taliban, Hizb-i-Islami, al-Qaeda, and the Haqqani network was a critical factor to their survival as ‘it allowed them to gain assistance from groups with similar ideologies’ (p.30). Although the Taliban regime lost its power hold in Afghanistan, ‘their leadership structure moved to Pakistan and based its operations out of three main cities: Quetta, Peshawar, and Karachi’ (Jones, 2008, p.30). There, they were able to set up committees that allowed them to organise and regain strength. The committees were: military, propaganda, finance, religious, political, and administrative (Jones, p.30, 2008). Jones describes that ‘the

Taliban's headquarters in Quetta was critical because it allowed easy access to Afghanistan's southern provinces, such as Kandahar, which was a key military front for the insurgency' (p.30). The Taliban was able to thrive - and continue to thrive - because Pakistan has provided them with all the support necessary.

### The Durand Line

In 1893, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand 'demarcated what became known as the Durand Line, setting the boundary between British India and Afghanistan, and in the process dividing the Pashtun tribes into two countries' (Rubin, 2002, para 11). The demarcation became a driving force for Afghan-Pakistani tensions until this day. Afghanistan has since then 'never given up its claim to these areas' (Ruttig, 2013, p.10). Nevertheless, 'the security situation on both sides of the Durand Line remains of great concern not only to both countries but also to the international community' (Brasseur, 2011, p.5) Despite some improvements to the Durand Line management<sup>2</sup>, 'still overall results have been limited because one vital precondition of border management - a recognised border - is absent. Neither country currently has substantive control of the territory around the Line. Instead, both have "ceded" control to militants and organised crime (Brasseur, 2011, p.13). According to Brasseur (2011), 'the overall lack of harmonisation on border patrols and cooperation in intelligence sharing has contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban' (p. 13) Thus, border recognition would make it easier for Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together on strategic border patrols. Recognition 'could be a major step toward sustainable trust building between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Recognition would not only facilitate the establishment of a more secure environment, but also speed economic development for the Pashtun tribes who live on both sides of the line' (Brasseur, 2011, p.5). However, formal recognition of the Line 'must be accompanied by Pakistani efforts to assure much better security, governance, and economic development in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)<sup>3</sup>' (Brasseur, 2011, p.5). To assist this effort, the international community should play a major role in guaranteeing increased investment in the

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<sup>2</sup> Improvements on border management include: 'the introduction of visa regime and biometrics at the Chaman border crossing', among others (Brasseur, 2011, p.13).

<sup>3</sup> FATA is now officially merged with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province.

border region. A properly managed and patrolled border can lead to a decreased presence of militants throughout the region.

### Iran

Iran's aim is to export its fundamentalist version of Islam. During the past decades, Iran has been increasing its network of seminaries and Islamic Shia schools in Afghanistan' (Amakhil, 2019, para 5). According to the 2014 report *Iran's Regional Policy: Interests; Challenges and Ambitions*, 'Iran's regional agenda is aimed at maintaining a leading position as the largest Shia-majority country of the region by becoming a key cultural, political and economic player that links the Middle East and Asia' (Sawahel, 2017, para 8). In order to achieve its goal, Iran uses education as a tool to spread its soft power. According to Amakhil, 'there are 170 religious schools and seven private universities operating under Al Mustafa University all over Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul; and 70% of these private universities' academic staff members are all Al Mustafa graduates. Additionally, in the Afghan Parliament 'more than 30% of the Members of Parliament are Al Mustafa graduates' (2019, para 8). Al-Mustafa International University is 'one of Iran's main arms for the dissemination of Khomeinist ideology abroad' (Steckler, 2018, p. 6). According to Sawahel (2017), in order to push against the spread of a fundamentalist version of Islam, 'responsible Afghans should stand up for independent and fair education that serves the interests of the Afghan society by providing objective and balanced learning free from political influence' (p.3).

Speckler argues that Iran, in addition to using soft power tools, also embraced hard power by 'offering financial, ideological, and material support for global terrorist proxies loyal to Iran's supreme leader (2018, p. 5). Speckler explains that 'while ideologically at odds with the Taliban, Iran has been heavily involved in Afghanistan through support of the Taliban in an effort to repel U.S. influence following the U.S. invasion in 2001' (Speckler, 2018, p. 5). Essentially, Iran plays a double game by 'maintaining close and constructive relations with the Afghan central government that is battling Taliban forces' (Nader & Laha, 2011, p. IX) while at the same time providing support to the Taliban themselves in an effort to oppose US influence. According to the State Department, 'Iran trains and arms the Taliban, does the same for Iraqi militants targeting US forces, and provides safe haven for al Qaeda members'

(Joscelyn, 2010, para 3)<sup>i</sup>. Nader and Laha (2010) state that ‘although Iran has traditionally backed Tajik and Shi’a groups opposed to the Taliban, its enmity with the United States and tensions over the nuclear programme have led it to provide measured support to the Taliban, which espouses an avowedly anti-Shi’a and anti-Iranian ideology’ (p. IX). For example, Iran has ‘permitted the Taliban free movement of foreign fighters through Iranian territory to support its insurgency in Afghanistan’ (United Against Nuclear Iran, 2019, para 2). An increased cooperation between Iran and the Taliban has been documented since the talks regarding US withdrawal from Afghanistan (Tabatabai, 2019). Leaving Afghanistan and decreasing international support will leave room for both Iran and Pakistan to play a role in a post-withdrawal environment. The international community needs to ensure that this scenario does not happen.

### **c) Peace talks won’t work**

#### *There is no such thing as a moderate Taliban*

For nearly a year, there have been nine rounds of peace talks between the US and the Taliban. However, the Taliban have continued to target and kill civilians. Just recently on 20 September 2019, the Taliban carried out an attack on a hospital, killing at least 39 innocent civilians and wounding 95 others (Al Jazeera, 2019, para 1). According to Dr Massouda Jalal, former Afghan Minister of Women’s Affairs, ‘seeking to negotiate with an implacable enemy could be seen either as foolish or foresighted. The West sees a deal with the Taliban as essential to its transition, but faith in negotiations appears to be based on the belief that there exist moderate elements of the Taliban, and that they can be coaxed toward supporting constitutional democracy (2011, para 5). Two main elements that prove the Taliban’s inability to be moderate will be examined: (1) the Taliban’s major ideological differences, including women’s rights and the sharia system; and (2) their strong ties with other terrorist organisations.

#### *Major ideological differences*

The Taliban, an ideological movement, ‘represents the overly conservative faction of society that is opposed to modernity and peaceful coexistence with groups that have different interpretations of religious norms and cultural values’ (Pasoon, 2017, p. 12). When it comes to

a desired governmental model, the Taliban oppose an Islamic Republic and want an Emirate wherein there would be an Amir al- Mu'minin as the highest authority and 'the government will not be able to implement any decision to which he does not agree' (Pasoon, 2017, p.14). Regarding women's rights, 'throughout this year's peace talks with the Taliban, the group have claimed that they agree to protect and uphold Afghan women's rights' (Guarda and Wolf, 2019, p. 1). However, since removed from power 'the Taliban have continued their opposition to women's rights and freedoms; Taliban insurgents have continually attacked and torched girls' schools across the country and targeted female students and teachers' (Pasoon, 2017, p.16). They also 'shot and killed a pregnant woman for speaking up against the group' (RAWA News, 2019). Furthermore, the judicial system of the warring parties is entirely different. According to Pasoon (2017), 'the Taliban government imposed the Hudud punishments with extreme fervour, which included the chopping of limbs for crimes such as left and robbery and stoning for adultery were commonplace and performed in public' (p.16). Nevertheless, not much has changed in areas under their control today as they continue to 'operate sharia courts and hand out such punishments' (Pasoon, 2017, p.16). Having said this, it seems highly unlikely that there will be much compromise.

#### *Taliban's alliance with terrorist groups*

The main condition of the US and its Western allies for peace with the Taliban is for the renunciation of international terrorism, including severing ties with al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. As Joscelyn (2019) states, 'there is no good reason, as far as I can tell, to think that the Taliban is trustworthy when it comes to restraining international terrorists; the Taliban has openly lied about the presence of al-Qaeda and foreign fighters on Afghan soil for years' (para 6). Additionally, 'the Haqqani Network was designated as a terrorist organisation in 2012 in part because of its close ties to al-Qaeda, and as it turns out, the Haqqani Network has now consolidated its influence within the Taliban' (Joscelyn, 2019, para 7). According to the United National Security Council's reports of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolutions 2368 (2017) and 2255 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities:



‘Al-Qaeda is “closely allied” with the Taliban, and the group’s “alliance with the Taliban and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan remains firm”<sup>4</sup>; al-Qaeda’s relationship with the Taliban is “long-standing” and “strong”<sup>5</sup>; al-Qaeda “has grown stronger operating under the Taliban umbrella across Afghanistan and is more active than in recent years”<sup>6</sup>; Al-Qaeda “members continue to function routinely as military and religious instructors for the Taliban”<sup>7</sup>; al-Qaeda “considers Afghanistan a continuing safe haven for its leadership, relying on its long-standing and strong relationship with the Taliban leadership”<sup>8</sup>; and the Taliban is the “primary partner for all foreign terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan with the exception of” the Islamic State’s Khorasan branch’<sup>9</sup> (Joscelyn, 2019, p.15).

These findings from the United Nations Security Council reports reveal that the Taliban have not stopped cooperating with terrorist organisations. The Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K)<sup>10</sup>, founded in 2015 and currently present in 30 districts of Afghanistan<sup>11</sup>, is held in the above report not to be a partner of the Taliban. The IS-K campaign of ‘seizing territories and encouraging mass defections from the Taliban provoked a violent backlash throughout most of 2015 by threatening the group’s dominance over material and symbolic resources of the jihadist industry’ (Ibrahimi and Akbarzadeh, 2019, p.17). However, contrary to existing research, new

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2017). Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities (pages 3 and 15). Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/S/2018/705>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2017). Twenty-third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities (page 16). Retrieved from [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/N1846950\\_EN.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/N1846950_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2015). Tenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2255 concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan (page 9). Retrieved from <https://www.undocs.org/S/2019/481>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2017). Twenty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities (pages 15-16). Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, ‘as of 2017, some members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the Haqqani Network, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have defected to IS-K’ (CSIS, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Sharifi, S. & Adamou, L. (2018). Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan. *BBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42863116>



research shows that ‘the relationship between the Taliban and IS-K goes through cyclical shifts, vacillating between conflict and cooperation’ (Ibrahimi and Akbarzadeh, 2019, p.1). According to Ibrahimi and Akbarzadeh:

while each group commands a core membership with strong organisational loyalties, we found that outside the organisational core there are significant jihadist factions that maintain dual loyalties or shift between the groups depending on their local circumstances. Consequently, the groups gradually shifted towards experimenting with localised collaboration, while maintaining strategic organisational rivalry (2019, p.2).

Since they maintain a strategic organisational rivalry, it is difficult to monitor their cooperation. Nevertheless, in 2018, ‘there seemed to be increasing coordination between the two networks in the series of attacks in Kabul and other cities in Afghanistan. For example, on 09 May 2018, two groups of suicide bombers stormed two separate police stations in Kabul within one hour. ISIS claimed responsibility for the first attack and the Taliban claimed responsibility for the second; meanwhile, Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security blamed the Haqqani Network for organising both attacks’ (Ibrahimi and Akbarzadeh, 2019, p.14). Furthermore, ‘in recent years, the de-escalation of the Taliban-IS-K conflict was also helped by the heavy losses sustained by the IS-K. Since 2015, ground and air offensives by the Afghan, US, and NATO forces as well as attacks by the Taliban reduced the capacity of the IS-K to hold and maintain major territories’ (Ibrahimi and Akbarzadeh, 2019, p.17). In other words, the IS-K seems to be losing its capabilities to compete with the Taliban over resources. These cyclical shifts of conflict and cooperation between the two groups, particularly their localised collaboration and dual loyalties, needs to be monitored.

### **PART 3: Conclusion**

A state with properly functioning governmental institutions and a well-trained security force is a place wherein terrorist organisations will find it difficult to operate. Focus should not centre on fruitless peace talks with the Taliban - as they have proven time and again that they will not compromise their ideological views. Instead, the international community should devise an overarching state-building strategy with proper oversight mechanisms, keeping in mind accountability and the prioritisation of long-term projects. This has yet to be achieved in

Afghanistan. There needs to be transitional justice in the country, where perpetrators are held accountable and the culture of impunity is put to an end once and for all - in other words, perpetrators of violence can no longer be awarded positions of power regardless of their past crimes. Furthermore, focusing inclusively on the security sector has not been a successful endeavour. Despite the billions of dollars invested in security sector assistance, Afghan security forces are not capable of securing their own nation. Thus, state building needs to be rethought, with an Afghan-led agenda, long-term commitment, and a coherent plan from the international community. Rural communities need more attention in terms of capacity building and civil society needs to be strengthened by assisting CSOs in trust building with the government. Moreover, it must be realised that none of this will be possible if Pakistan and Iran continue with their destabilising strategies and interference in Afghanistan. By recognising the Durand Line, Afghanistan can have greater negotiation power with Pakistan, thus obtaining a better managed and patrolled border. In an effort to curb jihadist ideology, Afghanistan - with the help of the international community - should monitor Iranian-funded universities and NGOs and reform curriculums that focus on fanaticism. In a civil society survey, Afghan citizens have stated that ‘addressing historical, economic and political problems with other regional states was deemed an important part of the peace strategy of the Afghan government and its international partners’ (Dashty, 2019, p.6). If Afghanistan is to realistically develop into a stabilised, democratic, peaceful country, the abovementioned issues need to be tackled.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Beginning in 2006, Iran's Qods Force "training the Taliban in Afghanistan on small unit tactics, small arms, explosives, and indirect fire weapons" in addition to providing armaments including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, and plastic explosives' (United Against Nuclear Iran, 2019).