Civil-Military Relations in Post-ISAF Afghanistan :

The Ongoing Tension between Nation and Village in the New Afghan National Army

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Contemporary efforts to construct a new Afghan National Army (ANA) have received considerable attention recently. While the origins of the project to rebuild the indigenous armed forces date back to the immediate aftermath of the post-9/11 invasion of Afghanistan, the status of ANA, as well as the more extensive collection of institutions associated with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), has taken on a new immediacy over the past six years for a number of reasons. Many NATO allies and other international contributors have exhibited a growing fatigue with the almost fourteen-year war due to the ongoing costs (both human and financial), increased domestic opposition and even perceptions of the ultimate futility of the war and reconstruction effort itself. This has culminated in some cases in painful and controversial decisions on the part of some contributors to exit the battlefield earlier than planned.[1] Understandably, US, NATO and the Afghan leadership have placed more and more emphasis on the development and improved proficiency of the ANA as an essential part of the exit strategy for all concerned.[2] An effective and self-reliant ANA serves at least two more immediate purposes : it is an important signal of progress, thus vindicating the profound contributions and sacrifices made, and therefore it can also assume more of the primary security responsibilities from the various international contributors. When successful, this part of the strategy offers a relatively timely and face saving fix to a multitude of seemingly intractable problems. In fact, the United States and NATO have already turned over the bulk of security operations to Kabul and its various security forces particularly since the formal conclusion of NATO's ISAF mission at the end of 2014. Many political and military leaders in Washington, DC, Brussels, and Kabul are cautiously optimistic. Unfortunately, a careful reading of the current endeavour at trying to create modern, "democratic" and combat-effective armed forces in Afghanistan in a relatively short timeframe (as well as a more detailed analysis of political and social relations in the country) suggest that these sanguine sentiments may be misplaced. In particular, profound complications and limited progress towards the

[1] The Netherlands withdrew its military contribution in summer 2010 ; Canada removed all combat troops in July 2011, and obviously the bulk of the remaining forces left by the end of 2014.

[2] While the status and progress of the ANA remains the cornerstone of ISAF efforts, considerable attention and resources are also being devoted to other components of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) such as the Afghan Border Police (ABP) and the Afghan National Police (ANP).

development of a modern and effective ANA will persist due to the resilience of local (traditional) authority patterns at the expense of centralized and bureaucratic (legal-rational) institutions and authority that are the cornerstone of Western militaries.

With this in mind, the objective of this article is to analyze the current effort at constructing a modern *and* effective military in Afghanistan with primary emphasis on loyalty and allegiance to the nation rather than the clan, tribe, ethnic group or village. While there have been earlier attempts at creating a modern, national Afghan military,[3] this most recent case of military reform also coincides with the development of a democratic political system. As will become evident, requiring the new ANA to internalize democratic values and respect democratic institution make current attempts all the more challenging. A second critical distinction between the current effort and the earlier endeavours is the fact that this time Kabul has had tremendous material and financial resources at its disposal as well as the broad support of most of the international community.[4]

However, before proceeding to the discussion on post-ISAF civil-military relations in Afghanistan, it is important to outline the theoretical lenses by which the analysis will be framed. As will be discussed later, there is no shortage of assessments on the current state of military reform in Afghanistan.[5] Many of these also include prospects for the future and policy advice necessary to reach the desired end-state. Overwhelmingly most of the evaluations focus on the seemingly insurmountable practical obstacles standing in the way of progress. Everything from the literacy levels and drug abuse of the average Afghan recruit to the lack of resources and foreign military trainers are cited as key variables inhibiting the development of the ANA. The country's tremendous ethnic, linguistic, religious and tribal diversity is also a frequently mentioned source of concern.

However, while acknowledging the stickiness of these identities and social ties, few studies delve deeply into just how resilient these loyalties can be and the profound obstacles they present for the creation of a "modern" military with civil-military institutions compatible with NATO and other armed forces. These connections are much more than arrangements for patronage or the product of affection. Instead, in order to comprehend just how deeply ingrained they are and thus resistant to change, one must appreciate their centrality to conceptions of political legitimacy. With this in mind, this assessment begins with a brief overview of one of the field's most significant treatments of the concept of legitimacy – that of Max Weber.

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[3] Such as King Amanalluh's post-independence (1919-1929) military reforms and much more recent efforts by the Afghan communist government and its Soviet sponsor to revitalize the Afghan armed forces following its 1979 invasion (1979-1992).

[4] One estimate claims that through FY2014 the United States alone has contributed $100 billion since the fall of the Taliban of which approximately 60% has been to train and equip the ANSF. $5.7 billion has been provided for FY2015 of which $4.1 billion is for the ANSF. The FY2016 request is for $5.3 billion of which $3.8 billion is targeted for the ANSF : Katzman, 2015.

[5] Any cursory search is likely to turn up dozens of articles and reports. Overwhelmingly, these are policy documents produced by government agencies, NGO's, think tanks, and/ or military experts. For the most up-to-date analysis, see Cordesman, 2015 and Katzman, 2015. Also, for ongoing updates and analysis on developments in Afghanistan, see Afghanistan Analysts Network website : www.Afghanistan-Analysts.org.

Legitimacy and Authority

Central to any organization (political, social, or economic) and particularly the military is the concept of authority. According to Max Weber, authority or "*imperative control*" is defined as "*the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons*".[6] Of significance, in most cases the decision to comply with an order from a superior involves a certain amount of voluntary submission. Furthermore, obedience to the commands of authority normally goes beyond simple calculations of material gains, fear of coercive power or affective ties to the person in command. In these cases, the decision to obey authority figures involves a further consideration, a belief in legitimacy.

Weber's classification of legitimacy is familiar to most social scientists and is one of his most significant contributions to the study of political and social systems. Under-standing different conceptions of legitimacy is essential if one hopes to truly understand how authority is exercised in a given political organization. Legitimacy determines roles, rules, and responses. Certainly, in reality few organizations will adhere completely to the ideal types presented by Weber. Individuals may simply comply at times due to hopes for material advantage or feelings of weakness or helplessness. These instances notwithstanding, "*a certain minimum of assured power to issue commands, thus of 'authority', must be provided for in nearly every conceivable case*".[7] The legitimacy of authority can be based on one of three foundations – legal-rational, traditional, or charismatic.

Legal-rational authority rests on the fundamental belief in the validity of a set of impersonal rules. Further, authority is vested in those persons who have been elevated to positions based on the legal application of the rules and procedures. Often these legal rules are the product of agreements and outlined in formal documents such as charters, compacts or constitutions. They usually extend to all persons within a given sphere of authority. For Weber, the modern bureaucracy and its administrative staff epitomize the concept of legal rational authority. Administrative staffs of this kind can be found in both private and public organizations, in political parties, churches, and obviously governments. Most significantly for this analysis, "*the modern army is essentially a bureaucratic organization administered by that peculiar type of military functionary, the 'officer'*".[8]

Individuals in an institution based on legal-rational authority are bound by rules, limits, and strict discipline in the conduct of their official capacity. They normally receive a fixed salary and do not own the means of administration. The legal rules and norms also determine such things as promotion, scope of authority, and appropriate means for resolving grievances. Technical knowledge and skill are essential elements of control; culminating ideally in a system in which positions and authority become the product of

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[6] Weber, 1964, p.324.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 334-335.

meritocracy. Finally, persons are free to enter into these contractual relationships and only subject to authority with respect to their impersonal obligations.

Instead of impersonal rules and a fixed set of obligations, *traditional authority* is based on a set of principles that "*have been handed down from the past*, '*have always existed*'".[9] The traditional set of rules determines who is in charge and their scope of authority. Personal relations between the "chief" and subordinates are at the heart of the organization. In contrast to a fixed set of obligations and specialized areas of competence, subordinates often find themselves performing a wide range of functions at the personal discretion of the chief. Compensation, promotion, and dispute resolution are also a matter for the traditional ruler or leader.

Organizations based on traditional authority, while fundamentally bound by rules passed down through the generations, operate nonetheless as personal fiefdoms. Kin, clansmen, and other "favourites" become the basis of the administrative staff. As these systems expand, members of the chief's staff often appropriate positions and property for their own benefit resulting in what Weber terms "*decentralized authority*". The result is an elaborate system in which the personal property of the chief becomes indistinguishable from public property ; personal requests by the chief become synonymous with public obligations ; and the chief's personal favour a primary path to prosperity and security. However, despite the direct relationship of obedience to one's fortune, following commands and orders is still essentially a function of the legitimacy of the system.

Weber's treatment of legitimate authority also includes a third possibility – *charismatic authority*. Authority based on charisma is rare and often short-lived. As Weber notes, charismatic authority is centred on a particular individual deemed by others to possess extraordinary vision, skill, or power. While important, the following analysis of efforts to create modern Afghan armed forces will rely primarily on the first two types of authority. In certain instances, notions of legitimate authority centred on an individual's charisma can explain the (initial) power of Afghan warlords. However, their longer-term political and military influence more often than not hinges on instrumental calculations of gain and/or more affective ties associated with regional or ethnic solidarity. Nonetheless, warlords have emerged as one of the most dominant military actors throughout Afghanistan. While their political authority remains limited, they continue to exercise a strong pull on the loyalties of potential Afghan recruits.

More specifically, throughout Afghanistan's history, military reforms aimed at producing national, modern armed forces have failed or at best produced very limited results due, in part, to the profound tension between modern legal-rational authority and more time-honoured beliefs in traditional authority patterns (either through tribal associations and/ or warlord allegiances). While practical challenges such as low education levels, lack of adequate resources, and ethnic and tribal divisions are formidable obstacles

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[9] Weber, 1964, p.341.

in and of themselves, progress towards a more modern and nationally-oriented armed forces ultimately depends on shifts in the most fundamental beliefs regarding legitimate authority. The modern "Western" style military envisioned by political and military leaders rests on a legal-rational foundation. Authority is fixed to an impersonal set of rules, a piece of paper, often called a constitution. Loyalty is to the "office" and structured through a military hierarchy based on merit, technical skill, and knowledge. However, time and again, Afghanis have demonstrated that legitimacy still resides in the more personal connections and networks found throughout the country. Ironically, members of the various ethnic groups and tribal associations have one thing in common – their steadfast faith in traditional patterns of power and influence. For example, in the case of contemporary Afghanistan, young recruits are expected to swear an oath to the Afghan national constitution and obey the commands of the duly appointed State officials and officers (the civilian president, etc.). However, evidence continues to suggest that many remain committed to more local figures, such as tribal and religious elders and warlords, and community-based institutions. And in fact, military expediency and the more immediate security needs associated with counterinsurgency and counterterrorism have compelled domestic and international reformers to turn back to these local organizations and militias for assistance.[10] Before turning to the current case of the ANA, it is important to note that any normative judgments on either model (traditional versus legal rational) are purposely avoided. In fact, as will be argued, each model has its merits depending upon the objectives. If the goal is the construction of a democratic political system based on the rule of law, then a modern, national military may be absolutely necessary. If, on the other hand, the objectives are security-related, then local and tribal militias and paramilitary units may be more effective. This tension between more political goals associated with modernization (and more recently, democratization) and the more practical necessities of security and stability has been prevalent since the very beginning of post-9/11 efforts at developing a new Afghan National Army.

The Post-9/11 Afghan National Army

A thorough analysis of Afghan and international efforts at constructing a national military is well beyond the scope of this article. As pointed out in the introduction, there are many detailed analyses dedicated to describing the ebb and flow of this process. Alternating between optimism and pessimism, scholars, policy-makers, and members of the increasingly vocal transnational civil society (NGOs, etc.), have approached the subject from many angles – analytical as well as normative. Therefore, the subsequent analysis will be necessarily concise and focus primarily on the central question related to

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[10] In a somewhat unsettling recent development, it seems that once again Afghan leaders in Kabul have engaged regional leaders and warlords for assistance in dealing with insecurity and the Taliban : Mashal, Goldstein & Sukhanyar, 2015. Also, in response to various shortcomings in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), the US and ISAF encouraged the development of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in 2010. Under the Ministry of the Interior, the ALP is recruited from the local population and performs security and defensive functions in order to allow the ANA to engage in more offensive operations.

conceptions of legitimacy and their influence on the ANA. In essence, the investigation suggests that despite important progress in terms of combat proficiency, the nascent ANA is still a fragile national institution and loyalty to the central government and its democratic political system problematic. This fragility is not just a matter of ethnic, religious, tribal and linguistic divisions ; underlying all these ties rests a lingering commonality – the persistent belief in the traditional legitimacy of local power relationships. Of obvious significance is the fact that this dynamic is clearly evident when it comes to the perceptions and ultimately performance of the national government.

> Even though many areas of Afghanistan, particularly urban areas, have modernized politically and economically since the fall of the Taliban, patterns of political affiliation by family, clan, tribe, village, ethnicity, region, and comradeship in past battles often supersede relationships based on ideology or views. These traditional patterns have been evident in every post-Taliban Afghan election, even though candidates have sought to advance specific programs and ideas.[11]

In the estimate of one expert, the current project is the fourth time in the last 150 years that Afghanistan is trying to rebuild the State's armed forces following their disintegration caused by invasion and/or civil war.[12] The decade-long civil war following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1988-1989 and the collapse of the communist government in Kabul in 1992 saw the virtual dissolution of the national army. Throughout this period, combatants joined a fluid mix of tribal, ethnic, religious and/ or other types of militia. Of importance to this analysis, average Afghanis were increasingly compelled to abandon national government institutions and turn back to local, more primary organizations for protection and sustenance. Furthermore, the power struggles associated with the civil war encouraged many military and political leaders to proactively "*demodernize*" national military institutions in order enhance their prospects for power and gain. Antonio Giustozzi's excellent analysis of Afghan warlords captures this accelerated breakdown in bureaucratic authority in the late 1990's :

> The new elites in power in Kabul and in the regions shared a lack of understanding and disregard for the advantages of bureaucratised systems of government. Although formally an administration was kept in place and so was the armed forces, their nature changed radically during the months and years following the collapse of Najib's government. Recruitment was driven by nepotism and favoritism to a degree that surpassed by far even the dubious practices of the monarchical era, while efforts to supervise and discipline were largely abandoned. As a result, the administration and often even the armed forces quickly went into a deep decline…[13]

This significantly reinforced and reaffirmed the power and legitimacy of traditional elites and relationships. Even the Taliban eschewed modern legal-rationality in favour of

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[11] Katzman, 2015*a*, p.2.

[12] *Cf.* Jalali, 2002, p.72.

[13] Giustozzi, 2009, p.80. See also Giustozzi, 2004 ; Giustozzi & Ullah, 2006.

its traditional interpretation and application of religious law and authority. The Taliban's rapid defeat at the hands of a combined Afghan-United States forces in autumn 2001 augured well for the construction of modern, democratic political system based on the rule of law and its concomitant national army. Over fourteen years later, progress towards this arguably laudable objective remains intermittent at best.

Building an army based on democratic civil-military institutions during a time of peace is challenging enough. Attempting to do so in a security environment plagued by insurgency and terrorism can be a monumental undertaking. Fortunately for Afghanis, they do not have to confront this project alone. International actors with deep pockets and a vital stake in its successful outcome, such as the US, NATO, and the EU, are also committed to the effort. These so-called international stakeholders made their commitments clear in the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, followed by a conference of donor nations in Geneva in April 2002. During this time, the Northern Alliance (the principal and most effective opponent to the Taliban) was disbanded and reconstituted into the backbone of the new Afghan Military Forces (AMF). The new AMF would number 60,000 and be comprised of an eight corps structure. A complete overhaul of security institutions was detailed in the December 2002 Petersburg conference. Security sector reform (SSR) was to be organized along five "pillars", each executed by a lead nation; (1) army development – the US ; (2) police – Germany ; (3) counter-narcotics – the UK ; (4) the justice sector – Italy; and (5) disarmament – Japan. With many modifications and institutional adjustments (for example, the EU and the US have assumed responsibility for training the Afghan National Police from Germany, etc.), this framework remains roughly in place.

By spring 2003, however, US government attention turned towards the imminent war with Iraq, as did naturally the flow of resources. As a result, the development of an Afghan military would languish for the next four-plus years. The election of Barak Obama in 2008 coupled with the considerable improvement of conditions in Iraq helped to refocus US (and with it international) attention to the unfinished business in Afghanistan. Perhaps most importantly, the situation in the country deteriorated drastically with insurgency-related violence and terrorist attacks on the rise. The most obvious impact of this new-found immediacy was plans to increase the size of the military. The initial goal of 60,000 was seen as inadequate and a decision was made in February 2007 to expand the proposed size to 80,000 and then in September 2008 decision-makers once again adjusted the number upward to 134,000.[14] Currently, according to the US Department of Defense, the Afghan National Army was slightly below the August 20, 2014 authorized end-strength level of 195,000.[15] While numbers matter (particularly for politicians) and can be a useful indicator of progress, the quality and effectiveness of the soldiers is an obvious related concern. And it is primarily in this dimension of the ANA that competing conceptions of legitimate authority present the most profound challenges. Although the effects of contested authority on recruitment and retention will be addressed, it is this writer's

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[14] Cordesman, 2010, p.84.

[15] US Department of Defense, October 2014, p. 41.

contention that many of the perceived shortcomings in the current ANA in terms of its quality and performance are the result of the deep influence of traditional patterns of authority. More succinctly, US and ISAF efforts to build a national military commensurate with "Western" notions of authority will continue to be disappointing and often fall far short of standards and expectations. However, when viewed through Weber's conceptual lenses, these deficiencies are not only understandable but in fact to be expected. With this in mind, this article will seek to evaluate the impact of traditional authority patterns on four overlapping aspects of the ANA: combat effectiveness, corruption, patronage networks, and recruitment/retention.

Combat Effectiveness

The gradual transfer of combat and counterinsurgency operations to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is one of the cornerstones of President Barak Obama and NATO's strategy for Afghanistan. In fact, according to the US Department of Defense, the ANSF were on schedule to assume full responsibility for security of Afghanistan by 2015.[16] Recent events suggest that this assessment is overly optimistic as the ANSF still requires considerable outside help, particularly in terms of logistics, intelligence, and a host of other combat support functions. Plans called for the transition to be completed by 2014, at which point a relatively autonomous Afghan military was expected to carry out combat operations with minimal outside (US) support. This admittedly ambitious goal (sometimes referred to as the "Afghanization" of the war effort) anticipated a vast improvement in the capabilities of the ANA. And while many agree that substantial progress has been made, particularly by the ANA, serious doubts have been raised regarding this goal.

Measuring the combat effectiveness of the ANA has been an ongoing project in and of itself. Various metrics and tools have been employed to gauge the progress, often with political as well as security-related motives behind these evaluations.[17] With primary responsibility for equipping and training the new ANA, the US Department of Defense has provided semi-annual reports on this central concern. In the most recent report of October 2014, the ANA and other security forces were praised for their performance during the 2014 Presidential elections and the fact that improvements were made in a number of non-combat capabilities such as medical care, military education, and recruitment of women into the ANA. However, the report goes on to note that there was a slight decrease in the number of "capable" ANA brigades from the last reporting period although the number of capable brigades remains above the historical range.[18]

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[16] US Department of Defense, October 2014.

[17] On the difficulties and problems in accurately assessing combat effectiveness and other metrics, see Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 30, 2015 : "Questionable ANSF Numbers Thicken Fog of War in Afghanistan," pp. 1-15. More specifically, the report argues thus: "(w)*hen dubious-quality numerical data feed into capability and readiness assessments that have themselves not always been consistently applied, there is a risk that defects in the original data will invisibly expand the margins of uncertainty in capability or readiness assessments, possibly leading to undeserved pessimism or unwarranted confidence*" (p.13).

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.

In terms of actual combat effectiveness, assessments tend to be overwhelmingly positive. The most recent assessment system is called the Regional Command ANSF Status Report (RASR) which moves away from evaluating individual units and instead focuses more on "*corps unit clusters*".[19] In fact, due to the reduction in the number of outside advisors capable of evaluating unit effectiveness, ISAF now utilizes an "RASR-lite" system which limits assessments to the headquarters and "*does not address individual brigades or speciality* kandaks *within the ANA corps*".[20] Despite this more generalized approach, 83 percent of the 40 units assessed were rated *capable* or *fully capable* in line with the six-month average of 85 percent.

Yet there is reason to be sceptical of this relatively optimistic evaluation of the performance of the Afghan combat units. Some suggest that these more positive evaluations are often based on the fact that Afghan soldiers have only been asked to carry out light duties such as "*simple patrols*".[21] Another more recent assessment is even more blunt: "*Although efforts have been made to improve training since this point, the ANA still remains over-dependent on the US and ISAF forces to provide guidance and material support for security efforts*".[22] This remains an on-going concern for the US and is the primary focus of post-2014 support. Eight areas have been identified as requiring on-going assistance if the ANA is to become truly independent – five of which directly impact its combat effectiveness: force generation; sustainment of the force; planning, resourcing, and effective execution of security campaigns; sufficient intelligence capabilities and processes; and internal and external strategic communication capability.[23]

One final indicator of concern regarding performance of the national military has been the increased willingness to rely on local militias for assistance in combating the insurgency.[24] Despite all the investments made in the ANA and legitimate, if limited, progress made in terms of capabilities, in spring 2015 the leadership in Kabul was compelled once again to employ local militias to assist in counterinsurgency operations in response to a Taliban offensive in the northern area of Kunduz.[25] This is particularly worrisome not only because ISAF just withdrew from combat operations, but it also raises fears of the unaccountability of militia units and ongoing questions of loyalty to regional and national political institutions. While there are undoubtedly numerous factors that contribute to the quality of combat performance, the essential point here is that weak "national" ties between soldiers, the absence of effective NCOs and junior officers, and the rampant "factionalism" of politics and authority continue to undermine progress. A recent

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[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

[20] US Department of Defense, October 2014, p. 60.

[21] Giustozzi, December 2009, p.40.

[22] Jane's Defence, Security & Intelligence Analysis, 2011, p.26.

[23] US Department of Defense, October 2014, p.28.

[24] Some also suggest that concerns regarding the ANA are also partially responsible for recent overtures to the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

[25] Reuters, 2015*b*.

2016 evaluation of the post-Isaf Ana explains the negative impact that these factional ties have on combat effectiveness by calling attention to the prevalence of political interference in appointments and promotions (in contrast to merit or proficiency) in combat units.[26] Among other problems, commanders are sometimes unable to adequately read maps, often ignore or disregard their superiors because they have political cover, and/or are reluctant to provide logistical support or share intelligence with rivals.[27] With political authority still essentially based on traditional local and ethnic bonds, obstacles to the development of effective combat units in the Ana will remain.

Corruption

The on-going struggle against corruption in the Ana has understandably attracted a great deal of attention recently. With finances tight in all donor nations and given the obvious limits to Afghan government revenues, the appropriate use of resources is all the more significant. While entirely eliminating corrupt practices is unrealistic, just about every assessment of the Ana makes this goal a key priority. Greater accountability and enforcement of "best practices" are certainly needed if the increasingly autonomous Ana is to make the most of its limited resources. Yet just how much improvement is feasible ? In fact, as will be discussed many of the corrupt practices are quite consistent with traditional patterns of authority and their elimination will require more than just increased bureaucratic oversight.

According to Max Weber, organizations characterized by traditional authority will exhibit a distinct approach to the allocation of property and resources. Economic benefits are based less on "fixed salaries", such as those paid in legal-rational based bureaucracies, and instead on the function of appropriation from the chief. Once a person has been appropriated or granted these benefits, "*he is entitled to exploit it, in principle, like any economic advantage – to sell it, to pledge it as security, or to divide it by inheritance*".[28] With reference to resources and property necessary for administration (such as equipment and salaries), the distinction between public and private ownership is blurred : "*It is also possible that the provision of means of administration and of the administrative staff can be the object of profit-making enterprise which exploits access to payments from the stores or the treasury…*".[29] From the more modern, legal-rational perspective, these types of activities constitute blatant theft and corruption. Instead, the examples discussed below will illustrate that they are better understood as inevitable products of traditional authority.[30]

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[26] Giustozzi & Ali, March 2016.

[27] *Ibid.*, p.11.

[28] Weber, p.347.

[29] Weber, p.348.

[30] Of note, obviously not all instances of corruption are the result of traditional authority. Corruption occurs at high and low rates in all types of political systems. Nonetheless, what constitutes corruption and its prevalence varies and the point here is that US and Nato's efforts to develop a modern Afghan military are predicated on an understanding of corruption through legal-rational framework and thus poorly suited to fully comprehending the current phenomenon.

The "buying" of offices in Afghanistan demonstrates the highly lucrative opportunities that accompany appropriated positions of power. According to one assessment, wealthy Afghans are willing to pay considerable amounts ($200 - 400,000) to be appointed commander in the Afghan National Police. While this may sound outrageous, estimates suggest that commanders can make up to $600,000 per year in extortion, tax collection, and drug deals.[31] Examples of this extreme type of activity are rarer in the ANA. Nonetheless, throughout all regions of Afghanistan and at just about all levels of command, there are endemic cases of misappropriation of military equipment and resources with few if any functioning military laws or administrative punishment systems. In one particularly spectacular case of the hazy distinction between public property and private benefit, three Afghan generals were under investigation for using Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) helicopters for commercial use.[32] Devising new institutions and strategies to combat these deeply ingrained practices are foremost among recent recommendations for the future of the ANA.

Other forms of corruption related to the exploitation of public office and position that directly affect the ANA are the prevalence of "ghost soldiers" in its rank and nepotism/favouritism in terms of promotion and duty assignments. The practice of "ghost soldiers" involves purposefully inflating the number of troops in military units so that commanders can expropriate the salaries of their fictitious subordinates.[33] While there have been some efforts to eliminate this practice, for example through the use of electronic pay systems, recent evaluations of the combat performance of the post-ISAF ANA in 2015 suggest that "ghost" soldiers continue to plague the armed forces. As one assessment points out, a "*recent survey of fifteen Afghan provinces suggests that there are up to 130,000 ghost soldiers in the payroll of the ANDSF*".[34] The afore-mentioned illegal sale of military equipment, fuel, and services is an obvious form of corruption and has been identified as especially problematic in the ANA by just about all assessments. Not only are these practices a drain on limited resources but clearly impact the capabilities of the new military. In explaining its recent shortcomings and difficulties in the spring 2015 counter-insurgency efforts in Kunduz, one analyst reported that such practices led to a chronic situation in which "*neither the US nor the Afghan government knew exactly how many soldiers and policemen are at its disposal*".[35] Finally, as will be addressed in more extensive detail in the following section, "*tribal and ethnic discrimination, clientelism, and nepotism are common forms of corruption in the ANA and ANP*".[36]

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[31] Cordesman, 2010, p.99.

[32] International Crisis Group, 2010, p.12. Based on interviews, the authors concluded that there was no indication that those implicated "*have been or would be charged*".

[33] The US Government's Special Inspector for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) defines "*ghost soldiers*" as "*dead, deserted, or non-existent soldiers kept on rolls by error or intention – whether to augment a superior's pay or enable a dead soldier's family to go on collecting pay in lieu of a death benefit*".

[34] Jalali, 2016, p.15.

[35] Rutting, 2015.

[36] Centre for Security Governance, 2014, p.6.

Patronage Networks and Ethnic Rivalries

Patronage networks are often at the heart of the corruption discussed above and impact a wide range of concerns about the Afghan armed forces. For the most part, these networks are constructed along ethnic lines and impact all levels of the military structure.

> The ethnic breakdown of the ANA masks a deeper problem. Promotions within the ANA also are often based upon patronage, ethnicity, money, or personal loyalty rather than upon ability. Entrenched and powerful patronage networks dominate the promotions system in the ANA and have created large blocks of officers whose loyalty to the central government is dubious at best.[37]

Certainly the networks are responsible for shortcomings in combat performance and can be the backbone of corruption. But perhaps most troubling is that the patterns of authority and loyalty which dominate within these networks often trump allegiance to the nation. As stated earlier, this is one of the quintessential features of traditional legitimacy.

It is difficult to know with confidence the full extent of these patronage networks. However, most assessments agree that the two most extensive groups centre on former Army Chief of Staff, Interior and Defence Minister Bismullah Khan, an ethnic Tajik, and former Minister of Defence Wardak, an ethnic Pashtun. Both can count on the loyalty of an extensive web of allies and commanders throughout the country. Both men stand at the apex of a vast arrangement of patron-client networks that are based on personal ties and not on impersonal (legal-rational) rules. Often this can have deep effects on the functioning of the Army. For example, in some cases, specially trained soldiers and NCOs become the personal assistants of Afghan officers rather than being utilized in a more necessary capacity.[38] (Although the 2014 election of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah suggests an opportunity to dismantle these networks, it would be premature to assume that they or similar organizations will not re-emerge).

The overrepresentation of Tajiks, particularly in leadership positions, is well documented and the result of the Northern Alliance's tremendous influence in the immediate post-2001 invasion phase. Numerous efforts have been made to adjust the ethnic composition of the ANA so that it more closely mirrors Afghan society in general. There are obvious practical objectives behind the creation of a more ethnically balanced military such as limiting factualism and improving recruitment. This may also serve a much deeper purpose – the creation of a more "national" army may foster, in the long run, ties and loyalties to the nation of Afghanistan. However, whether or not the appropriate ethnic balance is achieved, problems and complications associated with patronage networks will remain a fundamental issue as long as legitimate authority is tied to traditional patterns.

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[37] Cordesman, 2010, p.110.
[38] International Crisis Group, 2010, p.20.

Recruitment and Retention

While US and Afghan decision makers debate the ultimate size and composition of the ANA, the stark reality is that sustaining a military force of approximately 187-195,000 will be extremely difficult. This has become an increasingly critical concern due to the recent post-2014 turnover of combat and counterinsurgency operations to a relatively autonomous Afghan military. In fact, after a number of years of relatively steady gains in personnel numbers, the number of troops in the ANA declined by 8.5 percent to 169,203 from February to November 2014.[39] Setting aside many practical considerations such as funding, the current assumption of the war effort by Afghan security forces will have to address the on-going turmoil associated with recruitment and retention of qualified and loyal Afghan soldiers, NCOs, and officers. Even the most recent, and optimistic, DoD report admitted that "*attrition is always a concern, especially NCOs attrition, given the loss of key military experience this represents. Urgent action is therefore being taken to address the root causes of attrition beyond combat casualties and to develop a culture of leadership accountability in the ANSF*".[40] Furthermore, just about all other assessments of the ANA (governmental, scholarly, or independent) cite retention as a central concern and numerous causes have been identified as contributing to the problem. Thus, while one should not be surprised at difficulties associated with retention, designing effective solutions requires comprehending its root causes.

In terms of recruitment, high levels of illiteracy and limited education throughout Afghanistan continue to create barriers to the sufficient enrolment of recruits. Once a key concern, the problem of low wages has been addressed as salaries for the ANA have been made more competitive. Ironically, in addition to competing with the Taliban and other insurgent groups, the Afghan government has to vie with private contractors and NGOs for the services of young Afghans (particularly those with skills). The promise of better equipment and literacy training has also helped with recruitment. But as discussed earlier, individual decisions to join and possibly reenlist are also influenced by lingering patterns of traditional authority. Local figures continue to have a profound effect on these considerations. As one expert on peace-building suggests, "*traditional authorities, such as religious leaders and tribal elders, commanded considerable legitimacy in the eyes of their communities by late 2001 and were poised to reassert themselves with the departure of the Taliban*".[41] When it comes time to enlist, stay, and return to the Afghan army, young Afghans generally must have the support of these trusted leaders. Acknowledging this link, State officials in Kabul will often co-opt the support of local leaders through political appointments, distribution of state funds and/or encourage coalition building among various power brokers and potential allies in rural communities.[42]

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[39] Reuters, 2015*a*. See also : Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 2015.

[40] US Department of Defense, October 2014, p.43.

[41] Ponzio, 2011, p.167.

[42] On local power structures in Afghanistan, see Münch, 2013.

A US military combat advisor to the ANA reiterates the central importance of local affiliations:

> Ever since the establishment of the modern Afghan state, Afghan society always featured a power structure 'limited to social microcosms…characterized by a plethora of overlapping loyalties: villages, valley communities, clans, tribes, and religious groups as the most important frames of political reference for identity and action. In tribal cultures, society is understood as a dense web of reciprocal obligations established by individuals in the course of their lifetime. Power comes from patron-client relationships. Consequently, Afghans perceive individual power and status as the ability to 'get things done' and deliver results up, down, and across the social system. This tendency has strengthened rather than diminished since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.[43]

Although it is extremely difficult to determine loyalty patterns and their impact on recruitment and retention,[44] it is noteworthy that Afghan officers themselves have increasingly expressed concern regarding the perceived legitimacy of the Afghan State. In one interview, an officer claimed that "*political support for the ANA is a big problem*". Kunduz was a good example of lack of support from villagers for government forces and from government leaders for the ANA.[45] Also, in public opinion surveys, Afghan respondents tend to have more confidence in religious leaders, community Jirgas/Shuras and provincial councils than in national institutions, and were more likely to turn to them and to local Huquqs than to State courts for dispute resolution.[46] Without the full encouragement of these local leaders and institutions, unpredictable levels of recruitment and high desertion rates[47] will continue to plague the new, modern ANA.[48]

Conclusion

All evidence continues to suggest that the United States and other key international actors remain committed to their recent withdrawal from the Afghan battlefield. This reality has placed the professionalism and proficiency of the ANA front and centre of US Afghan strategy. With this in mind, the purpose of this somewhat concise overview is to remind decision-makers of the tremendous hurdles that must be confronted if Afghanistan (like many other traditional societies) is to successfully be able to develop a modern military with civil-military institutions consistent with its new partners. Past efforts have failed due to a variety of factors. Foremost among them, however, were influences beyond

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[43] *Cf.* Norris, 2012, p.34.

[44] Complicating this matter is the fact that "[d]*etails of ANA troop strength and attrition at corps level and below remain classified*". SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR), April 30, 2016, p.108.

[45] Giustozzi & Ali, 2016, p.13.

[46] The Asian Foundation, 2014, pp.89-98.

[47] The US Department of Defense June 2016 report estimates that the monthly attrition rate for the ANA varied between 2.39 and 3.49% – which suggests that up to one third of the armed forces personnel need to be replaced every year.

[48] US Department of Defense, June 2016, p.56.

the control of the so-called modernizers – traditional patterns of legitimate authority. Coercion, bribery and throwing resources at the problem only delay the inevitable. Regrettably, scholars also have supplied little advice on how to engineer the transition from traditional to legal-rational authority that is at the heart of (democratic) State-building. Being aware of the depths of the challenge is essential if decision-makers are to be able to genuinely prepare their constituencies for the profound commitments required. Also, this recognition will enhance the probability that they will make the appropriate reforms necessary – or in the most extreme circumstance determine whether a new institutional model is required. In either case, in order to successfully assist in the construction and longevity of a modern, combat effective armed forces, the transformation of beliefs in legitimate authority is of the essence.

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