



**Clingendael**

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

# Afghanistan post-2014

Groping in the dark?

Jaïr van der Lijn

Nº

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*Report*



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## **Afghanistan post-2014:**

Groping in the dark?

Jaïr van der Lijn



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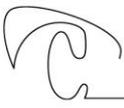
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## Executive summary

Afghanistan is entering a new phase in its history. In 2014, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will leave and responsibility for the maintenance of security in the country will be handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). How this new chapter will look is not clear because many factors determining the future of Afghanistan are still uncertain.

This scenarios paper develops six scenarios based on three key uncertainties:

1. Will governance in Afghanistan become relatively strong or relatively weak (effective and legitimate)?
2. Will governance in Afghanistan be heavily contested or mildly contested?
3. Will a Taliban-style group be dominant in Afghanistan or not?

The scenarios are as follows:

*North-South Conflict:* The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) is dominated by the former Northern Alliance which faces a primarily Pashtun rebellion in the south of the country. The West and the majority of the international community support GIROA. The Taliban, who stick to a radical interpretation of Islam and rely partly on international jihadists and Pakistani support, are united and in control of southern Afghanistan.

*GIROA Fights:* After the departure of ISAF the conflict in Afghanistan continues in a similar way to the recent past. However, GIROA has less international support. It dominates the major cities in the country, but it is unable to pacify particularly the rural areas. GIROA also struggles in northern Afghanistan.

*Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> (square):* Afghanistan still has the façade of a government in Kabul, but in practice the country has splintered into many small fiefdoms controlled by local warlords. In comparison to the warlords' period before the Taliban, fragmentation is much greater



because, in addition to the old warlords, many new power brokers have entered the scene. This results in a highly anarchic, conflict-ridden and violent environment.<sup>1</sup>

*Emirate:* In cooperation with a number of disgruntled former members of the Northern Alliance who feel marginalised by GIROA, the Taliban have taken over the government in Kabul. This time the emirate is much more benevolent, because the Taliban needed to tone down its more radical views to get the other actors on board. In spite of this moderation and the Taliban distancing itself from international jihadism, the international community is not supporting the new regime directly. Women's rights and the position of the Shia population are of particular international concern. Ethnic contradictions remain present, but tensions are of low intensity.

*Reconciliation:* After a negotiations process a peace agreement is signed and Taliban members join GIROA. However, in order to get them on board, a number of compromises had to be made, particularly with regard to women's and religious rights. The resulting government is relatively autocratic, but is able to reap the fruits of peace, in particular economic growth. Western influence in Afghanistan has diminished, as China is the major investor in the country. Only some disgruntled Islamist extremists continue to contest Kabul, and in most parts of the country the situation remains fragile as most local conflicts remain unresolved and occasionally flair up.

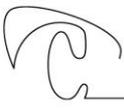
*Regionalisation:* After a bloody civil war the situation has settled down. None of the groups gained the upper hand and the war resulted in a balance of power between different more or less ethnically and factionally homogeneous regional zones. In the status quo, informal ad hoc deals have been made, and slowly economic interests have gained the upper hand. The regions each focus on their ethnic kin and regional partners across the border. In western Afghanistan the focus is on Iran, in the south on Pakistan and in the north on the Central Asian republics. The level of economic growth, rule of law and human rights differs according to region.

The main findings of the scenarios are:

1. It is very likely that violence and armed conflict will continue in Afghanistan. Even in the most optimistic scenarios violence, although at a lower level, continues to be part of the Afghan future. In fact, in a number of scenarios the present situation will deteriorate.
2. Those scenarios that see less violence tend to see more human rights violations because a Taliban-style or other relatively autocratic regime is in power that cares less about freedom and rights.
3. In spite of international actors' hopes that they have the capability to direct the situation, the Afghans themselves primarily determine the future of their country. It is clear that most of the factors determining the different scenarios are in fact primarily

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1 When the word 'Fragmentation' appears with the number 2 after it, it refers to the Fragmentation Square scenario



in the hands of the Afghans. This means that international room to determine the Afghan future and steer towards a particular scenario through peace negotiations with Taliban, or international NATO and EU missions, is limited.

Based on these scenarios, this paper builds a scenario plan on the basis of which the Netherlands can draw the following '3D' (defence, diplomacy and development) conclusions.

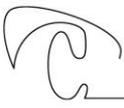
The importance of *defence* is likely to decrease further. Contributing to a NATO Training, Advising and Assistance Mission (N-TAAM) is not robust, because it is not likely to be required in most scenarios. More importantly, it is unwise because it is likely to backfire in a number of scenarios and contribute to the training of forces and militia that may be fighting another civil war. In terms of strengthening GIROA capacity and preventing its downfall, contributing to EUPOL (European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan) in Kunduz or Balkh provinces would be better, because the potential negative effects of its higher-level training are much more limited. Attention to counter-terrorism with regard to international jihadi groups – not Afghan political actors – is likely to remain needed for a long time. Contributing Special Forces and providing intelligence capacity for this purpose could be an option.

Contributing to a (regional) *diplomacy* strategy would be particularly worth investing in. This would be a robust, relatively cheap option that could provide high visibility. Contributing to and stimulating the Istanbul process would be a good first step.

With regard to *development*, continuing support for basic services is advised along the lines of the current two-pronged strategies of supporting the government where possible, while providing additional funding to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in areas where basic services cannot be delivered through, or with the inclusion of, government channels. In southern Afghanistan, NGOs are the most robust channel for assistance and therefore a continuation of support to NGOs in Uruzgan would make sense. Such support can reap benefits from the existing experience and relations in Uruzgan, as well as continuing and building on the Dutch '3D' approach started in 2006. Finally, humanitarian assistance and assistance to refugees will continue to be needed.

Last but not least, the Netherlands has a contribution to make to rule of law, which is sometimes seen as part of *diplomacy* and sometimes as *development*. It is an issue the Dutch feel particularly involved with, and contributing to accountability, anti-corruption and human rights, as well as training, institution building and supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs in this field, are strong options in all scenarios.





## Introduction

Afghanistan is entering a new phase in its history. In 2014, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will leave and responsibility for the maintenance of security in the country will be handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). How this new chapter will look is not clear because many factors determining the future of Afghanistan are still uncertain.

This paper does not aim to predict. Rather it provides six scenarios of how Afghanistan may look in the future. Afghanistan's future will not look exactly like any of them but is likely to include some features from some or all of them. As these scenarios aim to provide a 360-degree view of alternative futures, they cover the widest variety of potential futures, allowing policy makers to embrace uncertainty and be prepared for the different futures that may arise.

Scenarios are useful in policy planning processes. In the case of Afghanistan, for example, many policy makers are focused on a successful transition of security tasks and ignore potential indications that not everything will go according to plan. Others are pessimistic and only focus on the future collapse of Afghanistan, which may not happen. Planning for the different possible futures increases organisations' flexibility as they have already thought through what they aim to achieve and what will be done in each scenario. As Dwight D. Eisenhower said, 'Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.' In order to contribute to this purpose, the scenarios need to be creative but plausible. They should be internally consistent and preferably make the reader think.

The aim of these Afghanistan scenarios is to provide input for the Netherlands government's Afghanistan policy. However, they also aspire to provide input for planning processes in other organisations. In addition, they aim to be a vehicle for discussing the future of Afghanistan. The current debate on Afghanistan is sometimes lost in dogmatic, one-dimensional or historical explanations. The future may be very different.

## Methodology

These scenarios have been built using the Shell scenario methodology.<sup>2</sup> The data gathering to build the scenarios is based on a literature review, interviews with key experts, representatives and officials from relevant organisations (such as the International Security

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<sup>2</sup> Shell International BV, Scenarios an explorer's guide, The Hague: 2008.



Assistance Force (ISAF), European Union (EU) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and on workshops. In total, five workshops were organised during the last four months of 2012: in The Hague, two with Afghan diplomats and one with Dutch experts; in Brussels, one with representatives of the EU, NGOs and academics; and in Kabul, one at the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Subsequently, external key experts and a number of workshop participants reviewed the scenarios. The author is grateful to all who contributed to the process. Without their input this paper would not have been possible. Their participation was on the basis of anonymity to guarantee the most frank and open discussion and input. Therefore no references are made to sources.

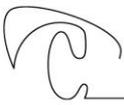
## The scenarios

The scenarios are based on three key uncertainties:

1. Will governance in Afghanistan become relatively strong or relatively weak (effective and legitimate)?
2. Will governance in Afghanistan be heavily contested or mildly contested?
3. Will a Taliban-style group be dominant in Afghanistan or not?

These three key uncertainties are not phrased in absolute terms. It is not plausible that governance in Afghanistan will become strong and effective in the near future, and perceived to be legitimate by the whole of its population. Similarly, it is not deemed plausible, whatever form of governance is in place, that it will be uncontested. The term governance in the key uncertainties has been chosen over government because governance may not necessarily be in the hands of a (single) government. In addition, governance does not necessarily describe the current Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), because a future government may be in the hands of a Taliban-style organisation. Last but not least, with the exception of the scenarios North-South Conflict and Emirate where the Taliban are united, or when they are portrayed by others as a unitary organisation, the Taliban is not referred to as a singular organisation. This might raise questions about whether *the* Taliban actually exists or about its homogeneity. What is clear is that a Taliban-style organisation may become dominant in the future.

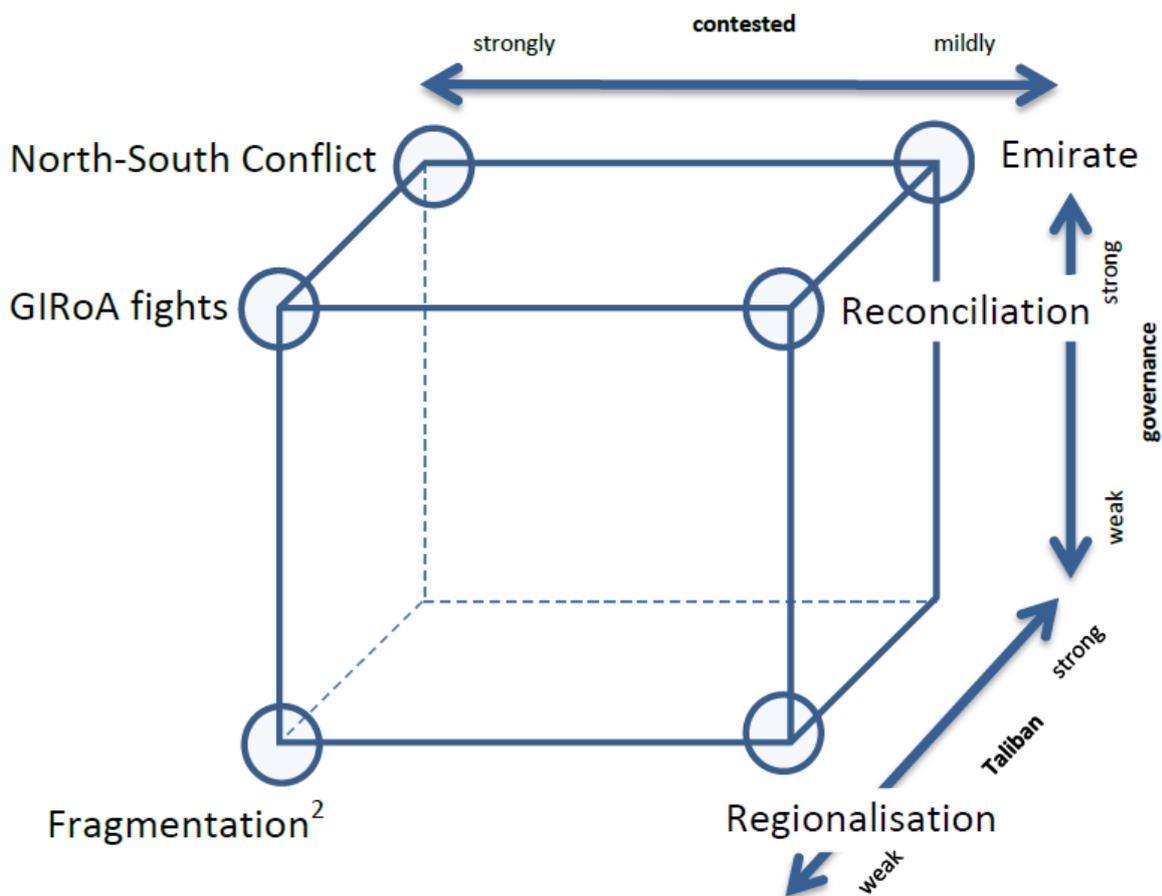
On the basis of these three key uncertainties, a cube has been constructed in which each corner represents one scenario. Although this can produce up to eight scenarios, only six have been developed because, in general, while four to five scenarios help to clarify the discussion, more become confusing. Extra scenarios often do not add much and are sometimes not plausible. In this exercise the ‘weak governance by a Taliban-style group’, whether mildly or strongly contested, scenarios do not add much to the other six scenarios and have therefore not been developed. It has to be stressed though that, although four of the six scenarios describe relatively strong governance, this does not mean that strong governance is considered to be more likely.



The time-setting horizon of the scenarios is 2017. This date has been chosen because it will take a few years for a scenario to fully develop after the departure of ISAF at the end of 2014. However, this does not make the scenarios less relevant for the immediate post-transition period in 2015. By that time the first traits of the scenarios will have developed and these can be monitored to potentially adjust policies.

The six scenarios are elaborated on below. Each starts with a future history of the period up to 2017. These are written in the past tense to emphasise that they are looking back from 2017. They are followed by a description of what Afghanistan looks like in each scenario in 2017 in the present tense. Each scenario ends with a short description of the recommended policy instruments for that scenario. The paper ends with a conclusion on the main findings of the scenarios with regard to their important drivers and actors, as well as the wild cards. Following a reflection on the scenarios, advice is given on what policy options are the strongest and most robust for Afghanistan in general and for the Netherlands government in particular.

Figure 1: Six scenarios



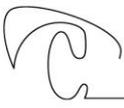


## **North-South Conflict: Relatively strong governance, strongly contested by strong Taliban**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

As all negotiations with the core Taliban (Quetta Shura) eventually broke down, the Taliban-style groups increasingly felt united behind their cause to overthrow the 'corrupt puppet government' and gained more and more confidence in their ability to succeed. With increasing dissatisfaction among Pashtun in southern Afghanistan, the strength of the organisation was growing rapidly as many opposition groups joined Taliban ranks. Faced with this increasing insecurity in southern Afghanistan, the rise of a Pashtun bloc, and the threat of a return of the Taliban, the power brokers of the former Northern Alliance decided to reunite and rally behind a relatively weak Pashtun presidential candidate. The presidential candidate, supported by the former Northern Alliance, won the elections but was not acceptable to many southern Pashtuns and the core Taliban. The Quetta Shura immediately issued a statement rejecting the outcome of the elections and promised to redouble its efforts to re-establish the authority of the emirate over the whole of Afghanistan. Although the new president was acceptable to the international community and the former Northern Alliance, most international forces were withdrawn. A NATO Training, Advising and Assistance Mission (N-TAAM) of 15,000 military personnel remained, complemented by a strategy of primarily air-to-ground operations and Special Forces. In addition, GIROA was still relatively generously funded in line with commitments made at the Tokyo Conference, receiving about US\$20 billion throughout 2015, and US\$4.1 billion annually to fund the ANSF as committed in the Chicago Declaration. Furthermore, to boost Afghan confidence, the US designated Afghanistan a 'major non-NATO ally', qualifying it for special security-related benefits.

As a result, although there was no clear border, increasingly the struggle turned into a war between northern and southern Afghanistan, with GIROA controlling northern Afghanistan and Kabul, and the Taliban bloc in charge of the south of the country. During 2015 and 2016 particularly, this led to some very heavy battles in which GIROA lost its last strongholds in the south after the last international forces left Kandahar. N-TAAM concentrated its forces in northern Afghanistan with its largest base in Mazar-i-Sharif.



## Afghanistan in 2017

In 2017, a weak Pashtun president leads GIRoA. He is supported by a number of politicians tied together in a highly corrupt patrimonial network. In addition to some Pashtun politicians, most power brokers that used to be part of the Northern Alliance support him as they fear the return of the Taliban. GIRoA has relatively strong control over northern Afghanistan, but faces a strong rebellion in the south of the country, from which it has retreated, led by an increasingly strong and recovering Taliban. The Taliban are united and have gained strength in their fight against GIRoA, as they represent a clean, non-corrupt alternative to the Kabul government. In addition, as the conflict has been increasingly framed in terms of Pashtuns versus the rest, many Pashtun in southern Afghanistan support the Taliban in the fight over what they perceive to be a Northern Alliance and particularly Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara-dominated government in Kabul. The continuing conflict and lack of reconciliation has strengthened the Taliban in its belief that its own radical interpretation of Islam is superior and that they should not compromise by reconciling less Islamist groups. The continuous international support for GIRoA and the international isolation of the Taliban has driven them back into the hands of their previous Salafi supporters. In exchange, the Taliban provide international jihadi with new safe havens in southern Afghanistan. However, their numbers remain limited as the Taliban walk the tightrope between getting support in their struggle against GIRoA and not upsetting the West too much and setting off a renewed large-scale international intervention. Nonetheless, reports of serious human, women's and religious rights violations in the Taliban-controlled south are common and worry the international community. Moreover, due to the conflict and in particular the isolation of the Taliban, the economic situation in southern Afghanistan is problematic, while in northern Afghanistan the economy is flourishing due to continued international support and trade with the Central Asian republics. The human rights situation and rule of law in GIRoA-controlled areas is also improving further because it has to satisfy international pressure.

Indian support for GIRoA has increased strongly and with it Delhi's influence in Kabul. Iran has a large influence over, particularly, western Afghanistan through its ties with the Hazara population. However, Tehran predominantly follows a similar strategy to the Chinese wait-and-see policy, as both countries remain satisfied with how GIRoA and its Western supporters continue to be tied down by the Taliban. In northern Afghanistan, the influence of the Central Asian republics has also increased due to their ethnic ties with key power brokers in the government. However, they are not a real source of power for GIRoA because they remain relatively weak. The Taliban receive considerable covert support from Pakistani security organisations. Islamabad fears the Indian influence at its northern borders and, out of fear of a potential two-front war, has decided a strong Taliban is needed as a counterbalance. In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, Ahmed Rashid has described Afghanistan's north-south conflict, as 'a proxy war of India and Pakistan [...] The Hindu Kush is where the cold war between India and Pakistan becomes hot.'

Although ISAF has withdrawn, international support for GIRoA is strong as most countries view the government in Kabul as the official government. This support shows not only in continued financial support for the ANSF and development assistance for GIRoA, but also by

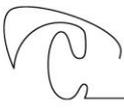


the 2017 surge of N-TAAM forces from 15,000 to 30,000. This surge is meant to support the ANSF in their struggle against the Taliban and to counter the threat from the south. The EU has continued its support for GIROA through a smaller EUPOL mission. This support for northern Afghanistan is in sharp contrast to the lack of support for southern Afghanistan where, in the absence of a GIROA presence, the N-TAAM and EUPOL deployments have come to an end and donor presence has diminished. Only a few NGOs continue to have a presence in the south, particularly in the field of humanitarian affairs. The strongest international presence experienced by the local population is the continuous threat of drone hovering in the skies, part of a broader military-heavy US counter-terrorism strategy that also includes Special Forces, among others.

### Policy options

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to the N-TAAM in northern Afghanistan. This could be done in a particular region such as Balkh or Kunduz provinces
- Contributing to the EUPOL mission in northern Afghanistan. This could be done in a particular region such as Balkh or Kunduz provinces
- Contributing to the financing of ANSF personnel
- Contributing to counter-terrorism, for example, through the deployment of Special Forces and contributing intelligence capacity in southern Afghanistan to deal with international jihadi groups, as well as preventing radicalisation in refugee camps
- Contributing to capacity building of non-security governance structures in northern Afghanistan
- Contributing to the establishment of the rule of law, through strengthening accountability, anti-corruption and human rights, providing training in these fields, and assisting institution building in northern Afghanistan, among other things
- Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs
- Assisting the provision of basic services where possible through or with the inclusion of government channels in northern Afghanistan and through NGOs in the south
- Contributing to private sector development (in particular agriculture) in northern Afghanistan
- Stimulating dialogue and diplomacy between the different Afghan parties
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan



- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance where possible through or with the inclusion of government channels in northern Afghanistan and through NGOs in the south
- Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries
- Assisting the repatriation of refugees and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to northern Afghanistan
- Providing asylum to 'friends' that in the past have supported stability in Afghanistan, but due to the situation need refuge.



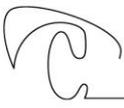
## **GIRoA Fights: Relatively strong governance, strongly contested, Taliban is weak**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

The transition of security responsibilities from ISAF to the ANSF was completed more or less according to plan. However, the ANSF lost more terrain in the rural areas than initially expected. Taliban-style organisations were not able to fill this gap as they lacked the strength, but often more local groups did. Former president Karzai had manoeuvred another Popalzai Pashtun into position to succeed him after the elections of April 2014. His carefully built network of supporters eventually agreed to this move because they knew that any other option might end the carefully built equilibrium, which in turn would affect their position. Moreover, Karzai remained active in the background. The international community was satisfied with the result of the elections, despite the fact that they had been violent and fraudulent, and intimidation had been common. US president Obama commented, 'The Afghan people have spoken. Although the elections were not free and fair according to our standards, this is as good as it gets at the moment in Afghanistan. We can be certain that the voices of the people have been heard.' To many opposition forces the new government was just a continuation of the old one, as they saw the new president as a puppet of Karzai. Nonetheless, the transition and the end of the ISAF operation were hailed as a success. Afghanistan would finally be ready to stand on its own feet. ISAF's successor mission, the N-TAAM, was still relatively large, with 18,000 forces. In addition, there were still a few thousand US forces deployed for counter-terrorism purposes, operating mainly from Kandahar Airfield. International donor support lagged behind the funds committed at the Tokyo Conference, but funding for the ANSF continued as agreed in Chicago.

### **Afghanistan in 2017**

Compared to the North-South Conflict scenario, in this scenario the Taliban-style organisations are weaker, not united, and the insurgency is more local. Moreover, the character of the continuing conflict is not so much north versus south, but Kabul versus the periphery. Afghanistan is a democracy but mostly in name only. The GIRoA structure remains as corrupt as before, tied together by patrimonial relations and agreements. Kabul is



in control of large parts of northern Afghanistan and all the main cities and towns in the south of the country. However, its influence often does not reach far beyond these urban areas as GIROA is particularly contested in rural areas. The western province of Herat is relatively stable. Power is primarily located in Kabul as this is where budgets are distributed from. Consequently, the provinces themselves have little influence over policy. Local power brokers who have the right connections in Kabul dominate locally. The opposition is fragmented and, although some opposition organisations such as Taliban-style groups, the Haqqani network and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, dominate national discussions, most insurgents are in fact local fighters in local conflicts. In many ways GIROA muddles through.

The ANSF has become more lean and mean as it is better trained and downsized. Consequently, its capacity has grown sufficient to operate independently in most parts of the country, but it is too weak to pacify the country as a whole. At the same time, in order to tie local power brokers to the government, Kabul has increased its use of militias. The economic situation is deteriorating due to continuing violence and decreasing international donor assistance. Unemployment has increased dramatically and this is placing increasing stress on the social and political system. In addition, in this atmosphere of continuous conflict, human rights, women's rights and the rule of law suffer.

A number of Pakistani security services in Islamabad continue to support different rebel organisations. They consider instability in southern Afghanistan and a weak government in Kabul as strategic depth in a potential war with India. India and China have gained some influence in Kabul after the departure of ISAF and the reduced Western presence, but the insecure environment does not allow them to invest heavily. Iran uses its influence to keep western Afghanistan relatively stable as it hopes to end the negative effects on its borders, such as drugs and refugees, which it has faced for years. Areas along the northern border are also relatively stable, allowing trade with the Central Asian republics to increase.

Now that GIROA has a new face the story in the international media is that, with the departure of Karzai, corruption has been better addressed. The US and EU consider the levels of corruption to be 'acceptable' and continue their financial support, albeit at a lower scale. Militarily, tired of the conflict and hard hit by the continuing economic crisis, international support has continued but on a much lower scale. N-TAAM is decreasing its numbers to a smaller operation of 5,000 personnel and the EUPOL mission is in the process of a partial drawdown.

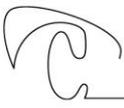
## **Policy options**

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to the N-TAAM. This could be done in a particular region such as Balkh, Kunduz or Uruzgan provinces



- Contributing to the EUPOL police training mission. This could be done in a particular region such as Balkh, Kunduz or Uruzgan provinces
- Contributing to the financing of ANSF personnel
- Contributing to counter-terrorism, for example, through the deployment of Special Forces and contributing intelligence capacity to deal with international jihadi groups, as well as preventing radicalisation in refugee camps
- Contributing to capacity building of non-security governance structures where security allows it
- Contributing to the establishment of the rule of law, through strengthening accountability, anticorruption and human rights, providing training in these fields, and assisting institution building where security allows it, among other things
- Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs
- Assisting the provision of basic services. Where possible this should be done through or with the inclusion of government channels. Where GIROA is not in control this can be done via NGOs
- Contributing to private sector development (in particular agriculture) in the more stable areas of Afghanistan
- Stimulating dialogue and diplomacy between the different Afghan parties
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan
- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Where possible this should be done through or with the inclusion of government channels. Where GIROA is not in control this can be done via NGOs
- Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries



## **Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> (square): Relatively weak governance, strongly contested, Taliban is weak<sup>3</sup>**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

During 2013 it became increasingly clear that the Afghan economy had been built on the presence of a large foreign force and assistance funding. Essentially it was a bubble economy. With the drawdown of ISAF and decreasing assistance, the economic situation started to deteriorate. The 5,000 troops that were part of the N-TAAM had a much smaller positive impact on the Afghan economy. In addition, donors were less generous than the commitments they had made at the Tokyo Conference, using Kabul's not abiding to the Tokyo criteria as their formal excuse. Waning public support for the mission in troop-contributing countries and austerity in the West were more important. The economic, social and political instability generated by the deteriorating economic situation had a negative influence on Afghan security. One reason for this was the increasing number of unemployed men who needed a living and were therefore easily recruited into militia. Slowly, the Bonn framework started to unravel. While in the past Karzai had been able to unify the system, he was now increasingly mistrusted and seen as the centre of corruption. He was seen as power-hungry, intent on directly or indirectly clinging to power. The fact that the situation was expected to deteriorate had already been signalled at the end of 2012 when it became apparent that business people were moving their assets from Afghanistan. Typically, large shipments of gold were leaving the country to more secure areas.

After the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011, the killing of Mullah Omar was big news on 21 January 2014, at the beginning of the transition year. The exact circumstances were unclear but after his death the Quetta Shura lost much of its coherence and its members started to quarrel over leadership. This further weakened the organisation, which lost much of its control over its commanders. At the same time, the reduced threat from Taliban-style groups removed the final remaining need for former Northern Alliance leaders to cooperate with GIRoA and Karzai. The first round of the April 2014 presidential elections did not bring any clear winner and eventually, in a second round with a relatively low turnout, a technocrat was elected. Loved by the international community because he had clean hands and sensible ideas, he was unable to keep the country together. Increasingly Afghanistan disintegrated and local power brokers gained the upper hand.

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3 When the word 'Fragmentation' appears with the number 2 after it, it refers to the Fragmentation Square scenario



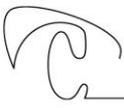
## Afghanistan in 2017

Although a façade government has remained in office in Kabul, basically GIROA has collapsed and the ANSF has splintered along Afghanistan's many faction lines, similar to the situation in southern Somalia. In the absence of a real central government, about 350,000 NATO-trained soldiers have sold themselves to the highest bidder. Many people refer to this period as the second age of the warlords, but in comparison to the first warlord period of the 1990s this one is much more complex. During the post-Taliban period, many new power brokers have risen and they hope to get their piece of the pie. Old warlords and new power brokers control their own tiny fiefdoms and are in continuous conflict over power, resources, the drugs trade and religion. What remained of the Afghan economy has collapsed because investments have dried up. Criminality, smuggling and violence are rampant. This anarchic fragmentation and lack of governance has allowed for the return of jihadi safe havens. The Afghan population suffers enormously as, in this highly insecure situation, all human rights are violated on a massive scale and the rule of law is absent.

Everyone who is able to leave tries to flee the country and Afghanistan faces a brain drain. Many elites from the GIROA era have fled abroad with their families. Not only the rich and bright have left. Due to high levels of violence, the number of IDPs has increased and refugees have started to pour into Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics. The situation for IDPs is particularly bad as humanitarian access is limited.

Afghanistan's deteriorating situation has spilled over into Pakistan. The conflict runs the risk of spinning out of control. Large parts of the Pakistani border with Afghanistan have destabilised to the extent that Pakistani security agencies are forced to take steps to prevent a collapse of the Pakistani state. In an attempt by the Pakistani government to regain some control over the area, it has forced jihadi fighters from Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Afghanistan. The extent of fragmentation has meant that neighbouring countries have lost a lot of the leverage they used to have in Afghanistan.

Overwhelmed by the situation, the international community has largely withdrawn from Afghanistan. There is some international presence in Kabul, but the NATO and EUPOL missions have been withdrawn. Obama reflected in an interview that, 'we have given it all we could, but sometimes even that is not good enough. In the end it is all about whether they really want peace.' EU assistance inside Afghanistan is greatly reduced due to the highly insecure situation. Donors continue to support humanitarian assistance and some NGOs have stayed. The UN and its specialist organisations are the main actors. The most noticeable international involvement, other than humanitarian assistance, are the continuous and even increased US counter-terrorism activities, particularly in southern Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. Despite complaints about the use of drones, together with Special Forces these form the heart of the US counter-terrorism strategy.



## Policy options

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to counter-terrorism, for example, through the deployment of Special Forces and contributing intelligence capacity to deal with international jihadi groups, as well as preventing radicalisation in refugee camps
- Assisting the provision of basic services, wherever humanitarian space allows through NGOs
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan
- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance through NGOs
- Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries
- Providing asylum to 'friends' that in the past have supported stability in Afghanistan, but due to the situation need to flee.



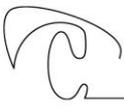
## **Emirate: Relatively strong governance by strong Taliban, mildly contested**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

Kabul and Washington were unable to reach agreement on post-2014 military arrangements in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) before the presidential elections. The new Afghan government revoked the immunity of US troops, effectively ending SOFA negotiations and the US presence in Afghanistan at the end of 2014. In the absence of the US, the plan for a further international military presence in Afghanistan was discontinued. In addition, in spite of the agreements and promises made, for example, at the Tokyo Conference, most international financial assistance rapidly declined. The continuing financial crisis required a further round of austerity measures in Europe and the US. Support for a government (which was considered corrupt), a country (perceived to have unsolvable problems), and a war (which was already lost) was seen as throwing money into a bottomless pit. Increasingly, because Kabul needed support from Delhi to survive, India gained influence over GIROA.

At the same time, the core-Taliban toned down its more radical views. At the end of 2012, it had already secretly reached out to and started a dialogue with Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras in the opposition. A Taliban spokesman at the time argued: 'Ninety per cent of them want an Islamic regime, just as we do.' Although they still pursued an Islamic state, they took on a more friendly face and abandoned some of the more violent aspects of their previous rule. In a statement, the core-Taliban accepted a new constitution that would protect the civil and political rights of all citizens, and which would allow girls to attend school and women to work. Cooperation with Taliban became more attractive to some Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras as they were marginalised under the Karzai government. In the 2009 presidential elections, their minority vote had forced Karzai to accept a run off, although this did not take place as his rival Abdullah Abdullah withdrew. Karzai was also unpopular with the Pashtun. The core-Taliban strategy was in essence simple: 'We can deal with these ethnic groups and unite with them against Karzai and whoever he chooses to succeed him.' At a 2012 meeting with representatives of the British Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London, the core-Taliban had already hinted at their willingness to accept a long-term US military presence as this would avoid interference in Afghan affairs by its neighbours. The reason for this change was that the Quetta Shura could no longer consider Pakistan a safe bet.

In the years following the 2014 transition, in the absence of funding and with a chronic corruption problem, GIROA became increasingly unpopular. The Taliban managed to unite and its 'struggle to end corruption, nepotism and marginalisation' attracted broad support



among the Afghan population. Also, cooperation with the Taliban became more acceptable to a number of former members of the Northern Alliance who felt marginalised under the GIRoA government. In the end, all deemed Islam to be the guiding doctrine, and the Taliban was able to become the leading organisation within the broader anti-government coalition. Pakistan's security organisations strongly supported this Taliban-led coalition, because they hoped to end India's influence on the northern Pakistani border. The subsequent collapse of GIRoA in the spring of 2016 was quick. Similar to the chain of events when the Taliban seized power in 1996, the Taliban coalition's rise to power was the result of a quick advance from Jalalabad. Due to the more moderate position of the Taliban, it was a smaller step for many local power brokers to change hats and join the winning Taliban coalition. At the same time, this turn of events was already partly foreseen by the old GIRoA elites who had ensured that their wealth was smuggled out of the country. Now they simply needed to join their families who had already moved abroad. Consequently, the power change took place without much violence.

### **Afghanistan in 2017**

In 2017, the emirate is more benevolent than the previous one. It has dropped any relationship with international jihadist groups and is, in fact, secretly cooperating with US counter-terrorism operations throughout the region. Women's rights and the position of the Shia population, however, are of international concern. Ethnic differences remain but, for the moment, are sufficiently balanced as all ethnicities are given sufficient freedom to express their identity and culture. This time the emirate follows a more Iranian model of governance. A religious structure complements a formal democratic system and can overrule any decision made by the civilian structure. The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice keeps a close eye on public life, but its punishments are less harsh and fear is less widespread. As a consequence of increased stability, the Afghan economy has grown at a relatively high rate, although there is international resistance to invest in the country because of its regime.

In spite of the emirate's more friendly policies, Shia citizens have a hard time and many of them flee to Iran. Iran supports the Hazara opposition, but at the moment the Hazara are not in position to resist the new government. Since the change of power in Afghanistan, relations between Kabul and Islamabad have improved, allowing the Pakistani government to better address instability in its own country. For China, the absence of jihadism and cooperation with Pakistan is good enough reason to fully support the new government in Kabul. Chinese companies are taking advantage of the situation to search for investment opportunities (which, due to the character of the regime, Western companies cannot pick up) and trade with the Central Asian republics flourishes. Only India's position in the country has strongly decreased.

Although the Taliban has fulfilled most criteria, distanced itself from Al-Qaeda, become more moderate, and laid down its arms, major donors are still hesitant to openly support the emirate. Since the West has ended its financial support (because supporting the emirate would politically be a bridge too far), the emirate is driven into the hands of China. The

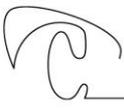


emirate's relations with the West are comparable to those of Sudan. There is a lot of hot air, but in secret some countries cooperate. The NATO and EUPOL missions have completely withdrawn. The EU maintains a low-level presence in Kabul. First, because it is thought that keeping contact with the emirate keeps the door open and will prevent a repetition of 1996, and secondly because the continuation of talks is hoped to further moderate the Taliban position. Thirdly, it allows the EU to continue to support NGOs. Counter-terrorism activities in Afghanistan have greatly diminished because the emirate ensures that any potential perception of a connection with jihadists is avoided. The Taliban even secretly provides intelligence to the US.

### **Policy options**

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to the establishment of the rule of law through silent diplomatic pressure on the government to strengthen accountability, anti-corruption and human rights
- Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs
- Assisting the provision of basic services through NGOs
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan
- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance through NGOs
- Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries
- Providing asylum to 'friends' that in the past have supported stability in Afghanistan, but due to the situation need to seek refuge.



## **Reconciliation: Relatively strong governance, mildly contested, Taliban weak**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

After talks in Kyoto during the summer of 2012 and in Chantilly at the end of that year, the media reported a change of atmosphere. The Quetta Shura Taliban showed increasing willingness to talk directly to what they had previously always called the Karzai ‘puppet regime’. In his 24 October Eid al-Adha message, Mullah Omar noted: ‘We are neither thinking of monopolising power, nor intending to spark off domestic war.’ Although the core-Taliban did not publically and explicitly fulfil the US demand to reject al-Qaeda at a 2012 London meeting with representatives of the RUSI, Taliban leaders said they ‘deeply regret their past association with al-Qaeda’. Moreover, in his Eid al-Fitr holiday speech, Mullah Omar said the Quetta Shura ‘will not allow anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against anyone’. The other US precondition for talks, accepting the Afghan constitution, was also brought to the table as a Taliban spokesman stated, ‘We can support 95% of the Afghan Constitution [and] we can also go for elections if there are a few changes in electoral laws.’ Out of a fear that the spill-over effects of the continuing instability in Afghanistan would be too harmful for Pakistan, Islamabad genuinely wanted to back an Afghan peace process. For that reason, they reached out to the former Northern Alliance. After talks with the Afghan High Peace Council at the end of 2012, Pakistan started to release numerous Taliban leaders, and the starting point for a common peace strategy was created. Looking back, a London meeting between President Karzai and Pakistan’s President Zardari in early 2013 would be the starting point of slowly improving relations between GIRoA and Pakistan.

In the areas where ISAF transferred its security responsibilities to the ANSF, stability improved. This showed not only the Afghans but also the international community that the presence of a large mission was not necessarily contributing to peace in Afghanistan. Karzai called it the ‘transition to peace’. After the departure of ISAF, only a small N-TAAM of 5,000 forces remained, while EUPOL stayed. GIRoA received financial support more or less following the commitments of the Tokyo Conference. During 2013 and 2014, the conflict between GIRoA and Taliban groups continued, but without a clear victory for either on the horizon. Peace negotiations became the only viable option. The new power brokers, who had grown powerful through their economic activities during the post-Taliban period, were important drivers in these negotiations. For them, the continuation of the war was simply too

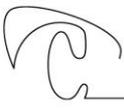


costly because they had too much to lose. In addition, after a tense period, the relationship between India and Pakistan entered a period of détente with the help of China and the US. The Afghan peace negotiations eventually resulted in an agreement in 2015, according to which elections were organised in 2016. Many Taliban hesitantly joined the GIROA political system and participated in the elections. They felt they had a good chance of winning the elections at a time when winning the war on the battlefield was increasingly further away. However, in order to appease Taliban, some heavy concessions were made on issues such as women's and religious rights.

### **Afghanistan in 2017**

Following the 2016 elections, the government of Afghanistan is relatively strong and autocratic. It consists of a wide variety of Karzai-related, former Northern Alliance and Taliban members. It manages to maintain a delicate balance of ethnic, tribal and religious demands, but does so at the cost of dissent. Despite frequent hiccups, it offers previous opposing sides enough to stick to the agreement. The ruling elites agree that this is the way forward and that dissent should be avoided. In return, they (including the former Taliban) profit from the economic progress. Democratic and liberally-minded forces have to give in because the government calls this 'the temporary cost of peace'. Women's rights are one of the human rights that have been placed on the back burner. To the international community, Kabul keeps up the appearance that it aims to democratise and eventually open up, but that for the moment more tight control is needed to ensure peace. This is a similar argument to the one made by the Kagame regime after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and which was accepted by the international community for similar reasons. In general, most of the opposition appears to obey to the new rules. There is not a lot of public support for restarting a war and, at the local level, the government manages to stabilise local conflicts. Only some disgruntled Islamist extremists continue to contest Kabul. They feel the Quetta Shura has renounced its principles and should stay truthful to the more Salafi jihadist interpretations of Islam. These groups are still occasionally responsible for bomb attacks and control some scattered areas, particularly in the south of the country. In addition, in most parts of the country the situation remains fragile as most local conflicts remain unresolved and occasionally flair up.

The Afghan economy is booming as a result of the 'peace dividend'. The increased stability has attracted more national and foreign investors. The agricultural sector in particular is increasing its outputs, and provides jobs for many Afghans. Chinese finances are also pouring in in exchange for resources such as copper from the Aynak copper mine. The country also has gas and oil reserves. In addition, the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) Pipeline has become operational. Moreover, US estimates that Afghanistan could be sitting on deposits worth US\$1 trillion – including gold, iron ore, uranium and precious stones, such as emeralds – boosted Afghan self-confidence. As a consequence, the West has lost much of its leverage over Kabul as the Afghan government can just as well get its funding from Chinese sources.



With refugees returning and decreased instability at their borders, countries in the region benefit from Afghanistan's increased stability and economic boom. Not only does the country's stability allow them to invest in Afghanistan, it also means that their own border regions are suffering less as a result of issues such as opium and violence.

After the peace negotiations the NATO mission is terminated. In spite of the at times problematic human rights and democracy situation, the EU supports the new government. EUPOL continues, albeit at a lower level. Donor funds do not decrease dramatically, although for many donors Afghanistan has become 'just another development country'. During the implementation period of the peace agreement, the UN particularly has increased its activities as it supports the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR), as well as repatriation processes.

### **Policy options**

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to DDR-SSR processes by supporting DDR and the reform of the police, as well as the customs and border police
- Contributing to the financing of ANSF personnel
- Contributing to capacity building of non-security governance structures throughout the country
- Contributing to the establishment of the rule of law, through silent diplomatic pressure to strengthen accountability, anti-corruption and human rights, and providing training and assisting institution building throughout the country, among other things
- Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs
- Assisting the provision of basic services through government channels
- Contributing to private sector development (in particular agriculture)
- Stimulating dialogue and diplomacy between the different Afghan parties
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan. This is particularly important in this scenario because all security organisations in Pakistan need to remain convinced that not destabilising Afghanistan is to its advantage
- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Assisting the repatriation of refugees and the return of IDPs.



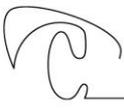
## **Regionalisation: Relatively weak governance, mildly contested, Taliban weak**

### **A future history leading to this scenario**

In 2012, Afghan power brokers had already started to prepare for contingencies in a post-ISAF Afghanistan. Ismail Khan, a warlord from the western city of Herat, was just one of many rebuilding their own militia. Stockpiling weapons and men in preparation for a potential fight between the country's many ethnic and political factions was perceived the smart thing to do. This was partly the result of the *Peace Process Road Map to 2015* which envisioned negotiations with the Taliban. The document considered giving positions such as Cabinet posts and provincial governorships to prominent Taliban, which was unacceptable to the minorities that vividly remembered, among other things, a number of large-scale massacres of Hazaras during Taliban rule. Karzai's talks with the Taliban were seen as part of a bigger Pashtun plot for dominance. Consequently, the peace negotiations with the Taliban ruptured Karzai's Bonn alliance and many ethnic minority representatives joined the National Front opposition.

Karzai continued to take a critical position towards NATO and the US. In 2012 he had blamed ISAF and US forces for the growing insecurity in Afghanistan, and argued that the foreign forces were responsible for Afghan corruption. The deteriorating relationship meant that increasingly a 'zero-option' became a real possibility and negotiations over the SOFA were postponed. The April 2014 presidential elections were considered fraudulent and were not acceptable to the international community. As a face-saving solution, the elections were called 'free and fair according to Afghan standards'. However, the nature of the elections, the fact that Kabul did not live up to the Tokyo criteria on a wide range of issues, the continuing international economic crisis, and Afghanistan's limited progress were the signals for the international community to reduce its financial commitment to GIRoA. It became too problematic to remain tied to such a corrupt regime. It was decided, despite earlier commitments, not to deploy a N-TAAM and, because of the lack of progress, EUPOL was reduced in size to a liaison office.

Following the termination of ISAF, the civil war intensified. As the ANSF faltered, the old Mujahidin warlords became impatient and reactivated their regional and tribal militias, effectively splitting up the ANSF. At the same time, ethnic and factional tensions increased as trust between the different groups and units in the ANSF evaporated. The subsequent conflict increasingly followed ethnic and factional lines. Central power in Kabul dissolved, and governance came into the hands of different ethnically and factionally dominated regions.



The Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Hazara and Baloch gained control over relatively homogenous regions, but the Pashtun were less cohesive than the others due to factional fighting between several warlords. This intensified war saw much ethnic and factional cleansing as populations of different origins were forced to flee, causing large IDP flows, or were otherwise killed. A few NGOs and international humanitarian organisations were able to stay to provide some humanitarian assistance.

Eventually, none of the groups gained the upper hand and the war resulted in a balance of power between the different ethnic and factional regional zones. In this status quo, increasingly informal ad hoc deals were made and slowly economic interests gained the upper hand. New power brokers, who had mainly been involved in economic affairs during the post-Taliban period, were the main drivers for peace because they were losing most with the ongoing conflict.

### **Afghanistan in 2017**

Power and governance are organised regionally and each regional unit is largely ethnically and factionally homogeneous. Elites and warlords try to monopolise the economic and resource incomes in the area under their control. The government in Kabul is very weak and mostly a façade. Warlords lead the regions, each with their own militia, 'police force' and 'administration'. The population's loyalty is primarily to their local leaders or warlord. The situation is relatively stable except in 'Pashtunistan' in the south, where occasional intragroup fighting continues and where Taliban-style groups are still relatively strong. The situation is better in some regions than in others. Some go through an economic boom, while others have a hard time as interregional trade is still limited. The trade in resources from some of the regions is booming. Rule of law is primarily based on informal structures. In some regions human and women's rights violations are more the rule than the exception depending on the warlord who governs them, while in other regions relatively good governance exists.

Afghanistan's different regions are primarily directed at regions abroad: the Baloch region at Baluchistan in Pakistan; 'Pashtunistan' and the south at Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); the Uzbek region at Uzbekistan; the Tajiks at Tajikistan; the Turkmen at Turkmenistan; and the west and Hazara-dominated areas at Iran. These regions and regional states trade more with their partners and kin in neighbouring countries, which also have a strong influence over the respective Afghan regions. The in effect carving up of Afghanistan may have for the moment stabilised the situation inside the country, but it has also increased tensions between countries in the region.

International support for Afghanistan as a whole is difficult as the government in Kabul is powerless. The EU and major donors support some regions. However, in the absence of a national security force there is no room for missions such as EUPOL or a N-TAAM. With no cohesive international strategy, different EU member states and the US often support

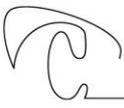


different warlords. In addition, the US continues its counter-terrorism activities, primarily in 'Pashtunistan'. The role of NGOs has increased as there is relatively a lot of room for them.

## Policy options

The policy options in this scenario for the international community and the Netherlands in particular are:

- Contributing to counter-terrorism, for example, through the deployment of Special Forces and contributing intelligence capacity to deal with international jihadi groups in the 'Pashtunistan' region, as well as preventing radicalisation in refugee camps
- Contributing to the establishment of the rule of law, through silent diplomatic pressure on the regional power brokers to strengthen accountability, anti-corruption and human rights
- Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs
- Assisting the provision of basic services through NGOs
- Stimulating dialogue and diplomacy between the different Afghan parties
- Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan
- Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation
- Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance through NGOs
- Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries
- Assisting the repatriation of refugees and the return of IDPs in the stable and secure regions.



## Conclusions, scenario planning and policy options

The six scenarios described above aim to provide a picture of how Afghanistan might look in 2017 in six of the eight different corners of the cube determined by the three key uncertainties:

- 1) Will governance in Afghanistan become relatively strong or relatively weak (effective and legitimate)?
- 2) Will governance in Afghanistan be heavily contested or mildly contested?
- 3) Will a Taliban-style group be dominant in Afghanistan or not?

### Main findings

First, it is very likely that violence and armed conflict will continue in Afghanistan. Even in the most optimistic scenarios violence, although at a lower level, continues to be part of the Afghan future. In fact, in a number of scenarios the present situation will deteriorate. The conflict may develop into an ethnic and factional war, into a north-south war, or into total anarchy.

Second, those scenarios that see less violent conflict tend to see more human and women's rights violations because a Taliban-style or other relatively autocratic regime is in power that cares less about freedom and rights.

Third, in spite of international actors' hopes that they have the capability to direct the situation, the Afghans themselves primarily determine the future of their country. It is clear that most of the factors determining the different scenarios are in fact primarily in the hands of the Afghans. This means that international room to determine the Afghan future and steer it towards a particular scenario through peace negotiations with the core-Taliban, or through international NATO and EU missions, is limited.



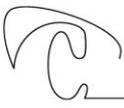
## Important drivers and actors in the scenarios and wild cards

The future of Afghanistan is highly uncertain. Which scenario the future is most likely to resemble is to a large extent determined by the following drivers:

- *Economic growth and stability*: How hard will the Afghan economy be hit by the departure of international forces and the decrease in donor funding? If these lead to economic instability, the resulting social and political instability could be devastating.
- *Legitimacy of the post-Karzai government*: How much support will the successor of Karzai have? Although many Afghans will be pragmatic, fraudulent elections may decrease his legitimacy. Much more will depend on to what extent the next president is able to build his network to include all the power brokers in order to gain and maintain their support.
- *Ethnic relations*: How dominant will the role of ethnicity be? And if it is dominant, will it have a large influence? How will negotiations with the Quetta Shura Taliban, which is dominated by ethnic Pashtun, influence relations between Kabul and other ethnic groups? Many ethnic groups such as the Hazara have not forgotten the massacres committed by the Taliban in the past and fear future Pashtun domination. On the other hand, to achieve peace, Kabul will have to come to some sort of agreement with the Taliban eventually.
- *Legitimacy, corruption of and dissatisfaction with GIROA*: Will the current government in Kabul be able to improve its image and legitimacy, or will dissatisfaction increase and further stimulate revolt? Afghanistan has seen many years of conflict and war weariness seems to set in. On the other hand, GIROA's systemic problems seem to generate a lot of dissatisfaction that may eventually overcome the fatigue.
- *Alternative livelihoods for the ANSF*: Will the current 350,000 ANSF troops have an alternative source for their salaries if the international community is no longer willing or able to pay them? If they do not, they may more easily fall prey to warlords and other power brokers if GIROA breaks down. This risk is particularly acute in the Regionalisation and Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> scenarios.

In addition, the following actors, driven by the above drivers, are of overriding importance:

- *The GIROA, former Northern Alliance and Taliban power brokers*: The most important actors are the power brokers in GIROA, the former Northern Alliance and Taliban. Which strategies will they choose? And how will their position and strength change after 2014? It is still uncertain whether GIROA will retain its strength with less international support. In addition, it is unclear whether Karzai's successor will be able to maintain his predecessor's patrimonial network. Moreover, like Karzai he will face juggling his contacts with the former Northern Alliance as well as Taliban. At the



same time, the power brokers of the former Northern Alliance may cooperate with GIROA out of fear of a return of the Taliban, but they can also switch sides because they feel marginalised by GIROA. Last but not least, are the Taliban-style organisation(s). Will they become stronger after 2014, or will they remain weak? The strategy of the core-Taliban is not yet clear. Some analyses see them as irreconcilable, but during 2012-2013 there have also been positive signs and statements that could be interpreted as potential openings for peace negotiations. It is this Afghan political playing field that will determine Afghanistan's future. The level of influence international actors have is relatively limited.

- *New power brokers*: Will the new power brokers, who gained their wealth and power in the post-Taliban period primarily through economic means, press for peace so that they can continue to profit from the relative stability, or will they start to behave like the older warlords? Little is known about these new power brokers. Many of them look young, fresh and professional, but when it comes to it they may take up the habits of their predecessors.
- *Pakistan*: Will Islamabad be an actor supporting peace or will its security organisations continue to destabilise Afghanistan to create strategic depth? This uncertainty is often seen as related to whether Pakistan's civilian government is able to control Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other security organisations. It is, however, also closely related to the relationship between India and Pakistan. Better relations between Islamabad and Delhi are likely to be more productive for Afghanistan. Further deterioration of these relations is likely to increase the war by proxy nature of the conflict. In addition, if Pakistan destabilises further, this is likely to negatively affect Afghan stability. Despite the importance attached by most analysts to other countries in the region, these have much less influence over stability in Afghanistan. After Pakistan, most attention is focused on Iran, but despite its cultural and political influence in western Afghanistan and smuggling in Nimruz and other provinces, it has relatively speaking less (open) influence on the whole of Afghanistan.
- *US and other Western countries*: Will the US and other Western countries remain committed both militarily and financially to Afghanistan? The extent of support for GIROA will partly determine its chances of survival. Donor support for, among other things, payment of the ANSF is probably most important, and more important than the presence of forces on the ground. The US will be the determining factor in how large in particular military support will be. This in turn will depend on the SOFA that still needs to be negotiated. Donor support may continue without a large mission on the ground. However, both are very dependent on how the economic crisis affects Western and donor budgets.

One thing appears most probable. International attention on Afghanistan is going to decline in coming years. This becomes apparent in Table 1, which shows international attention on Afghanistan in the different scenarios.

**Table 1: International attention on Afghanistan through different tools in the different scenarios**

International community's role	N-S Conflict	GIRoA Fights	Fragmentation	Emirate	Reconciliation	Regionalisation
N-TAAM	N -, S --	-	--	--	--	--
EUPOL	N -, S --	-	--	--	-	--
Donors	N o, S --	-	--	--	o	-
US CT	N o, S +	o	++	-	-	o
NGO presence	N o, S -	o	-	-	+	-

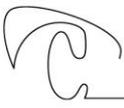
*o = amount of attention remains the same as current; + = amount of attention increases; ++ = amount of attention increases significantly; - = amount of attention decreases; -- = amount of attention decreases significantly. In the scenario North-South Conflict, a distinction has been made between the amount of attention in the N(orth) and in the S(outh).*

Lastly, three wild cards in the analysis may make a complete revision of the scenarios necessary:

*Implosion of Pakistan:* This would mean that Pakistan's influence, as a source of either stability or instability, drastically changes. It could mean that the instability spills over into Afghanistan, but it may also mean that armed opposition no longer receives sufficient support to continue its struggle.

*War with Iran or Tehran gains control over a nuclear weapon:* An international or Israeli intervention in Iran may have a wide variety of effects on Afghanistan. Iran may become a source of instability. Anger over an attack on Iran may also affect the position Afghan actors take towards the West. It may also redirect international attention further away from Afghanistan, but it could just as well make Afghanistan even more strategically important.

*China replaces the position of the West in Afghanistan:* This possibility has already been included a little in the Reconciliation scenario. However, it is imaginable that GIRoA decides it has had enough of the West, cutting its ties and directing itself completely towards Beijing. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that China will replace the international forces. In the West this would be seen as a dangerous move, but it may in fact provide more stability for Afghanistan.



## Reflection on the scenarios

The scenarios in this paper are not meant to be rated on their probability because in scenario planning the aim is to cover all, not just the most likely, possibilities. Theoretically they are equally possible, but in the literature and in interviews and workshops statements were often made on their probability. In general, the GIRoA Fights scenario is regarded as being more likely than the others. In Western literature and among the Afghan population, Emirate is also often referred to. In the first case, this is often to emphasise the need to continue the fight against the Taliban. In the second case, there is often a genuine fear of the return of the Taliban. Some stakeholders use the threat of the Taliban to underline the need for the West to stay and not abandon Afghanistan. However, among workshop participants and in interviews, this scenario was seen as less probable. The North-South Conflict, Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and Reconciliation scenarios are also often seen as less probable. Of all scenarios, Regionalisation is seen as least likely. Often Western stakeholders discard the civil war aspects in North-South Conflict, Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and Regionalisation because they prefer not to think about potential failure. Afghan stakeholders, however, often see these scenarios as much more probable, partly again out of fear of what may be coming. Other Afghanistan experts and stakeholders focus on these negative futures because their cynicism, or what they call 'realism', has taken over.

The scenario GIRoA Fights is generally perceived to be a continuation of the current situation. As such, it is a muddling-through scenario. To a large extent this means that current policy options would work in that scenario, but it does not mean that this is necessarily the case. Current policy options could have a negative impact in other scenarios and should therefore be reconsidered. At the least, thought needs to be given to how to avoid these negative effects. A good example of this is training of the ANSF (see below).

Scenarios in which there is a repetition of the previous Taliban regime are often described in the literature. These are different from the Emirate scenario described in this paper because in the latter the Taliban have become more benevolent. Further research on this topic found that a return to the previous emirate is a very unlikely scenario. Not only is the current Taliban not strong enough, it is also unlikely that the international community would allow such a repetition. In order to return to power, the Taliban need to tone down to gain enough support among Afghans themselves. If the Taliban gain control over a section of the country rather than the whole country, and are in conflict with others in Afghanistan, the view was that their position would be more extremist.

Although the scenarios were developed with 2017 in mind, it is not unlikely that Afghanistan post-transition will initially look like the GIRoA Fights scenario. North-South Conflict, Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, Emirate and Reconciliation are more likely medium-term scenarios, while Regionalisation is a scenario that typically follows a civil war.



## Scenario planning

There are four sorts of policy options when looking at the policy implications of these Afghanistan scenarios through the scenario planning method:

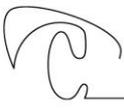
- 1) Robust option: an instrument that works in every scenario
- 2) Strong option: an instrument that works in most scenarios
- 3) Put option: an instrument that is worth implementing, but where it is important to anticipate discontinuation
- 4) Call option: an instrument not yet to be implemented, but where it is important to anticipate implementation

These four types of options are elaborated on below.

### Robust options

The following policy options are robust and are therefore recommended:

- *Assisting the provision of basic services:* In most scenarios this can only be done through NGOs. The use of NGO channels is therefore most robust, particularly in southern Afghanistan. However, in order to increase the government's legitimacy, whenever possible in the scenarios North-South Conflict, GIRoA Fights and Reconciliation, government channels should be included and preferred. A continuation of current two-pronged strategies is therefore advised – supporting the government where possible, while providing additional funding to NGOs in areas where basic services cannot be delivered through or by including government channels. In the Dutch context, continuing to provide basic services through NGOs in Uruzgan would be robust.
- *Contributing to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to play a positive role in the stability of Afghanistan:* Such pressure should be on Pakistani security organisations to not interfere in and destabilise Afghanistan. This would be particularly important in the Reconciliation scenario.
- *Contributing to the stimulation of regional cooperation:* Since stability in neighbouring countries and the region as a whole is of utmost importance to peace in Afghanistan, regional cooperation should be strived for. A potential avenue would be stimulation of and contribution to the Istanbul process.



## Strong options

The following policy options are strong and are therefore also recommended:

- *Contributing to counter-terrorism, for example, through the deployment of Special Forces and contributing intelligence capacity to deal with international jihadi groups, as well as preventing radicalisation in refugee camps:* This option is required in all scenarios except Emirate and Reconciliation. Counter-terrorism is often reduced to targeted killings, but should be seen from a broader perspective. In fact, such targeted killings, particularly when the subjects are participants in the Afghan political arena, are likely to remove potential interlocutors. The focus with regard to terrorism should therefore not lie on Afghan local actors but on the international jihadi groups that are a potential threat to international security.
- *Contributing to the establishment of rule of law through, among other things, strengthening accountability, anti-corruption and human rights by providing training and assisting institution building in these fields, supported by silent diplomatic pressure:* This option is required in all scenarios but Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, where it is ineffective. It is important to note, however, that only in North-South Conflict and GIROA Fights are open activities such as capacity and institution building possible. In the other scenarios, silent pressure on the government is required.
- *Supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs:* Again this option works in all scenarios except Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, where the situation is too dangerous and advocacy has little effect.
- *Stimulating dialogue and diplomacy between the different Afghan parties:* This policy option works in all scenarios except Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, where the political arena is too divided, and Emirate, where the government has no need for talks. It is still needed in Reconciliation to assist the parties in the implementation of their peace agreement.
- *Contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance:* As with regard to the provision of basic services, this option is needed in all scenarios except Reconciliation. In most scenarios, assistance can only be provided through NGOs. Therefore the use of NGO channels, particularly in southern Afghanistan, is most robust. Again, however, in order to increase the government's legitimacy, whenever possible in the scenarios North-South Conflict, GIROA Fights and Reconciliation, government channels should be included and preferred. A continuation of current two-pronged strategies is therefore advised – supporting the government where possible, while providing additional funding to NGOs in areas where humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered through or by including government channels.
- *Contributing to assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries:* This option is needed in all scenarios except in Reconciliation, when the repatriation of refugees and return of IDPs can start.

### **Put options**

The following policy options are put options, an instrument worth implementing, but where it is important to anticipate discontinuation:

- *Contributing to the EUPOL mission:* This option works in the scenarios GIROA Fights and North-South Conflict. It is most robust in northern Afghanistan because in the latter scenario it cannot be implemented in Taliban-controlled southern Afghanistan. In all the other scenarios it has to be discontinued because the situation deteriorates, because the political background of the government changes to one that can no longer be supported, or because the government no longer welcomes the mission. When implemented, an early drawdown and evacuation should therefore be anticipated. In addition, particularly in Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and the early stages of the Regionalisation scenario, training of police officers (which is meant to prevent such a breakdown of governance) is likely to backfire as these officers will be integrated in the militias, creating havoc. For this reason, potential negative side effects need to be considered and anticipated when providing training. A contribution to EUPOL is likely to have the least potential negative effects. In the Netherlands context it would be advisable to focus on particular regions, particularly Balkh and Kunduz, because these are relatively more robust, or Kunduz and Uruzgan, because these can build on past Dutch experience.
- *Contributing to the financing of ANSF personnel:* Like police training, this option is particularly important to prevent further destabilisation in the scenarios GIROA Fights and North-South Conflict, but also in Reconciliation. In all the other scenarios it has to be discontinued because the situation deteriorates, because the political background of the government changes to one that can no longer be supported, or because the government no longer welcomes the mission. Also, this option, although to a lesser extent than training, may backfire in the scenarios Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and Regionalisation. Such a backfire should therefore be anticipated.
- *Contributing to capacity building of non-security governance structures:* This option works in the scenarios GIROA Fights, North-South Conflict and Reconciliation. In all the other scenarios it has to be discontinued because the situation deteriorates or because the political background of the government changes to one that can no longer be supported.
- *Contributing to private sector development:* This option is particularly useful with regard to agriculture. However, it is no longer possible in the scenarios Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, Emirate and Regionalisation. It is most robust in northern Afghanistan because in the North-South Conflict scenario it has to be discontinued in southern Afghanistan.

One more option could be a put option but the costs of it backfiring in other scenarios are considered too high:

- *Contributing to N-TAAM*: This option, like police training, contributes to strengthening the ANSF in the GIROA Fights and North-South Conflict scenarios, and is most robust in northern Afghanistan. In all the other scenarios it has to be discontinued because the situation deteriorates, because the political background of the government changes to one that can no longer be supported, or because the government no longer welcomes the mission. However, if unsuccessful, the costs of military training backfiring, particularly in the scenarios Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and the early stages of the Regionalisation, are very high. In those scenarios these newly well-trained and equipped forces will be integrated in, and are likely to become the backbone of, the militias, creating havoc. Training military personnel is therefore not advised. If the Netherlands were to decide to go ahead in spite of the high risks, it would be advisable to focus on a region, particularly Balkh and Kunduz, because these are relatively more robust, or Kunduz and Uruzgan, because these can build on past Dutch experience.

### Call options

The following policy options are call options, an instrument not yet to be implemented, but where it is important to anticipate implementation

- *DDR-SSR*: This option should be anticipated if the Reconciliation scenario transpires.
- *Refugee repatriation and IDP return*: On a national scale this option should be anticipated if the Reconciliation scenario transpires. In the North-South Conflict and Regionalisation scenarios, this option can be anticipated with regard to more stable regions, in the first case northern Afghanistan.
- *Providing asylum to 'friends'*: This option should be anticipated if stability or the human rights situation deteriorates further. This is particularly the case in the scenarios North-South Conflict, Fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and Emirate, in which the lives of our previous partners may be under threat.

### '3D' conclusions for the Netherlands

With regard to scenario policy planning in the Netherlands context, the following 3D conclusions can be drawn.

The Importance of *defence* is likely to decrease further. Contributing to a N-TAAM is not robust, because it is not likely to be required in most scenarios. More importantly, it is unwise because it is likely to backfire in a number of scenarios and contributes to the training



of forces and militia that may be fighting another civil war. In terms of strengthening GIROA capacity and preventing its downfall, contributing to the EUPOL mission would be a better option in Kunduz or Balkh provinces, because the potential negative effects of its higher-level training are much more limited. Attention to counter-terrorism with regard to international jihadi groups – not Afghan political actors – is likely to remain needed for a long time. Contributing Special Forces and providing intelligence capacity could be an option.

Contributing to a (regional) *diplomacy* strategy would be particularly worth investing in. This would be a very robust, relatively cheap option that could provide high visibility. Contributing to and stimulating the Istanbul process would be a good first step.

With regard to *development*, continuing support for basic services is advised along the lines of the current two-pronged strategies of supporting the government where possible, while providing additional funding to NGOs in areas where basic services cannot be delivered through, or with the inclusion of, government channels. In southern Afghanistan, NGOs are the most robust channel for assistance and therefore a continuation of support to NGOs in Uruzgan would make sense. Such support can reap benefits from existing experience and relations in Uruzgan, as well as continuing and building on the Dutch ‘3D’ approach started in 2006. Finally, humanitarian assistance and assistance to refugees will continue to be needed.

Last but not least, the Netherlands has a contribution to make to rule of law, which is sometimes seen as part of *diplomacy* and sometimes as *development*. It is an issue the Dutch feel particularly involved with, and contributing to accountability, anti-corruption and human rights, as well as to training and institution building, and supporting civil society and advocacy NGOs in this field, are strong options in all scenarios.

**Annex 1 Policy options per scenario\***

Policy options	N-S Conflict	GIRoA Fights	Fragmentation	Emirate	Reconciliation	Regionalisation
Security instruments						
DDR-SSR					X (DDR, Police, customs & border police)	
Military training, advising and assistance mission	X (N)	X (region, eg, Balkh, Kunduz or Uruzgan provinces)				
Police training mission	X (N)	X (region, eg, Balkh, Kunduz or Uruzgan provinces)				
Financing of ANSF	X	X			X	
Counter-terrorism (eg, Special Forces; intelligence capacity; preventing radicalisation in refugee camps)	X	X	X			X



Policy options	N-S Conflict	GIRoA Fights	Fragmentation	Emirate	Reconciliation	Regionalisation
<b>Governance instruments</b>						
Capacity building non-security governance structures	X(N)	X			X	
Rule of Law (accountability; anti-corruption; human rights; training; institution building)	X (N)	X		X (silent)	X (silent)	X (silent)
Support civil society and advocacy NGOs	X	X		X	X	X
<b>Development instruments</b>						
Basic services	X (S: NGO; N: Gov & NGO)	X (NGO & Gov)	X (NGO, but limited space)	X (NGO)	X (Gov & NGO)	X (NGO)
Private sector development	X (N)	X			X	

\* X = a policy option to be pursued in a scenario. In the North-South Conflict and some other scenarios the distinction has been made with regard to the region where the option applies in the (N)orth and in the (S)outh. In addition, with regard to some policy option it has been indicated which channel needs to be used in each scenario, Gov(ernment) or NGO.



Policy options	N-S Conflict	GIRoA Fights	Fragmentation	Emirate	Reconciliation	Regionalisation
Diplomatic instruments						
Stimulate dialogue/diplomacy between Afghan parties	X	X			X	X
Contribution to diplomatic pressure on Pakistan	X	X	X	X	XX	X
Contribute to stimulation of regional cooperation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Humanitarian assistance						
Humanitarian assistance	X (S: NGO; N: Gov & NGO)	X (NGO & Gov)	X (NGO)	X (NGO)		X (NGO)
Assistance to refugees (abroad)	X	X	X	X		X
Refugee & IDP repatriation	X (N)				X	X (regional)
Providing asylum to 'friends'	X		X	X		



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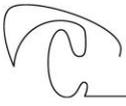
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# Afghanistan post-2014: Groping in the dark?

Afghanistan is entering a new phase in its history. In 2014, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will leave and responsibility for the maintenance of security in the country will be handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). How this new chapter will look is not clear because many factors determining the future of Afghanistan are still uncertain.

This scenarios paper develops six scenarios: North-South Conflict; GIROA Fights (largely a continuation of the current conflict); Fragmentation<sup>2</sup>; Emirate; Reconciliation; and Regionalisation (a new status quo after a civil war).

The aim of these Afghanistan scenarios is to provide input for planning processes. In addition, they aim to be a vehicle for discussing the future of Afghanistan.

The main findings of the scenarios are:

1. It is very likely that violence and armed conflict will continue in Afghanistan.
2. Those scenarios that see less violence tend to see more human rights violations because a Taliban-style or other relatively autocratic regime is in power that cares less about freedom and rights.
3. In spite of international actors' hopes that they have the capability to direct the situation, the Afghans themselves primarily determine the future of their country.

Based on the scenarios, this paper builds a scenario plan on the basis of which '3D' (defence, diplomacy and development) conclusions are drawn.

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Colophon

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