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Conference Item [paper]

Original citation:

Originally presented at *State reconstruction and international engagement in Afghanistan*, 30 May – 1 June 2003, London School of Economics and Political Science and University of Bonn

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28359/>

Available in LSE Research Online: June 2010

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**‘Empire light¹ – state light’ – transforming the punctuated equilibrium or a pathway to extinction?
an introductory paper to the symposium.**

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Symposium on *State Reconstruction and International Engagement in Afghanistan*.
London School of Economics and University of Bonn, Bonn, 30 May – 1 June 2003.

I Introduction

The stated objective of this meeting is to assess the progress that has been made in the first year of the international involvement in Afghanistan’s ‘reconstruction’, on this basis provide insights on how interventions should be modified and to look for lessons that might have wider relevance. The audience is ourselves and unspecified interested parties in the wider world to whom we hope to convey lessons. The focus of the discussion is around key functions of the state – the provision of security, political organisation and representation, fiscal systems and the rule of law. What of course is notably missing is any welfare function that has been stripped out in the new brave world of ‘state-light’.

My purpose in this introduction is to set a scene and situate the particulars that we will be debating and it is not my intention here to specifically address any of the detailed issues that we will cover later. But it seems to me that since we are fundamentally talking about a state building project we need to keep our eye on two particular balls. The first is this broader state building exercise and our theoretical and empirical models that we are explicitly or intuitively working with. I should say at the outset that there is much that I have seen and heard over these last two years particularly in the Kabul ‘bubble’ that has amazed me – the treating of state building as a normative, unambiguous and certain exercise when there is so much that I find problematic, uncertain and debatable. In that sense I hope the discussion that we have over the next two days does not stick with mechanics, practicalities and expediency but is used to

¹ This title is derived from Ignatieff’s (2003) ‘Empire-lite’; the American ‘lite’ as low in calories does not convey the richness of meaning of the English ‘light’ which I prefer;

² These are personal comments and should not be taken to represent the position of the AREU. I am contactable at adam@areu.org.pk or a.pain@uea.ac.uk

reflect seriously on theory and method, as robust analytical method should properly do. This will I think (and hope) raise fundamental issues around conceptions of ‘failed state’, state building and reconstruction.

My second focus is ‘the ground’ and to use selected material both to reflect on what is actually happening but to use it with respect to exploring the practice of ‘state-light’ building. I raise this because I think the prospect of Afghanistan unravelling completely (and its current trajectory is most clearly in that direction) is real. What would come out of that might be a huge ‘borderland’, which parts of the south of the country have already become³ and the borderland’s theme is one that I return to later. More to the point what would we learn from the unravelling? – would it be that we simply did not do our business very well? – and there are many who will point to the failure to establish ISAF beyond Kabul, for example, as a key implementation failure and lesson to be learnt. Or would it challenge more our very conceptions of nation state and the state building project. As Milliken and Krause (2002) have pointed out (p766)

‘ the issue of state collapse has merit in that it forces us to reconsider some of our least-examined assumptions about states and the state system. Once state collapse is seen, not as an ‘abnormal’ event, but as one possible outcome of the ongoing process of state formation (and decay), we can enter into a dialogue with other scholars who examine the historical evolution of the Westphalian system’

There is a third related issue, which I will touch on briefly now, and is one to be kept in mind, is what we are going to do with this discussion. To simply ‘present’ it to the key players (who ever they are) seems somewhat bland and hopeful – and there is no certainty that they would listen or even want to. Informing policy processes is often an appeal to a construct of policy making based on rational informed argument that bears little relation to a reality of rather deep political and competitive processes. I have in mind the uncontested establishment of the ‘‘state-light’’ motif in late November 2001, and how highly visible and authoritative it was (along with other

³ Ashraf Ghani, the Finance Minister, recently held out the prospect to a meeting of donors in Brussels of a descent into a nacro-mafia economy as one of three potential trajectories for Afghanistan, New York Times, June 1, 2003.

constructs of Afghanistan which we shall return to later) even before the paper was signed in Bonn, December 2001⁴. By all means ‘present’ and ‘inform’ to policy makers and pursue these objectives but I think that there is potentially a more serious and important project to engage in with respect to an agenda on understanding better the nature and processes of state collapse in Afghanistan and to ‘the normative and practical underpinnings of .. efforts to recreate states after collapse’ (Milliken & Krause, op.cit. p772).

I will be quite open about all my disqualifications for opening this meeting. Although I have worked in Afghanistan since early 2001, I do not have the depth of experience or understanding that many here today have – I constantly feel that I am on a learning curve that gets steeper and poorly equipped with skills or experience to understand wider processes. What I offer then to this discussion is a perspective from the field but it is shaped by a decade in the Himalayas, much of which was spent in a small Buddhist state at the eastern end which first started me thinking about mountain economies, state and non-state spaces and geographical and historical contingencies, an optic which I will apply to Afghanistan.

But it is from the field that I start.

II The state of play – evidence from the field⁵.

Mazar-e-Sharif is located within the Balkh province about an hour from the banks of the Amur River. This river (formerly called the Oxus) divides the plains of northern Afghanistan from Uzbekistan. From the 1930s the town was the major commercial centre for northern Afghanistan, drawing qaraqul skins (sheep skins), carpets and kilims (rugs), agricultural produce from the surrounding provinces of Jowsjan, Samangan, Saripul and Faryab and exporting these on to Kabul some 270 miles south

⁴ ‘State-light’ as an outcome is debatable enough but the model does not provide any authoritative route map for getting there from start or the process of state building.

⁵ This is extracted from Pain & Ali ‘War and Peace in Afghanistan’ an unpublished paper given to South Asia Research Workshop “ Conflict in South Asia”, Development Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich June 18, 2002. It has not been updated to take account of changes under the Afghan Transitional Authority as the basic picture still stands.

east (and from 1979 northwards into Soviet and subsequently ex-Soviet territories). It was also a major industrial town with fertiliser and textile production.

Northern Afghanistan was largely settled by non-Pashtuns, including Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen and Hazaras although from the time of Abdur Rahman in the late 19th century a substantial population of people of Pashtun origin were settled in the north, and Balkh city some 13 miles west of Mazar contains a sizeable nucleus of these.

With the Soviet invasion in 1979, Mazar became a major stronghold in the north of the Kabul regime given its defensive position (isolated in a flat terrain) and proximity to the then Soviet border. With the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1988 upto the fall of President Najibullah in 1992, it remained a stronghold of various parties that were to become constituent members of the temporary factional alliances that were to hold Kabul from 1992 until it was taken by the Taliban in 1996. From 1992 the key players in Mazar and the surrounding provinces were the parties of Jumbesh (National Islamic Movement under Dostum, Uzbek), Jamiat-i Islami (Islamic Society, Sunni Muslim, Islamist⁶ under Rabbani, mainly Tajik) and Hisb-I Wahdat (Unity Party, Shia Muslim, mainly Hazaras) with Jumbesh possibly having the upper hand.

In 1997 the Taliban made their first assault on Mazar and with various purchased alliances succeeded in entering the city. They however failed to maintain the support that they negotiated and an uprising drove them out and led to the massacre of an estimated 2000 - 4000 Taliban soldiers. The Taliban was to retake Mazar a year later and exacted revenge most noticeably against the Hazaras. Tension in the city remained high throughout the rule of the Taliban and some of the fiercest fighting after September 11th was in and around Mazar. There have been consistent reports since that date of revenge attacks against Pushtuns settled in the north.

The current constellation of players and parties in and around Mazar is summarised in Table 1 collating from various informal and anecdotal sources what little information there is to be had on their representation and power base. Noted here are some of the key features of each in turn.

⁶ They were the first party to ban women from working, and Ismael Khan's current discriminatory policies in Herat are a fair reflection of their position (Andrew Wilder, personal communication)

First in terms of the power base (which is a crude reflection of armaments, population and broader allegiances) is the Jamiat, a party of Islamic leanings, vehemently anti-

Table 1: Northern Afghanistan Players*

Parties	Jamiat	Jumbesh	Hisb-i-Wahdat
Position	Moderate Islamic Anti-Communist Anti-Monarchy	Pro Uzbek Pro Monarchy *	Moderate Islamic Anti-Communist Pro Hazara
Key Players	Ustad Atta	General Dostum	Mukkat
Background	Mujahideen Elite	Communist / Northern Alliance	Mullah, Mujahideen
Supra-Regional	Northern Alliance	None	Jumbesh as anti Balkhi
Position in Interim Authority	No	Deputy Minister of Defence	Minister of Planning
Other Party	Foreign Minister	Minister of Power	Minister of Health
Members in IA	Defence Minister		
Provincial Base	Mazar, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takar, Samargan. Saripul	Jawzjan (Shebargang) Faryab Saripul	Mazar
Ethnic Appeal	Tajik	Uzbek	Hazara
Numbers	Pop 1	Pop 3	Pop 4
Power Base	Power 1	Power 2	Power 3
Regional Alliance	(a) Arab (b) Pushtun		
Provincial base of regional alliance	(a) Badakshan, Balkh, Faryab (b) Balkh		
Regional Alliance	(a) Pop 5, Pow 4 (b) Pop 2, Pow 5		
No			
Resource base	Urban Taxation 33% Fertiliser Factory Agriculture	Cross border trade 33% Fertiliser Factory Gas Oil Agriculture	33% Fertiliser
External Support	Tajikstan in kind France Iran?	Uzbekistan USA? Turkey?	Iran?

* This has not been updated to the ATA.

communist and built out of a Mujahideen movement and with a wide provincial base stretching both southwards and to the east. The regional head Ustad Atta is not a member of the Interim Authority but many members of Jamiat are, including both the Foreign and Defence Ministers. Ustad Atta has credibility on grounds of both his Mujahideen history and coming from a prominent family in Mazar.

Key regional alliances exist with the Arabs (also of Tajik origin) and the Pushtun population of Balkh and Ustad Atta, built on Balkh's strategic location between Shiberghan to the west (the Jumbesh stronghold), previous protection provided by the Balkhi's to Atta when he was captured by the Taliban and combined dislike of the Jumbesh and General Dostum. The resource base of Ustad Atta is derived from a combination of urban taxation (each satellite phone connection is reported to be taxed some US\$ 1000 per month), from agriculture and a 33% share of the profits from the Mazar fertiliser factory shared with General Dostum (Jumbesh) and Hisb-i-Wahdat. The second major player in the region is General Dostum of Jumbesh, an almost exclusively Uzbek party. Dostum started his career as a fitter on the Russian gas fields of Shebargang and rose to be a key supporter of the Communist regime in the north until he changed sides to bring about the downfall of President Najibullah in 1992. By the mid 1990 he had become the key player around Mazar reputed for both his ruthlessness and his opportunism in pursuit of power. His possible hand in the assassination of a threatening subordinate warlord whose brother, General Malik, was a deputy to Dostum, led to Malik's alliance with the Taliban in 1997. Dostum fled and although came back to power briefly later, the arrival of the Taliban in 1998 removed him from the scene completely (in exile in Turkey) until the American bombing campaign started after September 11th.

His reappearance is thought by many to have been directly brought about by the Americans who are believed to have funded and armed him. Through control of trade across to Turkmenistan, of local gas and oil fields and a share in the Fertiliser factory, he has substantial financial resources. He holds the position of Deputy Defence Minister and a Jumbesh member is the Minister for Power in the IA. He has few regional alliances but is pro Monarch, and pointedly the calendars of Shebargang (then in 2002) positioned Dostum equally with Hamed Karzai (the President of the Interim Authority) under the ex-King, Zahir Shah.

The third big player is the party of Hisb-i Wahdat, an almost exclusively Hazara party represented the leader of which is the Minister of Planning in the IA. Hisb-I Wahdat resource base is probably somewhat less than that of the other two parties and they occupy a somewhat contingent position, maintaining loose connections with Jumbesh

on account of anti-Pashtun sentiment (that draws from Abdur Rahman's brutal conquest of the Hazaras in the late 19th century) and fuelled by Taliban actions, but also linking with Jamiat for other strategic considerations (and doubts over Dostum's consistency, well justified in view of his past history). An uneasy and wavering neutrality.

On April 28th 2002 a celebration was held in Mazar to commemorate the liberation from Soviet rule. Dostum sent his tanks and other armour but did not appear himself and held his own separate ceremony a day later in Shebargang. Dostum withdrew his tanks to the edge of the city but not further and kept them strategically located.

Tensions rose in the city. South of Shebargang in Saripul which had been held by Arabs, allies of Jamiat, an attack was mounted by local Jumbesh warlords and the fort was taken with the apparent loss of some 20-30 lives. Subsequent to this reports came in that Dostum had had sent weapons through the mountains to the east of Mazar and had positioned key offensive weapons dug in pointing against Mazar. Many attributed this offensive action to Atta's comments at the Mazar celebration that a return to the monarchy was unacceptable. At the time of writing this, tensions were temporarily defused but it was a re-run of earlier conflicts in the year. And since this time, conflict has continued.

At no time during the stand off between Jumbesh and Jamiat were members of the international security force present although representation from UNSMA attempted to defuse the tension. No presence from the Interim Authority was evident and indeed the economic independence of the major players in Mazar in the absence of any resources flowing down from Kabul makes it unlikely that any presence would have had much influence.

The complexity of local power relations and interests may be more or less than in other parts of the country. The resource base of the various parties is considerable and the weaponry that they hold sufficient to make them all credible forces in their own right. The old parties are still at play, with everything to go for and it is clear not unduly challenged by talk of peace processes and reconstruction. It is also clear that peace has not broken out.

Little has changed since April 2002⁷. Regional warlords continue to function and against an annual revenue of some \$100 M for the ATA, Ishmail Khan in Herat has from some estimates an annual income of \$300 from border trade and there is the whole opium trade (value \$3 billion?), which lies outside the formal realm. The epithet⁸ of being ‘in office but not in power’ is all too apposite with respect to the Karzai administration.

I discovered this week that I was not the only interested observer in Mazar that week – Michael Ignatieff’s account of the negotiations (Ignatieff, 2003) that took place between Dostum and Ustad Atta in the presence of a non-communicative ‘bulky American’ at that time is part of his narrative from Afghanistan in support of a general thesis in support of temporary imperialism or ‘Empire – lite’ as a necessity for democracy in countries disrupted by civil war. There is also a deeper reason as Millikan and Krause (op.cit, p764) observe:

‘Beyond the limited prospect of state collapse, lie dashed hopes of development ... beyond this lies the broader crisis of the modern state system. Understood as a systemic prospect, state failure is causally linked to increased and widespread humanitarian suffering, regional instability, and transnational threats of international organised crime and terrorism ... a potential source of insecurity for the core states of the international society and . a [threat] to the modern project of achieving political order’

The evidence is there that failed states do, and have posed a threat to global security, and Ignatieff’s argument is that there is a role for external intervention to prevent humanitarian catastrophes when states collapse. But as a reviewer of his book⁹ notes Ignatieff is least convincing in his arguments for the convergence between humanitarian and imperial agendas and neglectful of the instrumental role that the US and other have played in contributing to state failure around the world, including Afghanistan. Again Milliken and Krause (op.cit, p766) alert us to the fact that state

⁷ I note from Barbara Stapleton’s paper that the British are about to start their support for the PRT processes in Mazaar.

⁸ For which we can thank Norman Lamont in regard to his resignation speech to Major’s conservative administration – maybe his most memorable contribution.

⁹ David Mephan, Financial Times Magazine May 24, 2003

formation in one place may have unintended consequences in relation to state formation elsewhere¹⁰ although in the case of the regional complex of which Afghanistan is a part there is nothing serendipitous about the vulnerability and frailties of these states.

However Ignatieff is also extremely imprecise about his terminology – and his description of Afghanistan as a ‘failed state’; in this he has not been alone. Slogans of a failed state, destruction over 25 years of war, depleted social capital and devastation can be richly harvested from the narratives around Afghanistan¹¹. Indeed the terminology that has been used for the sessions of this meeting have strayed in that direction – ‘re-construction’, ‘re-establishing’, ‘re-building’ – have an implicit assumption of what there was before. Anton Lieven (2002) is unrestrained in this regard and highly critical of ‘the fairy stories about pre-communist Afghanistan for naïve western aid donors’ being told and the fib of ‘Afghanistan [in the past] as a successful secular modern state with a strong civil society’ now waiting to re-emerge’.

While Lieven would argue that ‘tribal dark ages’ explain all¹², we need to be much clearer as to what we mean by a failed state and in this regard a separation needs to be

¹⁰ ‘Few scholars .. examine the possibility that the forces that can produce strong and legitimate states in some contexts, can, interacting with different local and historical conditions, generate weak and collapsed states in others’

¹¹ See for example: “Food Security in Afghanistan had deteriorated markedly during the past two decades. The current drought has added a further burden to a series of adverse long-term trends. These include protracted conflict, the erosion of the agricultural production base, loss of irrigation and other infrastructure and declining non-agricultural income generation opportunities” (Sloane, 2001)

“Afghanistan is a shattered society ..It will take more than 36 months to heal the wounds left by 23 years of war .. Afghanistan’s infrastructure has been destroyed and its people by devastated by almost a quarter-century of war” (UN Secretary-General, 2002)

“More than two decades of conflict and three years of drought have led to a widespread human suffering and massive displacement of people in Afghanistan. Many parts of the country are vulnerable to famine, the infrastructure base has been destroyed or degraded and human resources have been depleted. State institutions have become largely non-functional and the economy increasingly fragmented. The social fabric has been weakened considerably and human rights undermined, with women and minorities being the principal sufferers” (Asian Development Bank et al. 2002, para. 1)

¹² “To describe Afghanistan as medieval is an undeserved compliment to its dark-age tribal structures. The best we can hope for is an era of UN-supervised peace .. Medieval is Afghanistan on a good day.. What much of Afghanistan has seen over the past generation bears more resemblance to the dark ages: chaotic, morally unrestrained warfare between ethnic groups, tribes and warlords, with catastrophic effects on economic activity” Lieven, 2002)

made between the *institutional* dimensions of state collapse and the *functional* dimensions of state failure (Millikin and Krause, op.cit p753) and these are separable. Functional failure can take place even without institutional collapse – and states can function without institutions. Further even if there are elements of institutional and functional failure it does not mean, as Doornbos (2002) has pointed out that nothing goes on and that local or informal governance structures do not persist or even deepen. To me (Pain, 2002) the puzzle has always been not why things are so bad but why things are not worse. Part of the explanation clearly lies with informal networks and one of the challenges that reconstruction faces is that modernisation processes do not crowd out (Dasgupta, 2002) mechanisms that have conferred resilience.

A failure to discriminate between the institutional and functional nature of state failure was, amongst other things, a causal factor in the ability of the political wing of the UN to work with a model of a ‘rogue’ state but a state all the same – and for the humanitarian and development wing of the UN (and others) to work with a model of state failure (Duffield et al, 2002), both institutionally and functionally (although quite how this squared with their institutional dealings with the Taliban and requirement for security is not clear).

Quite what the Taliban were as a state entity the jury is still out on although the offering of an ‘emerging political complex linked into local and global networks’ (Duffield et al. 2002) supports evidence of state like properties of the Taliban regime – they made laws, they enforced them, they provided security and trade flourished. Be that as it may it is abundantly clear that legacies from previous state formations in Afghanistan – both institutional and functional are to be found now and we are far from moving into a vacuum as had been widely assumed with reconstruction.

Two examples of this. The first relates to the matter of land recordation and the continued functioning of district courts with respect to land transactions that have continued to operate over the last 23 years (see Alden-Wily, 2003). Second as a recent joint WorldBank - AREU study¹³ (and Anne Tully will return to these) has shown provincial and district administrations despite everything have survived. Although

¹³ I am grateful for discussions with Andrew Wilder on this point. See Manning et al (2003).

they may not necessarily be functioning well, usually because of no resources, and in places captured by local commanders and warlords for the study provinces, provincial and district level administrative staff are in place, accept the rules that predate the 1978 revolution largely adhere to the staffing quotas allocated to each department in each district and province. The study argues that ‘the piping system still remains but no water has flowed through the pipes in a long time’ (Andrew Wilder, personal communication).

If we cannot label Afghanistan as a fully blown collapsed state or even a completely failed state now what is it, what are its current institutional and functional dimensions, and how have these changed? This is not the place to fully explore this issue although it is a legitimate concern since after all rebuilding something requires that you understand in what ways and why it has de-constructed itself and what the implications of this are for re-construction processes. Reference is made to Cramer and Goodhand (2002) for a more detailed discussion that notably emphasises the inability of state builders to develop, gain and hold onto a monopoly of violence, the ‘rentier’ economy and the role of force in it the regional context (with respect to both origins and issues to be addressed) and the involvement of actors with access to ‘conflict goods’.

The theme that I would like to develop from their paper is that of the ‘long and decidedly non-linear, conflictual experience in state formation and failure in Afghanistan’ (Cramer & Goodhand, 2002, p886) and the trajectory of ‘punctuated equilibrium; (op.cit, p898). ‘Punctuated equilibrium’ is of course a metaphor borrowed from evolutionary theory and is derived from the signal contribution of Steven Jay Gould to capture the idea of periods of rapid and dynamic species change and longer interstices of time when smaller or no change occurs to speciation. It could of course be applied more widely to state formation processes to challenge any incremental progressive history but to carry the biological metaphor further post equilibrium changes¹⁴ are either routes to success (reproductive success) or

¹⁴ The parallel between state formation and ecological systems could be carried further; just as a climax vegetation cannot be assumed to be the only equilibrium point in ecological systems (and certainly not a ‘natural’ or highest end point) the same perhaps should not be assumed for ‘the nation state’ and other equilibrium points are possible. A parallel between national parks and the state-building project could also be pursued.

marginalisation or extinction. All are possible outcomes and depend on circumstances.

The equilibrium points in Afghanistan could be equated within the periods of Abdur Rahman, from the 1930s to the 1960s, with shorter uncertain stability points around Daud and the Taliban. What of the interstices? - and here I am interested not only in the space that state formations occupy over time but also their spatial fetch. In this light Afghanistan has to be seen within its geographical context and the defining features of the Hindu Kush and Pamirs as an extension of the Himalayan complex. What struck me most on my first extended trip through Afghanistan was the contrast between valleys and irrigation, and the plains and mountain areas. As Scott remind us historically states and state formation processes, particularly in mountainous areas, has taken place most strongly in areas where there is a realizable surplus of production and potential tax has been able to support a state apparatus. This, in Asia has tended to be in valleys and paddy growing or irrigated areas and not in hills and mountains where surplus generation is limited. One can distinguish therefore between areas where the state has exercised authority and control and areas where it has exerted influence. It is no accident that Kabul ended up where it is – although I must confess myself puzzled by the state system that develop in Jam in the mountains of Ghor – and its location may have contributed to why it did not last.

Who knows at this juncture prior to Abdur Rahman the nature of the relations between state like entities and the populace within their sphere of control and the khanates within their sphere of influence in the 18th century. What we are clear about is that Abdur Rahman gained control through force from Hazarajat to Nuristan and the northern Turkman plains and enforced it through imposed settlement. But subsequent history is a testimony to the failure of the state to gain control. To me there is no stronger evidence for the failure of the state than for its inability to make the rural landscape legible (Scott, 1998). As we put it (Pain & Goodhand, 2002):

‘it failed to do what modernizing states usually do, i.e. making the rural landscape more clear through cadastral surveys, land taxation systems and intrusive civil administration. The rural economy has remained statistically unknown’

Whether this was cause or effect of a rentier state is unknown. But it can be no accident as Alden-Wily found (2003) that the greatest uncertainty and confusion over land, ownership and access lies with respect to pasture which comprises some 45% of the arable area. States are the enemies of people who move around (Scott, 1998) – and we have seen consistent attempts by the Afghan state to sedentarise the *kuchis*, most notably in the irrigation scheme in Helmand (Cullather, 2002) and they have failed. The impulse to move and remain mobile is of course a refusal and a statement of liberty and freedom from control. Language too can be regarded in this light a persistent feature of mountain countries, and Afghanistan is no different in this respect (Allan, 2001). Language and its associated cultural markers (of which ethnicity is one dimension) are contextual identities to be deployed as forms of resistance (or cultural refusal) and are to be found most particularly in mountainous areas. It is for this reason that Scott (2002) has argued that mountain communities should be described as areas of non-state spaces. Conrad Schetter is of course right to regard the construction of ethnicity with great suspicion¹⁵ but identities are always contingent on circumstances and the maintenance of a distinct identity even under conditions of acceptance say of Afghan identity is not incompatible.

There are further dimensions to non-state spaces most notably the border areas. Historically on all sides these have been areas where both legitimate and illicit trade have been carried out and the lives of many in the south along the Pakistan border have been intimately tied up with smuggling since the partitioning of the Pashtun speaking population north and south of the Durand line. Peter Levi (2000, p87) describes (from a journey in 1970) a pitched battle in early 1969 in Paktya between wood smugglers, foresters and the police which left 300 hundred people dead. Even these areas were in many ways were effective non-state spaces for the Taliban, where their writ did not rule and where tribal customs that defied Taliban laws (music, arms etc) were practised.

There is an emerging area of study around borderlands and border societies and the phenomenon of their growth as the nation-state transforms itself in a globalised economy. Suffice it to say the phenomenon of the peripheralisation of Afghanistan's

¹⁵ And will be strengthened in his purpose by the attempts of UNODC (2003) to map the opium

economy that took place during the 1990s (Pain & Goodhand, 2002) deepened under the Taliban and it is no accident that the regional players that stand outside the writ of the current Kabul administration are firmly based on borderland economies. There is also a certain irony that the very areas where the state in the past attempted to establish control through settlement and irrigation in southern Afghanistan have now been captured and redefined as non-state spaces and given over to a borderland economy of opium poppy. Over 95% of the 2002 production was to be found in five provinces – one in the north (Badakshan) and three in the south and one in the east (Nangahar). Helmand and Nangarhar between them account for 64% of production. The observation of Masefield (2002) that the location of the bulk of Afghanistan's poppy cultivation was unusual in that it was to be found where access was greatest¹⁶ can be interpreted, at least in the post September 11th configuration, as a statement of the removal of these areas from the state. In summary there is evidence that the extent of non-state spaces has grown significantly in Afghanistan in the last decade locating themselves in a regional spatial framework, rather than an Afghan territorial one. This is by definition a challenge to Afghanistan's state building project.

If the state space in Afghanistan has shrunk, the prospect that Afghanistan may never make it as a fully-fledged state has to be considered and here regional comparisons are instructive. The country that I find greatest parallel with is Tibet which like Afghanistan has occupied a similar geo- political position, sandwiched between great powers and fundamentally trading entities. From the 15th century a centralised monastic system emerged with a centralised administrative structure under the authority of the Dalai Lama and gained political control. Whether this was a true state or not in the western sense of a monopoly of force is open to dispute and attention has to be drawn to the ritual nature of the state and ritual sovereignty based on 'the cosmological conception of kingship' (van Spengen, 2000, p26)¹⁷. However despite the achievement of a coherent cultural identity, the political integration of all its parts was never realised fully realised and Tibetan state formation essentially failed because of the 'fragmented nature of its internal economic relations (van Spengen, *ibid*, p94).

economy in terms of its ethnic dimensions

¹⁶ Conventionally drug cultivation is confined to the remote areas where the state fails to reach

Whether or not the particularities of Tibet bear any relevance to Afghanistan is not really the point. The issue is that states do fail and disappear and questions as to why Bhutan for example, made it and Sikkim did not (absorbed into India in 1973) can only be answered through a careful analysis of the combination of history and geography and structuration to follow Giddens (1979, 1984). For Afghanistan on its trajectory of punctuated equilibrium, will this be a particular juncture when state formation processes can mature and deliver? We may wish it to be so but it is possible that for the moment (or for ever?) it may have missed the boat and what will emerge will be a geographical entity characterised by borderlands and spheres of influence, almost invisible from its regional context. Our best efforts will not be enough

But are these our best efforts? This leads naturally on to look a little more closely at the interplay between ‘empire light – ‘state-light’ motifs. The case for the existence of ‘empire-light’ has already been made (Ignatieff, 2003) and I merely add local evidence to that representation – the management of security and funding levels¹⁸ for example. But one should not forget though that when all is said and done that it is an ‘imperial’ intervention given the intention and enormous asymmetry of force and resources. Although the implied ‘empire-light – state-light’ linkage was created as an heuristic device, there is surely more to it than that. Goodhand (forthcoming) has the following to say:

‘According to the Minister for Rural Development [House of Commons, International Development Committee, “Afghanistan.”] over 90% of the resources have gone through non-state entities. As has happened elsewhere, the salaries and working conditions offered by international agencies have tended to attract the best-qualified Afghans and in a sense have actively de-capacitated Afghan institutions’

Under such conditions what possibilities are there for anything but ‘state-light’. Thus although the physical manifestation of the empire is light, it is quite clear that with respect to who sets the rules of the game, it is not a soft touch with respect to state

¹⁷ I have deliberately avoided the debate with respect to the compatibility between Islam and a modern secular state and also the specific role of Islam in Afghanistan’s trajectory.

¹⁸ Goodhand (forthcoming) states ‘While international comparisons should be made with care, donors have been less generous towards Afghanistan than to many other “post-conflict” countries. Based on pledges made, per capita spending on Afghanistan is \$75 for the first year, compared to Kosovo \$288 and East Timor, \$175. The ATA’s recurrent government budget of merely \$483 million, means that it is under-resourced, which contributes to its limited credibility’.

building¹⁹. On the objective or intent of ‘state- light’ there can be no doubt as the National Development Framework (2002) makes clear:

‘ the use of external assistance to build the physical infrastructure that lays the basis for a private sector led strategy of growth in such a manner as to support the building of human and social capital ..the creation of sustainable growth, where a competitive private sector becomes the engine of growth and the instrument of social inclusion through the creation of opportunity’

The role of the state is to be restricted to the building of strong institutions and establishing the rule of law.. ‘ we are committed to building on community level participation and effective management at the local level’ (*ibid*, p12).

The engagement of the private sector in reconstruction processes in such a direct manner of course is a sign of the times and is clearly being carried through into Iraq. The market place of reconstruction is one to be studied, not least for the fact that it is clearly fettered. Equally the capacity of private sector initiatives (or public private partnerships) to deliver public sector goods remains deeply problematic in the west²⁰ so deploy it as an instrument of reconstruction, as appears to be the case, is a process that should be closely scrutinised.

Equally some of the programmes in which the ‘state – light’ is involved closely, most notably the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), are also a motif of this paradigm given its emphasis on community driven development and the de-politicisation of development processes²¹. I want to here to briefly comment on this programme, drawing specifically from the draft operational manual (National Solidarity Programme, 2003).

First, what is this programme? The NSP is seen to be ‘ a new development paradigm whereby communities are empowered to make decisions and control resources at all

¹⁹ USAID I understand has persisted in working and funding entirely outside the government structure.

²⁰ I have in mind here the Public Audit report on value for money with respect to the Public private initiatives with respect to hospital building and management under the NHS.

stages of the project cycle (p4) .. leading to long-term strengthening of local governance and to provide assistance for reconstruction and development' (p4). It will work through a block grant system for the building of public assets, to the value of some US\$200 per household. Communities are defined in terms of residence – 'a community is a village of more than 50 families' (p5) and they will be expected to form a Community Development Council and Project Management Committees in order to implement projects. Facilitating partners, which are to be mainly Afghan and international NGOs will be contracted by the government to 'facilitate inclusive community planning and each is to cover 24,000 families per province per year. Facilitating partner's performance will be assessed in terms of annual target outputs, operating on a turnover of three batches of communities per year allowing a four month period for community planning, project preparation and appraisal. Project performance is to be almost exclusively judged against quantitative targets (number of villages, numbers of projects etc) with a selected and qualitative look at poverty impact.

There is much here that might give rise to certain reservations with respect to stated objectives, methods, time horizons and expected outcomes, indicating a suspicion that there are other motives at play (reinforced by the name of the programme) and indeed it has become clear that the use of the projected committees for electoral purposes is one of these. I do not particularly have an issue with the transfer of money to communities as a direct peace dividend and for political purposes, although the long-term viability (and political wisdom) of such a strategy might be open to debate. There could be concerns over such a transparent instrumental use of communities and any apparent lack of commitment beyond a four-month period. As Ottaway has observed (2002) the creating of institutions²² is the easy part – but making these institutions legitimate is extremely difficult. Creating institutions to legitimise others seems even more problematic.

²¹ See Harriss (2002) for a persuasive critical engagement with the notions of social capital and community driven development.

²² In addition Ottaway is insistent that we should clearly separate out conceptually organisations from institutions; what we are doing is building organisations which is the easy part – they only become institutions once there are accepted rule of the game and they have achieved legitimacy which is an entirely different matter.

But the concern is the whole characterisation of community, although it is consistent with much of the language of the 'state-light'. If by communities one is to understand small homogenous groups within which distributional conflicts are absent or minimal then it might be realistic to expect that such entities could organise themselves in an effective, equitable and uncontested manner. But the notion of an idealised undivided local community with an unfortunate historically deep hierarchical structure awaiting reform through the receipt of funds and four months of tutelage is deeply problematic under the best of circumstances. Afghanistan is not the best of circumstances and the evidence points to major inequalities with respect to land assets for a start (see Alden-Wily, 2003), let alone other conflictual dimensions.

One suspects, if one looks to the monitoring indicators, that a public transcript of success could rapidly be created on the basis of output and quantitative indicators – number of projects, numbers of communities. As Scott reminds us (1990) public transcripts usually hide a private transcript, which tells a rather different story. The story of community forestry in Nepal is one such example where the growth of community forest organisations coupled with environmental recovery has been held as testimony to the success of community driven processes. But put to the test under resource rich conditions the private transcript tells a rather different story in terms of distributional outcomes and livelihood benefits (ODG, 2003).

More to the point under conditions of a functionally failing state, as Nepal most certainly is but with persisting institutions that have an interest in capturing bureaucratic rent (Chetry et al. 2003) community participation as a panacea for problems of state failure become even more deeply problematic. Duffield et al (2002) have also noted this with respect to community development practices under the Taliban.

This brings us to the issue of whether 'state-light', as either an objective or a process under conditions of extreme state frailty can actually deliver reconstruction. Here we must revisit and remind ourselves of the long drawn out processes that were required to build the modern nation – state moving from the historical contract between of sovereign and subject over territoriality with respect to security, expanding to representation through long drawn out processes of contention, driven by economic

processes in parallel with law that enshrined and protected market relations for wealth building and ripening post war with respect to a function of welfare. None of this happened quickly or under conditions of 'state-light'.

On the question of speed Milliken & Krause, (2002, p762) comments with respect to the experience of the postcolonial state is relevant:

' the vision that new states [could] build legitimate nations, provide wealth and guarantee security within the span of a few decades was, to be kind, somewhat naïve'

Granted that Afghanistan is not exactly a postcolonial state although its territorial identity is very much a great power creation, its trajectory into the 20th century bears many of the hallmarks of a post-colonial state. On the issue of 'state-light' working in tandem with 'empire-light', Ottaway who gives space to the new imperial project is clear in her conclusions (2002, p1022)

'rebuild[ing] a collapsed state according to a favourable model but with minimal resources .. does not appear to work .. Institution building is part of the reconstruction process and it is a good idea ...it is not always an idea the international community knows how to implement or is willing to fund adequately'

To which Ignatieff (2003, p126) adds with respect to 'empire-light'

'Imperial power should be used to keep [Afghanistan] free of external interference and aggression as well as internal civil war. But it must be the local political authorities who rule in fact as well as name. At the moment, empire lite does neither: it neither creates the conditions under which local leadership takes over. Everything is done on the cheap, from day to day, without the long-term security guarantees and short-term financial assistance that would genuinely create the conditions for true national independence'

If 'empire-light – state – light' remains light, to which we could add the dimension of time-light as well, then it may well be a pathway to extinction. None of this is

particularly encouraging with respect to current reconstruction processes in Afghanistan.

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