

©Kamoludin Abdullaev “Warlordism and Development in Afghanistan”, *Beyond Reconstruction In Afghanistan. Lessons from Development Experience*. Edited by John D. Montgomery and Dennis A. Rondinelli. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2004. pp.169-188

## **WARLORDISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN**

### **Introduction**

On 17 April 2002, Interim Deputy Defense Minister of Afghanistan, Abdul Rashid Dostum asked a journalist, “What is this warlord thing you journalists keep calling me”? On the next day Dostum, dressed in civilian clothes, instead of his habitual fatigues, stood next to the freshly disembarked Afghan ex-king Zahir Shah at a welcoming ceremony at Kabul airport.<sup>1</sup> This was not the query of an odious militia boss but the demonstration of the power of a serious force, mobilizing his resources to remain politically influential and to become a key agent in the international reconstruction effort of this desperately poor and ruined country. Indeed, who is an Afghan warlord? How to deal with the few very, and many less important, non-state leaders that have military strength, the charisma of national liberators, and the ability to capture regional rule in an exceptionally poor and fragmented Afghanistan?

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing interest amongst worldwide practitioners and academia in the phenomenon of warlordism and warlord politics.<sup>2</sup> “Warlords” has been used to explain the disintegration of states and loosing of their monopoly over the means of coercion. They are defined as leaders capable of forming sub-national militarized groups that resist the restoration of central authority and are involved in illicit activities and crime. Warlordism considered to be a destructive socio-political phenomenon - stretching from

less politicized large-scale gangsterism (as in the case of Albania) to quasi-insurgent movements (in Chechnya and Kashmir).<sup>3</sup>

“Warlordization” - a tendency associated with the creation of “freelance” armed groups and private armies acting beyond the reach of international and national jurisdiction - had escalated from the intra-state to the inter-state level of international politics posing a serious and direct threat to world order. Since the last decades, the international community has attempted to confront and control “state-based” warlords like Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, and Radovan Karadzic in the former Yugoslavia; Saddam Hussein in Iraq; Pol Pot and Hun Sen in Cambodia and many others who established despotic, harsh, and criminal rule over the people they dominate. The activities of these “warlords of international politics” have been reproduced by numberless smaller warlords, including numerous “drug lords” and “gun lords.” Wherever they take root, they create alternative criminal economic systems and warlord organizations, like the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Western analysts have identified an alarming breakdown of government and society, as a consequence of the rulers of weak states’ “mismanagement of, and incapacity to regulate, their physical and biological environments.”<sup>4</sup> Rulers in weak and “failed” states of Africa, Asia and Latin America allow warlords to strengthen their hand in tax evasion, illegal taxation, arm trading, barter deals, smuggling, illicit production, narco-trafficking, looting and protection rackets. Building a global order to protect the rights of citizens and states, and to withstand the illicit activity of warlords, whether it be Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, or Chechnya is one of the greatest challenges for donors currently engaging in post-conflict reconstruction.

Official records tell us little about warlords and warlordism. No precise data exists about their share in “grey”, “black”, or “bloody” economies and narco-business; official reports and statistics usually ignore their activities. Nobody, including the authors of this publication could accurately predict what part of the “Afghan reconstruction pie” have already gone or will go to warlords and how exactly they are going to manipulate the donors’ recommendations to keep their social position, political authority, and command over resources. However, all see that the strength of local warlords has placed security, rather than physical and social reconstruction, at the top of the new Afghan government’s agenda. Greater security is needed to encourage donors to invest in reconstruction and reduce the risk of Afghanistan reverting to war.<sup>5</sup> Equally, de-warlordization requires a certain level of economic development essential for gradual transition of hundreds of thousands of Afghan fighters towards peaceful life.

The established approach to understanding warlords is one in the light of “economy of war”, which reveals mechanism of the warlord economy and exploitation of the resources of a failed state.<sup>6</sup> This analysis is often supplemented by studying of external (financial, material, informational, etc.) support provided by outside states and sympathetic diasporas to their client-warlords. Strategic analysts, military observers and peace researchers have also addressed alarming tendencies of the “new wars”, caused by decline of state power, breaking apart of professional armies, loosing monopoly of coercion and disintegration of violence that create a dangerous gap between war and peace, military and civil, public and private.<sup>7</sup> These approaches constructiveness notwithstanding, many important questions remain unanswered. Who is an Afghan warlord? How and when did warlordism emerge in Afghanistan? What makes Afghan warlordism distinctive in comparison with other situations in which it surfaced? Is there a difference between a legitimate local chief, a *Mujahid*, and a criminal warlord? How can we deal

with phenomenon, given the fact that warlords are an important (if not the leading) determining factor in Afghanistan's *realpolitik*? Drawing lessons from international intervention in countries with similar warlord-related problems, this chapter investigates the complex political, social, and ethnic characteristics of Afghan warlordism.

While scrutinizing the main characteristics of Afghan warlordism, this chapter argues that though Afghanistan for many years suffered from ongoing quarrels among major non-state conflicting groups, the country cannot survive without sub-national leaders and insular structures of government, which, for many, seem as a main obstacle to the creation of an effective central authority. I argue that Afghan (and Central Asian in general) history is not a narration of endless and irrational fragmentation and blind pursuit of warfare. The warlord problem in the Afghan context has developed due to various leaders' abandonment of communal self-defense and preference to operate outside traditional power structures and modern institutional settings. Equating all non-state armed actors to warlords, unconditionally excluding them, and announcing a "war on warlords" could raise unwarranted expectations. International intervention into such a thorny problem - without the provision of the adequate resources to meet maximalist aims - could exacerbate conflict potentials.

### **Comparative Perspective**

One of the first manifestations of modern warlordism appeared in Chinese politics - from the collapse of Qing dynasty in 1911 until the establishment of a republican regime in 1927.<sup>8</sup> During this period, especially after the death of Yan Shih -k'ai, China's President and strongman, the lack of a political force able to unite China and to create a centralized state gave rise to local warlords. Western experts view this period as mostly negative, referring to the regime's

weakness and corruption; yet some have also seen the warlords as “performing a constructive role in hastening the destruction of the old imperial civil service”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Chinese warlords (called sometimes less negatively as “militarists”) often supported efficient local administration within their spheres of influence. Some of the local civil and military rulers, known as *dujuns* (or *tuchuns*) showed themselves to be more than pointless militarists. The Governor of northwestern Xinjiang province Yang Tseng-hsin (r.1911-1928), for example, was an effective non-secessionist politician and administrator, when central authority was paralyzed. He conducted his Soviet policy, ignoring the weak Peking Government and developing contacts with the adjacent Russian/Soviet territories in Central Asia. Yang preferred the policy of imposing strict but rational control over the local non-Hanese population to direct oppression. As a result, he succeeded in keeping this peripheral multi-national, predominantly Muslim region within China’s borders, while Russian revolutionary turmoil and the rise of insurgency gripped adjacent Turkestan and Bukhara in 1917-1926.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, the recent demands for democracy in China have evoked interest in this period and animated the debate over warlords, focusing on the questions of federalism and devolution of power.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese warlords included ordinary field commanders at the local level, as well as more prominent nation-wide political figures. They emerged in response to a split of the imperial army, and the professionally trained military elite that had lost its ability to govern the country. Connections based on kin did not play a key role. In inter-war China, the warlord issue was resolved by the militarily and organizationally strongest faction’s defeat of its rivals. The party of Kuomintang under Chan Kai-shek subdued the warlords and crushed Communists by 1928. Relative peace thereafter allowed for industrial and financial development with some Russian, US and British cooperation. After World War II, however, Chinese warlordism re-emerged

posing a direct threat to the world order. The Chinese Revolution of 1948 brought Mao Tse-tung to power. Deposed Chan and his Kuomintang Army (KMI) fled to Burma, where they were drawn into the opium trade, helping to turn the sadly famous “Golden Triangle” into the world’s biggest producers of opium.

According to Paul Rich, the Chinese model of warlordism has limited applicability in other parts of the world in the post-1945 period.<sup>12</sup> In China warlordism developed as a consequence of the fragmentation of the military class, which accompanied the breakdown of central political authority. Chinese warlords united disparate elements that were **principally separated** and inter-changeable. Most often, recruitment into Chinese warlord armies took shape of volunteering of oppressed Chinese peasantry, attracted by prestige of the commander and possibility to plunder. These kinds of “contract” groups, yet suitable for sustained struggle, were nevertheless transitory, and close-ended. Their activities were not *a priori* determined by the aim of maintaining the integrity of the units. Whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the post-colonial world, warlordism has emerged in reaction to weak nation states, feeding on strong kin and clan relations. Sub-units of African warring factions were transient, but unstable, as they were led by predatory commanders whose power depended on personal domination within the gang, rather than on his talents as military leader, or prestige among population. Liberian factions, for example were made mostly by the short-lived presence of local fighters whose status was most likely part time. Need to survive push them towards routine looting and savagery of civilians, causing massive displacement of the population.<sup>13</sup> In Afghanistan, people followed warlords not because of their (leaders) personal prestige and military status, or mere in search of means for survival, but to support particular localized loyalties in defense from external threats. The principal aim was to provide rural survival in a stateless society. Having emerged

from popular insurgency, Afghan sub-state armed force was **principally united** by the desire to ensure the sustainability of continual status-groups like kin, locality, and habitat through establishing political control over respective areas and use of illicit ways for attaining resources. This guaranteed exceptional cooperation and coordination both in defense and plunder.

This distinction has important practical implications. The destruction of militias, whose status is vested in family, clan, and local loyalties, in principle, is possible if forceful means are employed. However, shared communal loyalties will always remain, leaving future political entrepreneurs' ability to mobilize them intact. Thus, diffusion, not to mention social re-shaping of kin-based solidarities cannot be recommended as an immediate development target in post-conflict Afghanistan.

The Somalian case is a clear example of the durability of traditional allegiances, and shows the West's inability to tap into clan rule. In that country, since the fall of dictator Siad Barre in January 1991, clan-based militarized political factions have prevented the establishment of a stable national government. In an attempt to establish a strong, centrally controlled administration, the international community (UN) and the US tried unsuccessfully to de-thread the clan-based social fabric that had maintained relative order in a decentralized society. The Somalian militia and clans challenged the UN peacemaking and peace enforcement operation known as the UN Operation in Somalia (UNISOM I, 1992 and II, 1993-1995), as well as the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF, in 1992-1993). The UNISOM II's failure stemmed mostly from its unwillingness to forge agreements with faction leaders before its deployment, and from the use of UN forces to protect the interests of one of the conflicting factions. This operation involved 33 000 troops and cost \$1, 55 billion annually. Clashes between UN troops and the Somali National Alliance (SNA) from June to September 1993 resulted in the death of 300

Somalis and 46 UN soldiers.<sup>14</sup> In March 1993, UNISOM II withdrew, leaving the Somali factions as divided as at the start of the operation. In the international milieu, this failed action left bitter memories, and gave rise to the term “Somali syndrome” – a complex fear to interfere into warlord politics.

The importance of these differences has not to overshadow the general effect of the warlordization as a sad consequence of state collapse followed by long lasting violence and migration, which in their turn, destroy and corrode established hierarchies of kinship, village, and clan. Actual warlordization begins when an insurgent faction fail “to translate military success into any form of social and political responsibility that benefits the population.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Warlords and Afghan State Building Politics**

Is the term “failed state” applicable to Afghanistan? The brief answer is no. This is partly because the country has never “failed” as it has never been a “state” in the Eurocentric sense. It emerged in 1747, as an association of tribes and ethnic groups ruled by charismatic leaders and cemented through the sharing of loot and state-income extracted from external sources, mostly from India. Pushtun tribal leaders commanded most military forces and provided the Emir with an army and cavalry (*lashkar*). To create a force, independent from the tribes, the king established non-Pushtun professional units under his direct command.<sup>16</sup> In 1880, the modern period of Afghanistan’s history began when Emir Abdul Rakhman (r. 1881-1901) received abundant arms and money from Britain in return for giving up control of the country’s foreign affairs. He cruelly subjugated thereafter thousands – especially local leaders and religious authorities - in a violent attempt to establish firm central political control. To undermine tribal

resistance he moved rebellious Pushtuns to non-Pushtun territories in the North and West, creating long-lasting tensions and animosities.

This state-building project was doomed to failure. The Afghan State was always too weak to destroy tribal power and control or disarm the countryside. The periphery, which stayed out of the state's control, remained armed to assure the tribes' defense from neighbors, emirs, and the British, as well as to maintain the rural order of local communities. Riding (loot) as an established institution among Central Asian nomads also required preservation of military order at local level. As local leaders had only indirect state rule above them, and they needed the armed support of tribes, they were more responsible and less despotic towards the people they ruled. This strong tradition of pastoral non-state survival has been a serious obstacle to accommodation to centralized power. Townsmen accepted the state, put their weapons down, and delegated political and military affairs to their rulers. The rural based leadership did not. "The only solution" put Ernest Gellner, while studying North African nomad societies, is "to bring the two social elements together, referring to the tribes' "civic spirit" and the towns' civilization."<sup>17</sup> Afghan state building relied on a precarious formula, combining communal self-defense in the countryside, with the modern notion of separation of warrior and ruling class, from the citizenry, in Kabul and other towns. Local military mutual-help associations that fed on the strong pro-self-rule potential along Afghanistan's periphery, survived until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Its relations with external powers have significantly influenced the character of Afghan warlordism. This country is neither a "failed" nor a "new" state - and it is not a "post-colonial" one either. Far from being a primary goal of conquest, the territory of Afghanistan was viewed by all the surrounding powers as an empty zone, which could serve as a useful buffer to protect

more vital interests elsewhere and to secure against expansions by rival empires. The Russians saw Central Asia and Afghanistan as a defense for Siberia and the Caucasus; for the British it was a zone of protection for India; for China it protected access to Mongolia and northern China. Later, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Pakistanis came to view Afghanistan from the position of “strategic depth” in their dispute with India. Because this area was primarily a buffer zone, there was no direct collision between Great Britain, Russia, and China during their two centuries of rivalry in the region. Consequently, none of the empires was interested in providing investment or supporting durable development in what was considered to be “nobody’s” country. Imperial needs were met in Afghanistan not by civil entrepreneurs, bureaucrats and capitalists (as in neighboring India, Iran and Central Asia), but by strongmen able to protect the narrow, often conflicting, interest of the great powers. The Afghan state has no history of self-sustained development; it never depended on revenues, generated by its own ownership class. Massive external material and finance support, and huge amounts of weapons coming mostly Russia, Britain, China, and later the USA, guaranteed the state’s questionable sustainability during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. Local leaders were important recipients of external assistance. Their power was vested in the right to redistribute these limited and irregular resources.

The insufficiency and irregularity of external inflows caused continual instability and growing fragmentation within the country. To assure their power, local leaders cultivated this fragmentation. Episodically, Afghanistan was shaken by popular revolts targeted against central government’s “internal imperialism.” These were repeatedly crushed with the weapons and money provided by colonial powers - Great Britain and later the Soviet Union. Sometimes this struggle was colored as *jihad*. Yet, this local *jihad* was incapable of mobilizing the masses,

transforming communities, and setting up a centralized state. Foreign interference led to paternalism, commoditization of loyalties, and the creation of a political economy of dependency, and clientalism at all levels of Afghan society.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet occupation (1979-1989) revealed the state and local powers' inability to lead a unified popular movement. The anti-Soviet resistance emerged as a spontaneous and disjointed movement of an armed non-state periphery. Supported by the West and its regional allies, it was led by traditional elements: local power holders, informal community leaders, Sufi saints, religious authorities etc., as well as a new generation of leaders, mutineer officers of the Afghan army, teachers, Islamists, Maoists etc.

When and how did the Afghan warlord emerge? As a phenomenon of military politics, he surfaced, using Eric Hobsbawm's expression, during "the new era of uncertain or illegitimate government,"<sup>19</sup> in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the superpowers have succeeded to stabilize frontiers but not establish reliable regimes. In this situation, armed non-state actors found themselves involved in statewide politics. Emerging thus as by-products of the superpowers' Cold War rivalry, warlords appeared because of the failure of civilians to control the military. In the USSR, China, North Korea, and Cuba civilian supremacy was provided through a single political (Communist) party, while Algeria, Benin, Burma, Ethiopia, as well as Libya, Syria and Iraq found themselves ruled by revolutionary militaries. Unlike these countries, Afghanistan had no ideology, political party, or strong army to create viable central power and defend it from external and internal threats. Afghan warlords emerged out of the remnants of the regular army and tribe-based local militias led by the heads of established local structures, as well as by informal ethnic and regional leaders during, and after the Soviet occupation.

Attempts were made in Afghanistan to unite all anti-Soviet resistance groups - comprised of *Mujahidin* (single: *Mujahid*) that is "holy warriors" - under one Islamic slogan and flag. Yet,

in spite of their common Islamic ideals, the effort to unite *Mujahidin* both in the field and on the political front failed. Afghan resistance groups fragmented into regional and ethnic exclusivist groups. One of the causes for the absence of a unified army lies in the very character of guerilla warfare. Afghan society was not homogenous enough for trust to be build beyond the village, tribe, or ethnic group<sup>20</sup>. In an environment characterized by the absence of reliable central authority, tribesmen were motivated by the goal of strengthening local community and ethnic group structures that could insure immediate security and defend communities against external and internal threats. Thus, warlordism appeared not as a particular kind of politics, not as nomad peoples' innate pursuit for warfare and plunder, but as "a function of the surrounding instability and security." As a leftover of military politics, it filled the "void left by the absence of ordinary politics".<sup>21</sup> As pushes for independence, and the struggle against external threats increased, this "abnormal" tendency became "normal" in Afghan politics.

Meanwhile conditions on the battlefield called for the separation of powers and tasks within the Mujahidin resistance. Gradually, military leaders known as field commanders crystallized their leadership position. Almost all Afghan field commanders were more than mere military leaders. As Naby and Magnus point out, "They (field commanders) have moderated the political stand of the parties, and, in conditions of civil war, they have created enclaves of peace and reconstruction while Kabul has deteriorated. The appellation of warlord applies to most, and the danger for the future lies in the field commanders" unwillingness to surrender political power in favor of a central government or democratic institutions."<sup>22</sup>

During the Soviet occupation, Western aid givers preferred to deal directly with field commanders. Usually they pressured local commanders to form special organs (*shuras*) to implement programs. Being the principal recipients of foreign aid and the immediate, physical

defenders and service providers to the population, these field commanders virtually gained complete control in the country. By the middle of the 1990s, the resistance was led by five eminent field commanders. In the Herat emerged Ismail Khan (a Tajik), mutinied Captain of the Afghan army and an activist of Jamiyat-i Islami-i Afghanistan (currently General, Herat Province Governor). In addition to Ismail Khan and Ahmad Shah Masud (a Tajik from Panjsher assassinated by Arab suicide bombers on September 9, 2001), who controlled the west and northeast respectively, Abdul Rashid Dostum (an Uzbek from Juzjan currently Afghan Defense Deputy Minister and presidential representative in northern Afghanistan) administered Mazari Sharif. Abdul Qadir (an Ahmadzai Pushtun, Afghan Vice President assassinated in July 2002) governed Jalalabad and its environs, and Jalaludin Haqqani (a Jadran Pushtun, joined the Taliban in 1995) ruled Paktia province. There were dozens of other less prominent Mujahidin field commanders. Typically, regional militias secured several villages and important strategic points (roads, communications, facilities etc). They were normally loyal to mid-level commanders, who controlled parts of the provinces and were usually associated with a regional unit, party, or organization run by a recognized leader. Consistency within the warlord units varied, and shifting loyalties (especially at mid-level) were often responsible for rapid changes and instability.<sup>23</sup>

Though all militias operated within their areas of origin, the war in Afghanistan was not desperately secessionist. Unlike cases in Sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda and Burundi) that did not pursue inclusive nationalism, and were drawn into extreme nationalism and genocide, Afghanistan's case left open the possibility for the eventual establishment of a modern unified sovereign state. Nonetheless, arms and money provided by American, Arab, Iranian, and Pakistani funds, amongst others, and distributed unequally to different groups deepened splits,

fuelled ethnic rivalries and distrust among Afghan factions. On the other Mujahid commanders tried repeatedly to coordinate their activities. Starting in summer 1987, they began to meet independently within the frameworks of the All-Commanders Council. Altogether, from July 1987 to October 1990, the Afghan commanders held three meetings (in Ghor, Quetta, and Badakhshan) trying to come to an agreement and establish criteria for cooperation and power sharing. This attempt was not a great success, yet it demonstrated the growing military and political power of field commanders.

Commanders from various parts of the country regularly sought ways to expand local solidarity networks and integrate into wider - national and Islamic - structures. The most inclusive group was the Jamiyat party, comprised generally of non-Pushtun northerners and whose political head was Burhanuddin Rabbani. Gulbeddin Hekmatyar was the most successful among Pushtuns in uniting tribesmen irrespective of tribal origin. However, forming temporary alliances with Dustum's Uzbek notwithstanding, his attempts to manage reliable coalition with Durrani Pushtuns failed. In result of the successful widening of social base, and formation of alliances, coupled with realization of victorious military strategies, the most sophisticated resistance front in Afghanistan, "a veritable protostate"<sup>24</sup> emerged, led by Jamiyat military commander Ahmad Shah Masud. In addition to carrying out effective military operations and defending his base in northeastern Afghanistan, he succeeded in building social infrastructure, administration, and managing economic activity and local governance.<sup>25</sup> In areas controlled by Mujahidin, "rudimentary governments" that ran schools, police, and courts were established. Consequently, these local groups evolved into five major regional coalitions, consisting of several provinces each.<sup>26</sup> A non-tribal, Sunni, non-Pushtun, and single-party (Jamiyat) dominated Mujahid coalition known today as the Northern Alliance has been less fragmented and most

successful in promoting national claims and forming of “state-organized type of front.” On the other hand, commanders from the Pushtun dominated south where more military and politically fragmented.<sup>27</sup> .

A decisive moment for modern Afghanistan came with the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1988 and the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Yet the immediate effect of a seemingly positive political development was the collapse of the Afghan State’s ability to collect taxes, a sharp decrease in Soviet aid, and termination of sales of Afghan natural gas to the USSR. Najibullah’s government was soon at the brink of collapse. Another problem was one of the Mujahidin. By the end of 1990, the number of armed militias was estimated at 60-70 thousands, or twice the size of the regular army.<sup>28</sup> To keep militias and resistance commanders loyal to the government, Najibullah attempted to buy them off, increasing wages and salaries and subsidizing consumer goods for many sectors of the population.<sup>29</sup> Being too weak to oppose local Mujahidin constituencies and unable to co-opt them effectively, he provided full autonomy, political recognition, money, and titles to local leaders. Instead of discharging tribe-base militias, he relied increasingly on patronage and brokerage, financed by the USSR.<sup>30</sup> Naturally, these measures did not bring the desirable acceptance of central authority by the countryside. Seven major field commanders were officially asked by Najibullah to participate in elections to the national assembly. Threatening them as legitimate representatives of local tribes and communities, not as political figures competing for power, was another mistake.<sup>31</sup> All seven rejected the offer and launched a military a non-concerted campaign against the pro-Communist Najibullah regime. Finally, in 1992 they captured Kabul, thus achieving complete victory over the Russians and their internal Communist and atheist clients.

Mujahidin-veterans of the Soviet war were held in great esteem among the population.

As Magnus and Naby point out:

“Without belittling the role played by Cold War politics, a scrambling Soviet system, and disillusionment with leftist politics in the Third World in general, credit must go to the stubborn perseverance of the Afghan Mujahidin. They have also paid the heaviest price of all – destruction, death, disabled bodies, and disunity.”<sup>32</sup>

Though successful in waging war against the Soviets, the Mujahidin failed to complete their jihad. An armed conflict between commanders destroyed any hope of a communal state building project almost immediately after Rabbani and Masud entered Kabul in 1992. From then on, the warlordization of Afghan politics sped up. It took a form of the undermining of the legitimacy of the Afghan resistance and the “privatization” of warfare by Mujahid commanders. The gradual de-legitimization of the Afghan resistance was caused by three main factors. The end of the Cold War and the changing global order modified the environment around Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the fall of Najibullah in 1992, external powers’ interest in the Afghan factions’ armed leaders who were their former clients diminished. Flawed international peace-making efforts, and continued US support to some factions, undermined the Mujahidin’s international and domestic status. Secondly, the chronic economic deficits of the Afghan State pushed many gunmen to take up, or continue with, illegal activities as a means of survival. In a virtually stateless and ruined Afghanistan, the post-war revitalization of the economy gave rise to opium production. Regional transport and drug mafias established the basis for a violent and corrupt economy that funded virtually all Mujahid groupings. Many commanders in search of cash-producing activities strove for autonomy from ideological and

political leadership, further decentralizing the Mujahidin movement. Ideology was a third causal factor of the de-legitimization of the resistance.

The Afghan case shows how warfare is an essential, but also short-lived, and insufficient part of jihad. The withdrawal of Soviets troops and the fall of their local “infidel” allies completed the military aspect of jihad and made the further existence of Mujahidin militarists unnecessary. This “de-ideologization” led to the gradual disintegration and criminalization of the resistance. Many commanders in need of regular maintenance for their military units inevitably distanced themselves (in physical and ideological terms) from their primary rural social bases, but also from the political leadership and the Mujahidin government in Kabul. This “de-localization” of warfare, lack of cooperation, and rivalry between commanders empowered “war parties” within all constituencies of the resistance. The Mujahidin’s inability and unwillingness to put weapons down, as well as their continuing rivalry and use of terror against the local population, led to the moral degradation and de-heroization of the Mujahidin. This erosion of the previously honored status of “holy warriors” in Afghan society prepared the soil for the emergence of the Taliban, considered as those who liberated Afghanistan from the Mujahidin disorder and anarchy.

The pressure to keep the war going led to a gradual shift of power and authority into the hands of conflict generating warlords - from the local chiefs who had defended the integrity of the community and Mujahidin-liberators – thus threatening the restoration of any stable political structures. Certainly, it is not easy to draw a clear line and separate “good commanders” from “bad” ones. The principal difference is that tribal leaders and old-fashioned Mujahidin wished to live within traditional Afghan society. Virtually all of them were involved in illegal activities. However, some, like Ahmad Shah Masud, Ismail Khan, and Hoja Qadir used illegal sources like

drugs, trafficking, smuggling of emeralds as well as foreign funds not for mere personal enrichment, but for also to enlarge their military force, build territorially based institutions, develop local self-governance structures, and support of local communities. Warlordism usually occurs when a consistent, unified ethnic (sectarian, tribal, etc) group cemented by a shared identity enters a conflict without any positive ideology (nationalism, Islamism etc.) led by a leader who is a “lord of particular area by virtue of his ability to wage war”.<sup>33</sup>

The predatory behavior of warlords is exposed particularly when they try to control the aid deliver process. Claiming to represent local populations, warlords bargain with aid agencies and international donors to maximize the amount of outside resources they can obtain to meet their own military and political interests.<sup>34</sup> Afghan warlordism thus seeks to use and corrupt traditional clan/tribe social structures, making them opponents of state and civil society forms of political organization. The process begins with warlords blocking donor agencies’ access to communities and demanding a share of international aid and running unproductive and conflict generating “warlord economy”.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, it leads to drug trafficking, illegal taxation and smuggling, used to finance the waggings of ethnic and sub-state conflicts on national and regional levels, as well as the “privatization of warfare.” In this way, warlords join the “new warrior class” of mercenaries known in many parts of the world.

### **Warlords and Drugs**

From the international perspective, the rise of warlordism and “drugism” in Afghanistan and other parts of the world has coincided with the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War, which caused a decline in Russia and the West’s capability to monitor international illegal traffic. The Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent relaxation of the militarization of the

countryside helped re-launch agriculture, trade, and trafficking in the remote Afghan periphery. This improvement first and foremost impacted opium-growing, heroin refining and smuggling. In the 1980s and 1990s, drugs were reportedly an important source of revenue for internationally supported groups of Mujahidin.

Opium was one of the most important sources of income for the Taliban. They dealt with narcotics in the same way the Kuomintang did in China. Chan Kai-shek saw the building of a drug monopoly as part of his campaign to unite China. The Taliban, like Chan, monopolized the drug “industry” with the stated aim of uniting Afghanistan and fighting regional separatists. Though prohibiting the cultivation of opium poppy in July 2000, the Taliban did not forbid the trade in opiates. De-facto they managed opium’s cultivation, harvest, refining, and smuggling and subjected this illegal business to "state" taxes. According to UN data, during the Taliban period, farmers received approximately 1 percent of the harvest profit, dealers 2.5 percent, and regional smugglers 5 percent. The Taliban taxed these amounts variously from 12.5 to 20 percent, or diverted a portion of the raw opium to sell itself. The Taliban taxed drug laboratories at a fixed rate (\$70 per kg for refining and \$250 per kg for transportation in 1999).<sup>36</sup> Over the 1994-2000, the Taliban drug based annual revenues totaled about \$150 million.<sup>37</sup> In exchange for taxing farmers, opium and heroin producers and traffickers, the Taliban assured their protection, as well as a stable sale structure, and access to transport facilities.

Leaving the state-sponsored drug “industry” of the Taliban aside, the weakness of the state is a key cause of the Afghan nation’s involvement in drug trafficking. Here, the Afghan case is similar to what is visible in China, Burma, Somalia, Thailand, Zaire, and South Asia. The experience of these countries indicates a tendency for warlordism to come about in conditions of a decline of centralized authority and to be directly linked to increased drug trafficking.<sup>38</sup> During

the last decades, the Afghan State has been unable to exercise reliable control over social and economic relationships including guaranteeing adequate border protection, capital flows, custom and traffic regulation, taxation etc. The presence of a weak state, transnational criminal organizations and non-state actors made Afghanistan a haven for drug traffickers.

Afghanistan's geographical location is yet another factor that influenced the rise of drug culture and trafficking. The country is located in the middle of strategically important international trade routes stretching from the Gulf States to the Indian Subcontinent, and from Southern Asia to Europe through Central Asia and Russia. Because of their geographical isolation, Afghanistan and Central Asia are loosely integrated into the modern world economy. This makes them at best providers of cheap labor for the extraterritorial production and shipment of goods and services to the First World. As much as 80% of the heroin seized in Europe and 95% of the heroin seized in Great Britain is estimated to originate from poppies in Afghanistan with majority of that transported through Central Asia.<sup>39</sup> International crime syndicates in 2000 received roughly 100 billion US dollars from narcotics trafficked through Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup>

Destruction of irrigation systems, drought, and the decline of traditional agriculture are other factors that influence the Afghan nation's involvement in illicit activities. In search of survival means, Afghan peasants turned to mass poppy-cultivation.

To date, the Afghan drug trade does not appear to have been significantly effected by the war on terrorism and the US military presence in the region. Having opted for a strategy of non-confrontation with the warlords, many of whom are deeply involved in drug dealing, the Afghanistan administration risks losing the support it has developed should it initiate a direct, wide-scale attack against drugs production. Harsh measures against poppy cultivation are also not effective because about 50% of Afghan peasants are still involved in drug production and

trade. With financial support from donor countries, the current Karzai's government tried to ban poppy growing and promised to provide \$350 to farmers who agreed not to cultivate poppy on a quarter of a hectare piece of land. The farmers refused the offer, because the income they expected to extract from illegal poppy production was ten times greater. The heroin economy is so entrenched that a "war on drugs" and a total ban without the definition of a replacement crop or alternative sources of income could be disastrous for the interim government. However, letting the trade continue unrestrained may also anger the international community on which Afghanistan depends for funds to achieve reconstruction.<sup>41</sup> The counter-narcotics effort that had been undertaken by the Government's poppy-eradication campaign in the five provinces in 2003 had created tensions exactly because alternative livelihoods programs did not support this law enforcement endeavor. A study by United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) estimated that gross income from opium production at the farm level might have been as high as \$1.2 billion in 2002. It is unlikely that that international community could afford this as that was more than half of what the Government expected in total international aid.<sup>42</sup>

Though some warlords established control over drug production facilities and trafficking routes, and some are active in the illicit trade, in general, Afghanistan is a place of regional, local, ethnic warlordism, rather than warlordism of drug and arm dealers. Overall lack of security (for individuals and their property), absence of nation-wide financial and political structures, the poor transport infrastructure, as well as unstable conditions in neighboring countries (Central Asia, Pakistan, Iran) prevented uniting of small, competing autonomous commanders and drug dealers into transnational narco-mafia. As a result, in Afghanistan drugs sustains and furthers ethno-regional warlordism – rather than the reverse. The current political situation in

Afghanistan makes it possible for warlords to operate in the countryside, and for the expansion of narco-business to continue apace.

The drug problem as such has a much wider “social dimension” than warlordism. It touches upon the previously neglected cluster of key societal issues like the violation of human rights, gender, family, ethnicity, etc. Potential donors should be aware that the “war on drugs” is often been used by regional governments to reach narrow political ends – to suppress the opposition, target particular religious and ethnic groups, limit civil liberties, and tighten political control.<sup>43</sup>

The drug business and the warlordism are both long-term complex problems, conditioned by multiple factors and for which there is no simple solution. A weak Afghan central authority, a ruined national economic – which is unable to generate enough income for the government or its citizens - in addition to the continual presence and influence of warlords, makes it possible for the drug “industry” to continue in Afghanistan. The international community’s full-fledged commitment is needed to adequately address this issue. So far, drug money has been invested heavily into the wars and conflicts in Central Asia. Drugs are a risky mode of survival for Afghan peasantry. The dominant factor of drug business’ vitality is an enormous profitability of opium trade, heroin manufacturing, and illegal trafficking. It is also clear that in foreseeable future reconstruction effort cannot generate legitimate income that could substitute illegal revenues for Afghan people. Warlords may emerge as principal guardians and keepers of this lucrative business. The case of the anti-drug struggle in the Latin America shows that policies that place excessive emphasis on forceful and military solutions are bound to fail. The accent should be shifted from pressuring the government to destroy drug crops, wiping out laboratories and intercepting drug transports, towards helping Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors

fight drugs trafficking both economically and politically. The narcotics traders and trafficking networks in Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian states have also to be targeted to diminish demand for opiates within Afghanistan.

### **Warlords and Security Sector**

The security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely explosive. It must be recognized the weakness of Afghan central state vis-à-vis the armed countryside. By mid 2002, according to the Afghan government, 75,000 armed soldiers worked for warlords, and over 100,000 armed irregular combatants and war veterans had dispersed around the country.<sup>44</sup> Later, President Karzai recognized the crucial importance of security and development saying, “over a million Afghan combatants cannot be absorbed into the mainstream of society and economy without imaginative development support”.<sup>45</sup> In violation of the provisions of the Bonn Agreement, most of the top warlords maintained their well-equipped private armies. Moreover, they were officially recognized as regional leaders and the government does not plan to use force to disarm commanders of private armies.<sup>46</sup>

There are not too many incentives for the warlords to give up their military power, control over resources and population. All of them watch each other, trying not to miss the moment when the rival may break a promise and take advantage of the weakness of the others. Even those who are in the government have secured their “exit policy” against the possibility of failure of the Karzai’s government or rivals attempt to defeat them. The second most powerful person in Afghanistan, Marshal Muhammad Fahim (Minister of Defense and Vice President), at the moment of writing, kept 300 tanks and 500 armored cars in his stronghold in the Panjshir valley. In Kabul he had 10 000 troops being paid well from the government sources.<sup>47</sup> The

Governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, kept an army of 30 000 troops in the West, using income, generated from duties imposed on cross border trade with Iran. Pacha Khan Zadran of Eastern Afghanistan had 6,000 soldiers under his command with 600 being in direct pay of America.<sup>48</sup> Gul Agha Sherzai (a Qandagari Barakzai Pushtun) in the south and Karim Khalili (a Hazara, Hizb-e Wahdat faction's leader and Afghan Vice President) as well as numerous lesser commanders existed in almost all parts of Afghanistan. For the time being their combined private armies are stronger than the state's.

Among main sources of insecurity is continuing rivalry among warlords, and their challenging of the central authority. Uzbekistan-backed Uzbek Dostum's contest with Fahim's backed Tajik Muhammad Atta in the North as well as Iran-backed Tajik Ismail Khan's bloody conflict with Pushtun Amanullah Khan in the West, and stubborn challenging of Karzai by the US-backed Pacha Khan Zadran in the East in addition to continuing presence of the al-Qaeda and the Taliban remnants in the South controlled by a countless of Pushtun warlords made security situation in the country similar to one in 1992-1994.

Placing the international force (ISAF) against non-state military commanders is not possible. It is worth mentioning that at the end of 2002 the USA and coalition force in Afghanistan numbered about 16,000 troops (including 5,000 of ISAF) equipped mostly with light weapon. To change the military balance in favor of the central government, the international presence would have to be enlarged and extended to all regions of Afghanistan – thus becoming a de-facto occupying force. The sad example of the Somalian peacekeeping operation suggests that this scenario is doomed to failure, and that the international force would be dragged into another long-term conflict with unpredicted consequences. Even if a protracted

military conflict could be avoided, after the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country, another upsurge of instability would be likely.

However, there are serious programs initiated by international community in security sector. Its constituencies include the creation of Afghan National Army (ANA), the formation of professional police force, and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program. Under auspices of the Geneva Conference on security sector reform, major donor countries accepted responsibility for the supervision of each of these programs – the USA, Germany, and Japan respectively. This fundamental project was supplemented by Judicial Training (Italian/European Commission lead) and Counter-Narcotics (UK lead) components.<sup>49</sup>

The Afghan government in conjunction with international community intends to create an 80,000 army (including 60,000 ground force soldiers, a 12,000 border guard, and 8,000 of air force).<sup>50</sup> This is a first in Afghan history attempt to create a genuine national army, controlled by the central government and reflecting country's ethnic diversity.

Major warlords, commanders and regional leaders (Dustum, Ismail Khan, Gul Agha Sherzai, Karim Khalili, Sayyed Hussein Anvari, General Atta Muhammad, General Baryalai, General Muhammad Daud, and General Bismillah Khan) are members of the Afghan Military Commission, formed in June 2002 with the aim to facilitate and monitor the Afghan National Army formation. This is a very promising initiative as it encourages cooperation between the Government and warlords.<sup>51</sup> All regional leaders have also agreed to DDR program and its gradual implementation is underway.

However, bringing together recruits from different ethnic and religious communities and avoiding domination of single (the Panjshiri Tajik) group is not easy. There is a widespread

concern that new army might be used as an instrument to strengthen Tajik control of the government.<sup>52</sup>

### **Tajikistan's Experience**

Generally, the term “warlord” has an extremely negative connotation especially among Western experts. Contrasting “horse people of Gengiz Khan” who “used to live by war alone” to medieval European barons, who “despite their abuse of power also performed important social functions, supporting religion and culture”, John Mackinlay in his yet valuable and convincing study wrote:

“Warlordism involved the use of military force in a narrower, more selfish way than of barons or the chieftain. It implied protectionism, racketeering, and the interception of revenues, without any mitigating cultural or religious commitments, and was not a concept that became intellectually developed in our culture (underlined by KA)”<sup>53</sup>.

The demonizing of “horse people” as irrational war-producing barbarians and equating warlords to nomad riders depicts the whole region of Central Asia as a weak state zone filled up by numerous acting and potential warlords. Studying Central Asian warlordism, the USA experts Troy Thomas and Stephen Kiser wrote:

...”Despite the efforts of the Council for National Reconciliation (CNR), warlords are organized and violently active in Tajikistan. Significantly, their range of movements includes the Ferghana Valley and Northern Afghanistan, where they often joined in fighting against the Taliban. One should not be deluded into thinking that warlords are not present elsewhere in the region – they exist! For now, they remain co-opted by the government. Deepening roots of violence and stronger transformational engines, however will likely cause Yomud warlords in Turkmenistan, *orda* warlords in Kazakhstan, or city-state warlords in Khiva, Uzbekistan, to break with the government.”<sup>54</sup>

This kind of gloomy assessment resonates strongly with “West versus Rest” assumptions that civil society and nationalist movements are in short supply in Central Asia and much of the Middle East. They fail, however, to see important internal dynamics within Central Asian society and provide little clue for actual freeing this region from warlords. Meanwhile, the experience of neighboring Tajikistan can be helpful in post-conflict security sector reform in Afghanistan.

The 1992-1997 civil war in Tajikistan also resulted in a rapid rise of numerous “people generals”, “field commanders” etc. After the war came to an end with the signing of the UN-brokered General Peace Agreement in June 1997, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) was given a 30% quota in governmental structures at all levels. The quota did not change much, but provided as a real alternative to war for the most prominent warlords. Almost all the militias (total 7,000) were assembled and disarmed under UN supervision. It is important to note that demobilization was a prerequisite for amnestying of leaders of opposition and the legalization of their political parties. Quite surprisingly, the military aspect of the peacebuilding project was implemented easier and quicker than the power sharing agreements. After the completion of demobilization, the UTO announced its military units dismissed, giving the right to former combatants to join the national army. Four and a half thousands out of seven thousand UTO fighters joined the army, which, by that time, was comprised mostly of pro-government militias. There was a risk that this integration would fail, for initially most of Islamic opposition as well as their pro-governmental opponents remained loyal to field commanders that had appalling human rights records and were deeply involved in illegal activities including narco-trafficking from Afghanistan. At the same time these hardened detachments (national army by form, ethno-regional military bands by content) were a real, effective, and unique force able to protect the state from uncontrolled bands and insurgents. Indeed, former combatants united in a loose “national army” crushed remnants of non-allied peace spoilers from both – government and UTO – parts, and by 2002 cleared the country of uncontrolled military units deeply involved in drug trafficking and anti-government activities. In 1999, a quick and effective campaign was held to confiscate arms and introduce a ban on the carrying of weapons by unauthorized persons.

A flexible strategy was applied towards the Tajik field commanders - indeed, warlords. It consisted of: 1) inviting the most influential warlords to enter governmental office in the capital to please their ambitions and make their activities transparent; 2) sending them to Military colleges and academies outside the country; 3) providing them with opportunities to go into legal business; 4) using legal procedures to bring to justice those who committed crimes subsequently. The aim was threefold: 1) to detach the warlords from the ordinary fighters; 2) to disengage warlords from the population and destroy their criminal networks, and 3) to free central power and government from its warlord dependency in conjunction with the restoration of stable national institutions, the formation of a national army, police, legal system, introduction of the

rule of law, etc.<sup>55</sup> In result, the warlords were successfully driven out of the risky war-producing zone into a less dangerous area of grey economy and open political competition.

During the transition from war to peace, Tajik commanders retained their legitimacy. Many of the former field commanders were integrated into governmental structures, especially law enforcement bodies, thus solidifying their commitment to the peace process' successful implementation. In the 1995-1999 parliament (Majlisi Oli) of Tajikistan, among the 181 deputies there were about 20 former field commanders from the pro-governmental "Sitod-i Melli" (Popular Front). The UN-monitored legal reform and elections thereafter in 1999 changed the situation. In the current, bi-cameral, professional Majlisi Oli there are virtually no warlords left. In conditions of peace and with the restoration of security, local communities did not provide electoral support to "tough guys." Yet, nobody regrets that the warlords left the Parliament, some recall their open speeches and fearless challenges to the conformist rhetoric of the post-Communist majority. Most of field commanders have left the country, or quit politics to take up business, sports, etc. Few, if any top warlords were sentenced and brought to justice. Many of them, having disengaged from the military, continue to exert influence on communities, and increase their personal wealth. Some maintain control of the drug trade; they are thus less likely to willingly squander this power by re-taking up arms.

Naturally, these activities and the UN intervention did not transform Tajikistan into a modern democracy. However, peace building in Tajikistan has largely been considered a success as it stopped the war and led at least to the implementation of a "negative peace."<sup>56</sup> The Tajik government and the former opposition agree on the need to avoid violent conflict, and the necessity of protecting the national state-building project. A significant conflict trigger would be the breakdown of this consensus. Vis-à-vis the government, a loosely institutionalized body that struggles to act legally within the international system, the former opposition has a powerful tool – a mechanism of social mobilization (including Ishan-murid groupings, Sufi networks, Islamist movement, etc.) capable of mustering social masses in a country with few effective political institutions. The situation is fragile, as former warlords could ally with political and regional entrepreneurs to break the status-quo. This may lead to a rapid breakdown of civil-military relations, a resurgence of warlords and the hazardous destabilization of the system as happened in the first half of the 1990s. So far, the government and the Islamic opposition are leading

Tajikistan towards the establishment of a relatively stable oligarchy dominated by two rival cliques.

The Tajik case provides ground for both optimism and pessimism. It shows that the disintegration of sub-state, kin-based political and military alliances is possible through demobilization, subjugation, and repression. However, the “disintegrators” should be aware, that the initial unity of the “disintegrated” may last. Similarly, physical “de-warlordization” is unable to change cardinally the very nature of a country’s political culture and to put an end to the use of violence in communities. Meeting human rights standards and transforming the culture of war to a culture of peace are remote aims. A complete freeing of the community from warlord dependency, and their actual inclusion into a nation-state framework, is possible if an alternative haven for communities – that is a state – is created. However, the construction of unified national army, police, workable and responsible government, that may provide civil services and political participation to communities, is going to takes years to form. In most Third World states, this process is underway with generally depressing results.

## **Recommendations**

This is not easy to offer concrete recommendations, yet some conclusions can be made in the end of this study, hoping that donor community would support further scrutinizing of this problem.

Experience of Najibullah shows, that, the politics of buying off warlords is short-lived. Prices could rise up while promises undone. There should be no doubt that increasing international intervention is crucial to prevent a return to total calamity and chaos in the country. However, the author argues that a strong and viable state should serve as a central agent in gradual extrication of the country from warlordism. To help Afghan government to get rid from warlords, donor community has to focus on most essential and at the same time most achievable measures.

It is not realistic to expect that USA, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Russia would stop dealing with their Afghan clients. However, it is also irrational not to use their influence in

Afghanistan for the benefit of peace. International community should force regional governments to put an unendurable pressure on warlords forcing them to factually reconcile and recognize central government. The precedent of this kind have already taken place in Tajikistan in the middle of the 1990s, when Russia and Iran, alarmed by the rise of the Taliban put pressure on their clients – post-Communist secular Dushanbe and Afghanistan and Iran-based United Tajik Opposition (UTO) respectively and forced them to make a peace. International community have to relate its development and aid programs in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia as well as other involved countries with demands to contribute into peace process in Afghanistan. Governments of neighboring states should be convinced that donors' assistance could grow enormously if they help Afghan government to sustain peace and all sides would, finally benefit from the stabilization. For those continuing the interference into Afghanistan affairs, harsh measures have to be applied. The fueling the rivalry between Dostum and Atta, for example, is to a great extend a result of the Uzbekistan's intervention.<sup>57</sup> Donor community has an effective instrument to extend its influence on most of Afghanistan neighbors, as international aid's share in their budgets is enormous. However, current development and aid programs in Central Asia have barely addressed the security issues in Afghanistan. There is a need for an integrated, inclusive, and principled approach to the reconstruction. It should be firmly anchored to overall regional security and confidence building in Central and Southern Asia and Middle East. This "securitizing" of reconstruction in Afghanistan is crucial for the de-warlordization of the region. Similarly, the US must to stop providing unrestricted support to Afghan warlords at the pretext of "war on terror". Particularly, they should fasten their cooperation with Uzbekistan to "de-warlordization" of the North. The US has also to halt empowering Pacha Khan Zadran, who openly challenging Karzai. Remnants of the Taliban can be eliminated with the help of the

emerging Afghan National Army, as it happen in Tajikistan, when UTO fighters and governmental forces crashed the Uzbekistan-backed warlord colonel Khudoiberdiev's incursion in 1998.

In addition to outside pressures, which should be secured by international donor community, and neighboring governments, it is important to support the internal "de-warlordization drive" of the Afghans. Afghan communities have openly to express their growing antagonism and confrontation to criminal warlords. War exhaustion could help to build up this pressure. Donors' contribution here can take place in the form of supporting NGO sector involved in human right activities, local communities empowering, family and gender related projects in Afghanistan. Afghan NGOs can play a monitoring role of both government and UN reconstruction efforts. Local approach to peacemaking should be given a priority versus various international models elaborated by academic peace conferences. This endeavor would not be expensive as the costs of humanitarian projects are much lower comparing with ones related to direct military engagement to combat warlords. The keeping of one fully trained soldier on the ground costs hundreds of thousands of USD, while most NGO work almost voluntary. Attention should be focused on local institutions capacity building based on "bottom-up" strategy. Traditional institutions of power, including *shura*, a mosque-based council, comprised of popular representatives, should emerge as key agents in community governance, and serve as a counterbalance to warlords who habitually corrupt these communal structures to promote their individual, criminal interests. These traditional institutes and networks, a long-lasting warlordization notwithstanding, survived, providing ground for optimism. They are likely to remain central to Afghan politics. The issue is to free them from warlord dependency. Traditionally Afghan power structures were rooted in a fragile coalition between capital-based

elites – who controlled the state apparatus - and local power holders. The former had sub-contracted the latter in a form of state patronage. This personified patron-client connection provided the illusion that links between ethnic communities and the government existed. In the current situation, warlords could privatize their local networks and re-establish patron-client relationships with the central apparatus claiming their right to ethnic representation. These warlord-state alliances will inevitably lead to a type of nation building that is characterized by a weak and corruptive state without civil society, political parties, and free market.

Having recognized that “the man with the gun” is virtually the leading element of Afghanistan’s *realpolitik*, it is essential to note that warlords’ stand in society is different, depending on their public role, ethical status, attitude towards the population of the area they control and readiness to compromise in the interests of peace and national unity. The author of this chapter opposes the use of an essentialist definition of warlords - that labels all armed non-state agents of “failed states” pejoratively, equating local chiefs and liberation leaders, with “warlords of international crime” and “client warlords”.<sup>58</sup> This conceptualization of warlords is linked to the dominant Western peace building approach, which gives preference to the Western educated secular elites who occupy administrative and governmental positions in the capital, and considers all armed non-state agents in the periphery as “warlords.” In this chapter, I am proposing the existence of a clear distinction between legitimate popular and religious leaders, and the armed groupings that operate outside **any** legal framework. To deal with the latter requires enlisting the support of civil society resources to combat warlordism and restore state authority in Afghanistan.

The most important part of factual eradication of warlordism is yet military and political discharging of warlords

Cooptation is a most promising so far form of dealing with warlords. It implies deliberate convincing of Mujahidin to put weapon down, integrate with central government, and join legal politics. Creating incentives for this kind of transformation is crucial as it has important implications for the modeling of an effective power distribution formula for Afghanistan.

Power sharing and designing a suitable structure for the future Afghan State is of high importance for moving warlords out of “war zone”. There are roughly two options available in the state building project to address the warlord challenge, namely centralization and decentralization

Centralization aims to constitute an internationally backed strong centralized national authority capable of getting rid of warlords and uniting all sub-national groups. Few if any consider that this option could succeed in the short-term. Yet many Westerns authors and human rights promoters support it, portraying all commanders as criminal warlords. The most common way to implement centralization consists of picking the victor(s) and helping him, (them) subdue or contract non-state rivals. This approach, however, has been tried before, as recalls the Emir Abdur Rakhman Durrani’s failed state-building project of more than one hundred years ago. Restoring of Pushtun domination or creation a Tajik-controlled Afghanistan instead, is not among the best options because of the lack of social cohesion required for such a bid and inevitable resort to violence and the warlords empowering that it would cause. From the perspective of nation-ness, recovering Afghanistan must face the emergence of ethnically close independent mono-national states in Central Asia.

Another issue is in dichotomy between religious versus secular state-building projects. Afghanistan is designated as an Islamic state, while neighboring Central Asian states – and even Pakistan - pursue, at least *de jure*, secular and democratic projects. Both paths are complicated,

obscure, and open ended, given the general failure of Islamic state formation as well as the “unfulfilled promise” of post-Communist Central Asian states to build open societies, effective governance and market economies.<sup>59</sup>

The complexity of state building in Afghanistan creates incentives in favor of centralization.<sup>60</sup> However, the option of restoring a highly centralized Afghanistan contains in it a danger of confrontation between an externally supported center and peripheral warlords often backed by regional neighbors and diasporas.

Decentralization is another option. Recently the debate on institution building in Afghanistan has taken a new turn. Several analysts have begun to advocate for federalism, and devolution of power given the upsurge of pressures for national self-determination, and need to free the country from “person-centered politics and internal colonialism” associated with the period of Pushtun domination.<sup>61</sup> Back on February 2, 2003 a seminar titled “Federalism and the Future Afghan Political System” was held in northern city of Mazari Sharif advocating “a federal, democratic and parliamentary system or a union in which all central and provincial organs of government are chosen by direct and secret ballot and in which people in the provinces have a right to chose their own leaders.”<sup>62</sup> While others recommend decentralization as the only realistic - yet not desirable - option for dealing with warlords. They call for discarding the “unrealistic idea” of building a strong central authority. Their proposal is that “central power must perform minimal tasks, while warlords and tribal leaders will control the rest”.<sup>63</sup> International donors however, do not for the time being willing to accept this option unconditionally as it would require the legitimization of existing regional groupings, sharpening of ethnic divisions, and the factual “balkanization” of Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup>

Neither strong centralization and wide-scale social engineering, nor giving up the periphery to tribal leaders and leaving things “as it is,” can solve the governance puzzle in Afghanistan. As it has been mentioned above, the creation of a legitimate and effective Afghan state with a workable central authority is essential to free the country from warlordism. Warlord structures provide both opportunities and obstacles for such a bid. Given the complexity of Afghan warlordism, the most important task is to separate its political and military constituencies. This implies recognizing warlords as influential political figures and non-state militia commanders, but not as legitimate local leaders. The task here is to discharge them militarily and use their political potential positively.

Certainly, the international community did not initially intend to apply a gradual approach involving compromise with warlords, at the expense of democracy. However, stopping the war and achieving relative peace can make further steps towards democracy possible.

The appropriateness of dealing with warlords in peace processes was been recently underlined by former Russian Prime Minister Eugenie Primakov, who advocated using Tajik peace making as a model for Chechnya. He argues that the core of the talks with Chechen field commanders should be, as in Tajikistan, the definition of conditions under which these commanders would be prepared to disarm, and the benefits they would receive for doing so. This proposal’s applicability to the Afghan situation is questionable, because of the differences between these three countries. Afghanistan and Tajikistan were (and remain) independent countries, while Chechnya is, and under any peace proposal acceptable to Moscow must remain, a constituent part of the Russian Federation.<sup>65</sup> Besides, in the almost mono-national, and generally Sunni, Tajikistan it was not difficult to pacify the two warring Tajik factions under the cover of Tajik nationalism especially with regard to growing Pushtun nationalism in Taliban-

dominated Afghanistan. While in multi-national Afghanistan with ardent Shi'a pockets, it will not be easy to find an acceptable power-sharing formula. Nevertheless, the Tajik peace process' main message, which is worth being taken into account in Afghanistan, is of the need to settle problems through direct negotiations and bargaining, rather than through confrontation with local militarized power holders. The Tajik case has been a bright example of successful UN-brokered bargaining between governmental and Islamic militants. It showed that Muslim politics is not inevitably and desperately radical and anti-systemic.

Power- and responsibility sharing is a well-honored principle to use in situations where protracted conflict has polarized society and politics. The accusing of strongmen as hopelessly illegitimate leaders which most of Western media is currently engaged in, and their contrasting with the US-backed "legitimate government", is as counter-productive as the dichotomization between "traditional vs. modern" in Muslim societies.<sup>66</sup> The transition process of the Afghan society from "the abode of war" to the "abode of peace," from militancy to revival, will take years. There is no doubt that Afghan warlords pose serious challenge to the Transitional Government. However, the tactics applied towards them have to be based on concession rather than pressure. With crimes committed by all Afghan factions, and the pressure to follow human rights international standards being exerted on all, the issue of real national reconciliation has to be solved in accordance with Afghan notions of right and wrong.<sup>67</sup>

Focusing donors' efforts on local capacity building requires effective representative central government. A cabinet built upon a system of quotas (based on region, ethnicity, gender, sect etc.) will not be as effective as a merit-based professional one. Weak central government should be balanced with a deliberate transfer of power to ethnic and local identities, and the building of their capacities. Armless Mujahidin, supported by a local electorate, legalized and re-

instated in due order, may lead their communities. Attempts to create a highly centralized state in the interests of any, even dominant ethnic group, (or groups) could lead the international community into another long-lasting protracted conflict as it happened in Somalia in the 1990s. Perhaps federalism and the decentralization of power among diverse civil society actors, is the most preferable framework to extricate Afghanistan from warlordism and preserve the country's unity. Yet the probability of various warlords supporting federalism as a pretext to exert their control with little interference from Kabul is high. Oppositely, some may insist in centralization in an attempt to restore "internal imperialism" and Pushtun domination. Most likely, the debate around new Constitution could exacerbate new round of rivalry and conflict between North and South. In the beginning of 2003 the Governor of Nangarhar Din Muhammad, (a Pushtun) have expressed support of "strong federal government", while Tajik Ismail Khan and Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dustum favored federal system. <sup>68</sup>

In Afghanistan, the warlords have emerged from liberation movement. Most of them have charisma of national heroes. If international reconstruction effort fails, in the years to come warlords would attract more immediate sympathy among poor and starving population to resist nation and state building in Afghanistan and threatening international security.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: McCord, Edward (1992). *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press); Rich, Paul B., ed. (1999). *Warlords in International Relations*, (London & New York: Macmillan Press LTD); Reno, William. (1999). *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

<sup>3</sup> Rich, Paul B., ed. (1999),. xii.

<sup>4</sup> Reno, William (1999), 217

<sup>5</sup> Durch, William B. (2002). *Security and Peace Support in Afghanistan: Analysis and Short- to Medium-term Options*, Rev.5 (Henry L. Stimson Center), 25 (<http://www.stimson.org/fopo/>)

<sup>6</sup> Rubin Barnett (1999) “The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan”  
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<sup>45</sup> Sedra, Mark (2002). *Challenging the Warlord Culture: Security Sector reform in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (Bonn: International Center for Conversion, paper 25), 23.

<sup>46</sup> “Kabul Will Not Forcibly Disarm Warlords”

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<sup>54</sup> Troy S. Thomas and Stephen D. Kiser (2002). “Lords of the Silk Route: Violent Non-State Actors in Central Asia”, 80.

<sup>55</sup> See: Abdullaev, Kamoludin and Barnes, Catherine (2001) *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, (London: Conciliation Recourses).

<sup>56</sup> In the beginning of 2002, conceivably under the pressure of USA and/or Russia the Tajik president dismissed three ministers (custom, border protection, and taxes) allegedly heavily involved in corruption and warlord politics. Besides, two other former militias, commanders of National Army were suggested, “to change a place of job”.

<sup>57</sup> Sedra, Mark. (2002), 15.

<sup>58</sup> Chan, Stephen, “The Warlord and Global Order”, in Rich Paul B. (1999). *Warlords in International Relations*, 167-167.

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<sup>62</sup> “Mazar-e Sharif Hosts Conference On Federalism”

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<http://www.ceip.org/files/events/events.asp?EventID=442>

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<sup>68</sup> “Nangarhar Governor Supports a Strong Central Government in Kabul”

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