Is Afghanistan on the edge of a civil war? Analyzing the causes of the Taliban resurgence.

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Acronyms

ANA: Afghan National Army
ANP: Afghan National Police
ANSF: Afghan National Security Forces
CICA: Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
FATAs: Federally Administered Tribal Areas’ North Waziristan
ISAF: International Security Assistance Force
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SAARC: South Asian Association for regional cooperation
WTO: World Trade Organization
Introduction

In June 2011, President Obama declared that the United States had achieved their goals in Afghanistan and announced a progressive withdrawal plan for American troops.¹ The goal is to hand over all security duties to Afghan forces while the allied forces gradually step back from areas they were successful in pacifying.² At the same time, US military experts declared that the forecast for the pace of withdrawal would complicate the current counterinsurgency campaign planned by commanders, adding that the 300,000 Afghan national security forces were not yet able to take over.³

In the 2012-2013 report of the House of Commons Defence Committee stated: "We hope that Afghanistan can become a secure, prosperous and flourishing country but we are concerned that Afghanistan could descend into civil war within a few years."⁴ One year later, assessing that the insurgency remains strong and persistent with successful attacks on high profile targets, the Committee is still doubtful about Afghanistan’s future: “We note the confidence of the Secretary of State for Defence⁵ that Afghanistan will not descend into civil war following the withdrawal of the majority of international forces from the country and can only hope that he is correct.”⁶

Moreover, the 91,731 war logs provided by Wikileaks to Spiegel, the Guardian, and the New York Times, seem to corroborate the same anxiety regarding the situation in the field. German and American military officials believe that the current conflict in Afghanistan will result in a civil war, and once the withdrawal is complete, insurgency leaders sheltered by

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² NEW YORK TIMES, Obama Will Speed Pullout From War in Afghanistan, [online], http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23prexy.html?pagewanted=all& r=0 (22th June 2011)
⁵ “There is already a robust insurgency; I don’t see anything that would indicate that the insurgency would be able to move that up to civil war. They will have lost the recruiting sergeant of infidel troops, which has been an important one for them. We already believe they are throwing everything they have got at this in repeated attempts at surges. They have no reserves, as far as we can see, and their message becomes more difficult to deliver when they are inviting insurgency against Afghan forces under the control of a democratically elected Afghan Government. So, no, I don’t see that being the outcome.” (source: HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE, Oral Evidence: Afghanistan, HC 994, Wednesday 12th March 2014, available at: http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/afghanistan/oral/7433.html)
Pakistan will return to Afghanistan.

A former minister in the Karzai government, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, agreed that NATO troops have considerably weakened the Taliban in the southern part of the country but noted that the same situation does not prevail in the southeast, the east and the western parts of Afghanistan, thus creating a perfect scenario whereby the country could plunge into civil and regional war if the United States do not leave at least 20,000 troops after 2014 with significant economic aid. However, at the end of May 2014, the U.S. President declared that only 9800 troops would remain on Afghan soil after the withdrawal, and by the end of 2015 this number will be reduced by half. The U.S. presence in the country would finally consist of an embassy and a security assistance office in Kabul. However, U.S. military presence after 2014 will depend on the signing of the proposed bilateral security agreement between the United States and Afghanistan. Karzai has rejected this agreement but the two candidates for presidency have already stated that they would sign it after the results of the elections.

To summarize, even if the U.S. President had declared that the goals had been achieved in Afghanistan, we are still forced to note that there is a fear amongst political and military actors that the country could descend into a civil war. Even if the country has already endured a civil war for the period 1989 to 1996, it remains difficult to conclude on the current existence or emergence of another internal war after the departure of NATO troops.

However, this anxiety for Afghanistan’s future does not exist by accident. In fact, we will see in this paper that the level of violence is not decreasing, quite the reverse, it is actually increasing due to an insurgency that is becoming stronger. We come to the question of how this outcome is possible after more than ten years of international counterinsurgency operations, economic aid and state-building. What are the factors that led to the current volatile situation in Afghanistan? We will see that the conflict in Afghanistan is complex and involves more than what usual counterinsurgency theories suggest. The latter literature mainly focuses on the insurgency in itself and tries to develop techniques in the field to counter it. Instead, this paper search to better understand the causes that led to the current state of violence characterized by the resurgence of the Taliban movement after their defeat in 2001.

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7 SPIEGEL ONLINE INTERNATIONAL, Preparing for Withdrawal: German Military Fears Civil War in Afghanistan, [online], http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/preparing-for-withdrawal-german-military-fears-civil-war-in-afghanistan-a-801253.html (2nd December 2011)
9 REUTERS, Obama Plans to End U.S. Troop Presence in Afghanistan by 2016, [online], http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/27/us-usa-afghanistan-obama-idUSKBN0E71WQ20140527 (27th May 2014)
Methodology

In general, political science literature assigns religious, ethnic or cultural causes to civil wars. However, since the end of the nineties, economic theories of civil violence have refuted this assumption based on political grievances. Instead, they have identified economic causes of civil war. The main factor explaining the risk of civil war for a country is its level of economic development, which determines the opportunity for rebellion.\textsuperscript{10} Our aim is to analyse the Afghan insurgency from its causes and not from who its actors are. A focus on the causes will enable us to assess each actor at the stage in which they must be included in order to better understand our case study.

We will use these theories in order to build the theoretical framework, which constitutes the first part of this paper. First, we will define what constitutes a civil war and present Nicholas Sambanis’s definition.\textsuperscript{11} Second, we will develop the two main causes of civil wars identified by the economic literature on civil violence: state fragility and the level of economic development.

The second part of this paper will focus on a case study: the resurgence of the Neo-Taliban insurgency. First, we will test the hypothesis that Afghanistan is currently experiencing a civil war by applying the definition of civil war selected above to our case, and we will see that Afghanistan is in actual fact in a state of civil war. Second, we will explore what caused this particular civil war by first testing if Afghanistan is a fragile state, and if so, what type, as this would be a determinant that favours insurgency. We will then confront the reality of the case with the economic development factors that favour the Neo-Taliban insurgency.

A dynamic exists since 1989, which appears to be driving the country into civil war, and we believe that an identification of the dynamics that cause civil war and how they intertwine will offer a refreshing and comprehensive approach on the current crisis. This could help policy makers prevent an escalation of violence, especially in the post-electoral context, which has seen major violent events.


Part 1. Civil war theory: the causes of civil war

1.1. A definition of civil war

Small and Singer define a civil war as “any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides.”\(^\text{12}\) In a civil war, the state is one of the parties in conflict against a rebel group.\(^\text{13}\) The latter is identified as an armed rebel organization staffed with full-time recruits\(^\text{14}\) capable of challenging the state militarily.\(^\text{15}\) Rebels usually carry territorial, economic or political claims that the state does not accept to concede.\(^\text{16}\) Finally, the resulting violence of a civil war should be 1000 fatalities/combat related deaths on both sides.\(^\text{17}\)

The definition is straightforward: the 1000 casualties threshold (which distinguishes civil wars from other types of violence) comes from the Correlates of War dataset, which is widely used by conflict scholars. However, Nicholas Sambanis raised some concerns over how the threshold was coded in the first place. In fact, after having re-processed the coding, the author came up with a more precise definition of civil war that we will use in this paper.\(^\text{18}\) Nevertheless, we will regroup some of his criteria and also integrate a clarification by the author on the difference between civil war and insurgency. According to Sambanis, an insurgency represents a strategy that can be used in a civil war. This strategy is pursued by a small group, which does not enjoy high levels of public support. Instead, a civil war involves the majority of the population, displaying a certain level of public support towards the insurgents.\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, an armed conflict should be classified as a civil war if:

\(^{15}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{18}\text{Ibid, p. 829-831.}\)
\(^{19}\text{LEIGH, M. R., Thinking the Unthinkable: Civil War in Afghanistan, Thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, Academic Year 2010, p. 22.}\)
(a) The war takes place within the territory of a state that is a member of the international system with a population of 500,000 or greater.

(b) The parties are politically and militarily organized, and they have publicly stated political objectives.

(c) The government (through its military or militias) must be a principal combatant, and the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance. Effective resistance is measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party.

(d) The start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths. If the conflict has not caused 500 deaths or more in the first year, the war is coded as having started in that year only if cumulative deaths in the next 3 years reach 1,000.

(e) Throughout its duration, the conflict must be characterized by sustained violence, at least at the minor or intermediate level. There should be no 3-year period during which the conflict causes fewer than 500 deaths.

(f) The main insurgent organization(s) must be locally represented and must recruit locally. Insurgent groups may operate from neighboring countries, but they must also have some territorial control (bases) in the civil war country and/or the rebels must reside in the civil war country. The country engages the majority of the population which a part supports (explicitly or implicitly) the insurgents.

1.2. The causes of civil wars

The economic theorists of civil wars have taken the opposite stance in civil war studies by refuting the common justification of civil wars and claimed that the Cold War and its consequences and political grievances as being the main causes of internal violence. They sustain that the key indicators that cause civil wars are poverty, the level of economical development and economic growth, which are also key markers of state fragility. 20 Consequently, fragile states lack the financial resources to prevent the emergence of insurgency and are not able to produce efficient counterinsurgency strategies. 21 These are the elements we will explore in the sub-sections.

21 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
1.2.1. State Fragility

According to Rotberg: “nature abhors a vacuum, and the weakness of the central state is as often the cause of civil war as its consequence.” This statement is confirmed by Ann Hironaka who sustains that “lengthy civil wars tend to occur in weak states rather than in strong states […] regardless of ethnicities, identities, cultures, or grievances.” These authors focus primarily on the structural characteristics of the state and how they influence the escalation of violence to the point of civil war.

In literature about fragile states, there is a consensus supporting the fact that different degrees of state fragility exist. These can be described along a continuum of declining state performance: the first stage would be “weak states”, followed by “failing states”, continuing with “failed states” and ending with “collapsed states”. Precisely, fragility is measured according to the functions that the state fails to deliver. Thus, the level of failure is measured according to a hierarchy of political goods: security, dispute settlements mechanisms, political participation and social welfare.

According to Rotberg’s writings on state failure, states fail because they no longer have the capacity to deliver positive public goods to their people: security, rule of law, political participation, and social services. Therefore, their governments lose their legitimacy and the state itself becomes illegitimate for a growing majority of the population. Failed states are states under pressure, threatened by conflicts, dangerous and closely contested by warring factions. In the majority of these states, governmental groups fight against armed revolts led by one or more rivals.

Rotberg uses a variety of indicators in order to label a state as failed. Among them, there is the “persistent character of violence”, which illustrates the incapacity of the state to

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guarantee protection from violent non-state groups towards its population. As a result, people tend to turn to warlords, or other ‘state enemies’, for protection. Tensions are even more exacerbated by the existence of disharmonies between communities. To complete the circle, this reality reinforces populations’ demand for protection from warlords and other strong figures “who express or activate ethnic or clan solidarity, thus offering the possibility of security at a time when all else, including the state itself, is crumbling.”

The second major indicator is the incapacity of the state to control its borders, leaving large areas of its territory to fall outside its authority. Official power is thus exerted in the capital city or other large cities. Additionally, besides deteriorating or destroying infrastructure, failed states exhibit flawed institutions; that is, in major cases, only the institutions of the executive functions. The judiciary is derivative of the executive rather than being independent. Consequently, the people know that they cannot rely on the court system for remedy, especially against the state. The army is possibly the only institution within which integrity remains but it often remains highly politicized.

On the other hand, rulers are perceived as adopting a “politic of the belly”–style approach to governance; that is, they work for themselves and their kin, and not the state. Therefore, their legitimacy and the state’s legitimacy fall. Furthermore, people perceive the state as an instrument of enrichment owned by an “exclusive class or group, with all others pushed aside.” This lack of legitimacy is a key concept, and authors like Clements sustain that state fragility can be decomposed into two elements: (a) fragility with regard to functions and effectiveness, and (b) fragility of legitimacy. The latter refers to the situation where the population no longer recognizes itself as “citizen of the state” but identifies itself as a member of a sub- or trans-national, non-state societal entity (e.g. kin group, tribe, village, clan). For the population, order, security, and social safety are naturally coupled with the community, and not the state. Hence, the state is perceived as being a blurred figure distant from its people physically and psychologically; appearing as an “alien external force”.

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30 Ibid., p. 6.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
these countries, traditional actors and institutions, and indigenous knowledge, have shown strong capacity to adapt and considerable resilience that defies the “modernization theory”.  

Traditional authorities, such as village elders, clan chiefs, healers, big men, and religious leaders determine the fragile states even today, particularly in rural and remote peripheral areas.

There are several countries labelled weak, failing, or failed in the world. All of them are affected by the poor delivery or nonexistent functions we have observed until now. Several indices exist to rank these countries according to their level of fragility. In this paper, you will find a selected list of indices and their method of ranking in Appendix 1. Furthermore, Appendix 2 will provide a tab including the top ten most fragile countries for each index described in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 also provides a 2005-2013 trend tab from the Failed State Index 2013 ranking the top ten most failed countries over the nine-year period.

1.2.2. Economic development

Economic theories of civil violence have helped academics to perceive civil war differently, notably on the causes of civil wars. While they have usually been interpreted as being rooted in ethnic or religious hatred, authors in economic theories of violence have demonstrated, using econometric models that religious or ethnic grievances are not significant explanatory variables of civil wars. The work of Collier and Hoeffler\(^\text{42}\) (CH) and of Fearon and Laitin\(^\text{43}\) (FL) are the state of the art economic theories in the field and we will review their results in the following section.

The assumption behind the CH model of “greed and grievance” states that civil war arises because people weigh the economic opportunity cost of violence against its utility.  

In other words, potential rebels make a rational decision by comparing the expected gains to the expected losses of going to war. In this context, grievances serve as rhetoric to legitimize the greedy decisions that are the real motivation for rebellion.  

The CH model states that war occurs combining three interacting elements: preferences, opportunities and perceptions. Preference for private gain (“greed”) leads to political violence if there are opportunities to

\(^{40}\) “Modernization theories would describe the situation in developing countries as one which modern institutions slowly supplant traditional ones, leading to the eventual emergence of Western-style states across the globe.” (KRAUSHAA, M. and LAMBACH, D., “Hybrid Political Orders: The Added Value of a New Concept”, Occasional Papers Series n°14, The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, December 2009, p. 2.)


\(^{45}\) Ibid.
rebel: “Therefore, civil war occurs because of the availability of loot combined with the opportunity to organize an insurgency.” The material benefit of rebellion would thus determine the financial viability of a rebel movement.

On the question of how rebellion finances itself, Collier and Hoeffler demonstrate that diasporas, abundance of lootable resources and extortion of local population facilitate the financing of rebel movements and increase the probability of rebel victory. Another important source of financing is subvention from hostile governments.

Besides, these authors proxy the transaction and coordination costs of rebellion with the degree of ethnic fractionalization, and find that “ethnic kin groups facilitate within-group coordination and hinder cross-group coordination.” Therefore, coordination for rebellion is easier when ethnic fractionalization is low. This leads the authors to conclude that the more diverse the society, the lesser the risk of civil war. Furthermore, a joint study based on the CH model of the World Bank involving well known scholars in the field, including Collier and Hoeffler, found that “the presence of common ethnic groups across national borders influences the patterns of external involvement in civil war and the spread and internationalization of these wars”.

Finally, insurgency is less probable when the state is strong, or alternatively, when the economic opportunity costs of rebellion are high. CH measures state strength with GDP per capita: stronger and richer states will be better able to defend themselves against a rebellion as they are institutionally more efficient and can mobilize more resources and therefore reduce the net expected gains of rebellion. Further, there is a “prevention of rebellion advantage” in strong states. Strong states have the capacity to reduce rebel labour supply as the time devoted to production activity in strong states pays more than in weak states, thus discouraging potential rebellion. [In sum, a country’s economic opportunity structure—its

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48 Ibid., p. 263-264.
49 Ibid., p. 263.
52 Ibid.
53 Doubling per capita income approximately halves the risk of rebellion; each additional percentage point on the growth rate reduces the risk by approximately one percentage point; and the effect of primary commodity dependence is nonlinear, peaking when such exports are around 30 percent of GDP. A country that is otherwise typical but has this high level of primary commodity exports has a 33 percent risk of conflict, whereas when such exports are only 10 percent of GDP the risk falls to 11 percent. (COLLIER, P., et. al., “Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy”, A World Bank Policy Research Report, The World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 58)
income level and growth, as well as its economic system—determines the “supply” of insurgency for a given level of insurgency “demand.”][55]

State strength is one of the central arguments in Fearon and Laitin’s study. The FL model is more stato-centric than the CH model as it includes variables, which measure for state capacity (political instability, new state formation and regime type).[56] Similarly to the CH model, the FL model finds that what determines the prevalence of a civil war is not political determinants but economics. What does determine civil war is economic growth and economic development (measured in per capita income).[57] More precisely, economic growth is considered as a proxy for “the economic opportunity cost of rebellion and the level of resources and relative competence of the state”.[58] If a country’s level of development is high or if its economic opportunity costs are low, the risk of civil war is reduced. Therefore, if the economic opportunities are low, the percentage of unemployed young men will be higher and they could be cheaply hired by rebels to take control of resources in a weak state.[59] Indeed, the risk of conflict is determined by the feasibility of predation […] but it is the conditions for predation which are decisive.”[60]

Even if the CH and FL models concur that ethnic and religious diversity reduce the risk of rebellion, there is one particular situation that Collier and Hoeffler pointed out: ethnicity could have an influence if the largest ethnic group constitutes between 45 and 90 per cent of the population, a situation they call “ethnic dominance”.[61] In this case, a country presents a 50 per cent higher risk of rebellion.[62]

Other determinants also favour insurgency: rebel activity is facilitated by rough terrain; large population and the amount of local knowledge rebels have of the population.[63] However, other studies have showed that the rough terrain variable is not robust and statistically significant[64], but that population dispersion can facilitate insurgency as a country with large unpopulated regions may offer hideouts for the rebels.[65]

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[57] Ibid., p. 88.
[60] COLLIER, P., “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy”, Oxford University, April 2006, p. 3-4. (available at: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpco/research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf)
Part 2: The Neo-Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan

2.1. The Taliban emergence

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has a unitary government structure where authority is exercised in Kabul, the capital. The central government also determines the structure of authority at provincial and district level, the official subnational administration units. The country has several ethnic groups as illustrated in Appendix 3. Basically, each ethnic group is divided into clans and tribes, but the overall cleavages between ethnic groups are the following: in the North, the Tadjik, Hazara, Ouzbek and Turkmen do no want the return of Pastun domination in the country and are not in favor of a central government with strong powers. The Taliban are not an ethnic group but are chiefly Pashtuns primarily defining themselves according to their ideological beliefs: the creation of an Islamic state in Afghanistan.

However, throughout history, these ethnic groups had the capacity to enter into alliance and successively repel invaders, namely the British Empire in the 19th century and the Soviet Empire in the 20th century. The Soviet invasion is a crucial point in the Afghan history, as the country became a battleground between the two blocks from 1979 to 1989. The Opposition to the Soviet army was composed of the Mujahideen who were backed and financed by Saudi Arabia and the United States along with the “Carter Doctrine”. Warlords such as Massoud, Rabbani, Sayyaf and Hekmatyar were allied under the jihad and managed to expel the Soviet army on the 15th of September 1989. Soon after the Afghan defeat, the USSR fell and Afghanistan ceased to represent a stake as the Cold War came to an end. The country was left alone after 10 years of war that have brought the country to chaos. At that time, Afghanistan was a pure failed state with a ruined agriculture system, an education

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system which no longer existed, and with growing networks of illicit trade, notably the opium economy.\textsuperscript{72}

The political scene was marked by the takeover of power by the \textit{Mujahideen} in 1992 but together they failed to build a consensus amongst themselves for the future of the country.\textsuperscript{73} At that point, the warlords that were previously united to expel the Soviets, fell into a civil war against each other for power.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, without a central authority, and with foreign manipulation of the different actors in Afghan society, a new force emerged in 1994 called the Taliban, and in the space of only two years, they conquered more than 95 percent of the Afghan territory.\textsuperscript{75} Their rapid progression was explained by the population’s manifestation of enthusiasm towards them, as they were progressively securing the country by disarming warlords, a première for Afghans since the Soviet withdrawal.\textsuperscript{76} However, once in place, the Taliban created a safe haven for drug traffickers and terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda.\textsuperscript{77} The latter perpetrated the attacks of 9/11 which was followed by the US and NATO military intervention that defeated the Taliban the same year. The Taliban escaped to the Pakistani tribal zones, regrouped in 2005, and have since been leading a neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan through the AfPak frontier (a Pashtun area).\textsuperscript{78}

\section*{2.2. The persistence of civil war}

After the Taliban regrouped and re-organized, Johnson and Mason observed a 200 percent increase in insurgent attacks when he compared the first five months of 2005 and 2006.\textsuperscript{79} The rise in the year 2006 was explained by the change in intensity of the Taliban attacks. Before 2006, the insurgent’s attacks consisted of hit-and-run tactics conducted by small groups of guerrillas; after 2006, the Taliban had the capacity to carry out frontal assaults on government targets and security posts with groups of more than 100 fighters.\textsuperscript{80} This rise in intensity is represented in Appendix 4, which shows the spread and density of security

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 483.
\textsuperscript{74} RIPHENBURG, C. J., “Ethnicity and Civil Society in Contemporary Afghanistan”, \textit{in Middle East Journal}, Vol. 59, n°1, (winter, 2005), p. 37.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}
incidents for the period 2008-2013. Therefore, we observe that progressively, first the east then the south of the country fell under the control of the Taliban and the tendency continues to the present time, where we acknowledge a situation with a higher density of security incidents.\footnote{JOHNSON, T. H., \\& MASON, M. C., \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 81.}

Finally, we observe that the year 2006 represents a turning point in the level of violence carried out by the insurgency. Moreover, the violence does not appear to be decreasing as attacks by insurgents on government forces remain at a high level with peaks during spring and summer confirming the so called “traditional Taliban spring offensive” as showed in Appendix 5.

The aim of the next section is to apply to the Afghan case the criteria allowing us to confirm the existence and persistence of a civil war. To achieve our goal we will take each criterion separately and use data collected from 2006 and 2014 by the Brooking Index on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2.2.1. A state member of the international system with a minimum population of 500,000.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan counts 31,822,848 inhabitants\footnote{CIA WORLD FACTBOOK, \textit{Afghanistan}, [online], https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html.} and is a member of the United Nations since 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1946. The country is a member of regional organizations: the SAARC (South Asian Association for regional cooperation) and CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia).\footnote{MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN), \textit{Afghanistan Foreign Policy}, [online], http://mfa.gov.af/en/page/3883#en.} Furthermore, in February 2013, the EU and Afghanistan signed a deal concluding their bilateral negotiations on Afghanistan’s accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva.\footnote{The EU is one of Afghanistan's main trading partners, accounting for almost 9% of its exports and 12% of its imports. In 2012 the total value of EU goods exported to Afghanistan was €935 million, while imports from Afghanistan amounted to €56 million. Afghanistan mainly supplies the EU market with skins and leather products, fruits/nuts, but also electronic products, which together represent more than 50% of its exports to the EU. The main EU exports to Afghanistan are vehicles, mineral fuels, machinery and electrical equipment. (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-135_en.htm)}

2.2.2. The parties are politically and militarily organized, and they have publicly stated political objectives.

Since 2013, the war in Afghanistan reached a new stage where it is now a fight
between the insurgents and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the latter representing 350,000 security personnel. The major insurgent group is the Afghan Taliban, which is under the command of Mullah Mohammed Omar. Besides the Taliban, there are three other groups: a Taliban splinter group named Mahaz-e-Fedayeen, under the command of Mullah Najibullah, who had previously served under the notorious Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah; the Hizb-e Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar based in the east; and finally, the Haqqani network, operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas’ North Waziristan (FATAs) and closely affiliated to the Taliban. Concerning their political objectives, insurgent groups in Afghanistan are committed to bringing down the Afghan government and to getting rid of the international forces.

In this paper, we will focus on the major insurgent group, the Taliban. They have reemerged since their defeat as a more sophisticated actor leading the current civil war. They have since recovered their logistics, foreign support, foreign fighters and part of their financial capital through the narcotics trade. They are the most organized group on the Afghan soil and the one with whom President Karzai and the Americans are trying to reach a political settlement. However, the Mullah Omar has stated several times that it was out of the question to negotiate concessions with Karzai’s government, as the stated political goal of the Taliban is to overthrow the current government and regain total control of the country. In other words, “We are in front of an existential battle over the form of government implemented in Afghanistan after international assistance reduces.” The Taliban are clearly fighting for total control over state institutions.

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2.2.3. The government must be a principal combatant and the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance.\textsuperscript{94}

By observing the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) fatalities in 2007-2013 in Table 1, and comparing the numbers with the U.S. and coalition fatalities in Table 2, we can see that the government is a principal combatant alongside the U.S. and coalition troops. Since the beginning of the war in 2001, the U.S. and Coalition troops have suffered 3431 fatalities, while for the shorter period 2007-2012, the ANSF suffered 9876 fatalities.

**Tab. 1.** : Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) Personnel Fatalities, January 2007-2013.\textsuperscript{95}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ANA</th>
<th>ANP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>1012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>1106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>1480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>3400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tab. 2.** : U.S. and Coalition Troop Fatalities from October 2001 to May 2014.\textsuperscript{96}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Fatalities</th>
<th>Hostile</th>
<th>Non-Hostile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>2316</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3431</td>
<td>2775</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides, we can observe that the insurgents are capable of mounting effective resistance as the level of fatalities surpasses by far the threshold of 100 deaths. This statement is strengthened by the level of civilian fatalities shown in Table 3, which should be read in parallel with Appendix 6 illustrating the yearly percentage of Afghan civilian fatalities per the group that caused them. The majority of civilian deaths are attributed to anti government forces (between 54.8% and 79.1%) and a lesser fraction to pro-government forces (between 11.5% and 39.1%); this corroborates that the principal combatants are the government and the insurgents.

\textsuperscript{94} Effective resistance is measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party.

\textsuperscript{95} LIVINGSTON, S., & O’HANLON, M., “Afghanistan Index”, Brookings, 14\textsuperscript{th} May 2014, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 10.
Tab. 3: Civilian fatalities by year (2007-2013)\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian fatalities</td>
<td>1523</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>2412</td>
<td>2790</td>
<td>3133</td>
<td>2768</td>
<td>2959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.4. The start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths.

As mentioned before, we began with the analysis of the data from the period 2006-2007. In 2007, ANSF fatalities are 1012 (see Table 1), and civil casualties 1523 (the year when the civil deaths first surpass 1000 casualties) (see Table 3). Therefore we count a total of 2535 fatalities (excluding coalition fatalities) thus confirming that the civil war began in 2007 in Afghanistan.

2.2.5. There should be no 3-year period during which the conflict causes fewer than 500 deaths.

Combining Table 1 on fatalities and Table 3 on civilian deaths, we observe that there is a sustained high level of violence from 2007 to 2014. As a matter of fact, each year sees far more than 500 fatalities.

2.2.6. The main insurgent organization(s) must be locally represented and must recruit locally. Insurgent groups may operate from neighbouring countries, but they must also have some territorial control in the civil war country and/or the rebels must reside in the civil war country. Additionally, The country engages the majority of the population which a part supports (explicitly or implicitly) the insurgents.

Since the U.S. intervention in 2001, the Taliban have escaped to Pakistan tribal areas (see Appendix 7) characterized by a Pashtun ethnic dominance. Their leader, Mollah Muhammed Omar, is the head of the Quetta Shura (leadership Council). From there, Taliban leaders maintain a degree of operational authority over Afghan Taliban fighters: the Quetta Shura and the subcouncils make all the decisions, then they issue directives to provincial,

military and religious councils, which are also divided into regions and districts. Subsequently, the orders reach Taliban local commanders in Afghanistan who control de facto a number of provinces with a parallel system of “shadow governors” who are in charge of conducting the attacks, channelling aid for the population and rendering justice in accordance with traditional customs (*Pashtunwali* code). In short, apart the use of violence, the Taliban strategy is to provide the population with services that state institutions do not have, the capacity to offer. As a result, the population support the Taliban in certain areas of the country. In fact, a survey from the Asia Foundation found that rural Afghans trust the Taliban’s shadow justice system more than that of the government and that “a third of Afghans—mostly Pashtuns and rural Afghans—had sympathy for armed opposition groups, primarily the Taliban.” What is more, nearly two-thirds of Afghans currently believe that the government should reach a settlement with the Taliban to stabilize the country.

### 2.3. State fragility in Afghanistan

According to the different fragility indices we have compared in this paper, Afghanistan is either the first, second or third most fragile state in the world; with an exception as per the *Fragile State Index 2013* where it lies in the top 7 most failed countries. This observation is based on different indicators of fragility. In the case of Afghanistan, and even with the two international military command structures backing the country, the state is unable of providing the most important public good for its people: adequate security.

#### 2.3.1. Public goods provision: security and rule of law

No less than Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003, coined the saying that Afghanistan is in need of three things: “Security, security, and security”.

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101 Ibid.
The security situation in Afghanistan is worsening. We saw it before in Tables 1 and 2 with the increase in the number of ANSF and civil death since 2007. In the face of such a violent insurgency, the number of policemen killed each week speaks for itself: last September, a top NATO commander expressed his concern regarding the losses the ANSF were and still are facing.105 The ANSF is currently counting more than 100 dead a week; a number that has doubled in just one year, leading the Afghan government to not even publish the number of casualties for several months to avoid demoralizing the troops.106 Hence, the country is marked by a “persistent character of violence”, illustrating the state’s incapacity to guarantee the protection of its forces and population against insurgents.

One of the reasons behind these alarming numbers is that the ANP significantly lack resources, training and proper equipment.107 Moreover, the Afghan Ministry of Interior is “ineffective, poorly led and corrupt”.108 This situation is confirmed by the Asia Foundation’s survey of the Afghan people, which argues that the population believes security is the first problem that should be fixed; especially in the south-eastern provinces of the country.109 As a consequence of this insecurity situation, and adding the fact that the official power is exerted in Kabul and other large cities, while remaining absent in vast rural areas -which are under the control of non-state power holders110- the formal state is losing credibility and legitimacy as it appears remain dependent on the support of foreign forces and is incapable of protecting its population and police forces.111 Moreover, the legitimacy of the central state is further shaken by the revelation of corruption occurring at the highest level, the presidency, as President Karzai seems to favour a network of “urban elites” and former warlords appointed at state functions when it comes to redistributing assistance112, as well as other suspicions of corruption.113 As a consequence, the state is becoming increasingly illegitimate for a majority of the Afghan people.114

106 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 23.
113 Narco-trafficking and corruption are now known to reach the highest levels of the Afghan government, as shown by the recent corruption scandal at the Kabul Bank, the interference in the Anti- Corruption Commission by President Karzai himself, and the fact that the Afghan Deputy President, Zia Massoud, was alleged to have
In an attempt to reverse this trend, the government issued The Afghan Compact advancing a series of ambitious tasks in the sectors of security, governance and rule of law. The document proved to be more radical than the Bonn Agreement and the Afghan state had not yet acquired the capacity to achieve these objectives. However, these goals have not been met yet as the state remains extremely fragile. The state has not penetrated all its territory and areas of governance, and its legitimacy remains at stake.

2.3.2. The Taliban shadow government

We previously mentioned the existence of shadow governors in the country. In 2008, Kilcullen identified 13 operating shadow Taliban courts in southern Afghanistan thus expanding Taliban influence and legitimacy. These courts settle disagreements using Islamic Shari’ah law and the Pashtun code for all civil and criminal matters. The Taliban have succeeded in bringing their judiciary system to many areas of Afghanistan previously ignored by the Afghan state. This is an illustration of the traditional cleavage between cities and villages in Afghanistan. After having proven that they were militarily organized, the Taliban went on to challenge the sovereignty of the state by providing justice to the population where the state was not capable of doing so. Further, the Taliban also:

[...] developed a media section, political wing, financial commission and, most recently, a “Call and Guidance/Recruitment Commission”, intended to bring over defectors from the regime. International intelligence estimates traced the growth of the armed strength of the insurgency from the low thousands in 2005, to somewhere around 25 – 35,000 in 2013.

As a result, the Taliban has obtained internal legitimacy as the local population in certain

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118 Ibid.
southern and southwestern areas\textsuperscript{121} consider the Taliban a more efficient security provider than the Afghan government or the coalition forces.\textsuperscript{122} Additionally, the movement has received external legitimacy through the opening of a Taliban office in Doha\textsuperscript{123}. International recognition of the Taliban through the Doha office could constitute a first step towards considering the Taliban as a viable alternative political contender inside Afghanistan.

In parallel, the Taliban sustain informal relations with local government officials. This is the case in the Kapisa Province where government agents and Taliban are aware that they will not be able to defeat each other hence promoting coexistence.\textsuperscript{124}

Acknowledging these realities, the Afghan government has discussed the possibility of allowing the Taliban to participate in the political process and granting amnesty to insurgents willing to do so.\textsuperscript{125} Additionally, the Afghan government has launched an objective of formal direct negotiation with the Taliban by end 2013 through the Afghan High Peace Council, in prevision of the withdrawal of most NATO forces by end 2014.\textsuperscript{126} Moreover, an Afghan senior official declared last June that the Taliban were ready to enter the process.\textsuperscript{127} In this regard, it has to be noted that the willingness of Karzai to propose reconciliation was made possible by the intervention of “high-level former Taliban [who] have joined the system and held positions in government.”\textsuperscript{128} However, no concrete results have emerged so far. A number of authors suggest that the Afghan government is actually in a position of weakness (increase in insurgency, foreign coalition forces to be withdrawn in 2014) and thus should avoid any negotiations with insurgent groups.\textsuperscript{129}

Taliban leaders appear least interested in dialogue. Even if they were, amnesty for hardcore Taliban leaders and commanders and inclusion in government would send

\textsuperscript{121} The Taliban had support from a number of Pashtun Ghilzai tribes, as well as such Durrani tribes as the Alekozai, Eshaqzais, and Norzais. But most Durrani Pashtuns did not support the Taliban, nor did a number of other eastern and southern Pashtun groups. (JONES, S.G., “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad”, in \textit{International Security}, Vol. 32, N°4, 2008, p. 11.)


\textsuperscript{124} SAFI, M.(Asia Times), \textit{War’s a Farce in Afghan Truce Village}, [online], http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MC31Df03.html (31th March 2011).

\textsuperscript{125} INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, “Countering Afghan’s Insurgency: no Quick Fixes”, \textit{Asia Report n°123}, 2 November 2006, p. 20.


\textsuperscript{127} WELCH, D. (Reuters), “Taliban is Ready to Talk Peace with Afghan State”: Afghan Official, [online], http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/18/us-afghanistan-idUSBRE95H0NE20130618 (18th June 2013).


the message that the road to power in present-day Afghanistan is through the gun.\(^{130}\)

Therefore, there is a risk of seeing the current civil war worsening and all the efforts that were mobilized for stabilization and state-building could be undermined by the resulting additional loss of state authority and legitimacy.

2.4. Economic development

2.4.1. Afghanistan’s economy

In May 2012, the NATO Summit in Chicago ratified the decision for financial support for the amount of 4.1 billion $ per year until the end of 2014 for the Afghan army. In July 2012, the second Tokyo Summit gathered the donor countries, international organizations and the Afghan government to discuss the long-term development of Afghanistan. The stakeholders decided that they would continue financing the country up to the amount of 16 billion $ until 2016.\(^{131}\) Afghanistan is not yet capable of sustaining itself as the country faces a budget shortfall.\(^{132}\) According to the World Bank, “Afghanistan will need more than 7 billion $ annually for the next decade to sustain a functional government, maintain infrastructure and fund the Afghan army and police.”\(^{133}\) We will now review the economic indicators from 2005 and the current difficult situation.

Appendix 8 illustrates a number of economic indicators for Afghanistan: we observe that the GDP per capita and real GDP have increased each year since 2005. However, economists explain that the overall economic growth remains highly volatile. As an example, in the FY2009/10 Afghanistan’s GDP growth rate was 21 percent and dropped to 8.4 percent in FY2010/2011.\(^{134}\) We observe a fragile economy that depends heavily on one particular volatile sector, namely agriculture, which is dependent on weather conditions. The latter appeared to be exceptionally good for the year 2009/2010, a year that also saw a large increase in donor grants.\(^{135}\) Also, the percent of GDP attributed to the service sector grew due


\(^{131}\) **MICHELETTI, P., Op. cit.**

\(^{132}\) **THE WASHINGTON POST, Afghan Economy Facing Serious Revenue Shortage, [online],**


\(^{133}\) **Ibid.**

\(^{134}\) **THE WORLD BANK, “Afghanistan Economic Update”, October 2011, p. 2.**

\(^{135}\) **Ibid.**
to a boom in telecommunications transportation and insurance services. The mining sector is also expected to restore the trade balance as it is a sector not yet exploited but with substantial reserves (expected revenue of 208 million $ per year over 2011-2015). This tendency was repeated in 2012 with a record harvest (a quarter of the GDP) and rapid expansion in services (half of the GDP), resulting in a 14.4 percent economic growth (6.1 percent in 2011).

However, there were signs of a considerable slowdown in 2013, except for the transportation sector that maintains its health with international military contracts and is currently benefitting from the repatriation of international forces. The World Bank predicts a weaker economic growth of 3.5 percent in 2014. Private investment considerably slowed down in 2013 and will continue to drop in 2014. Moreover, the administration’s weakness in collecting revenue is also a major concern: during the first semester of 2013, revenues amounted to 48 billion Afis (Afghanis) while they reached 54 billion Afis at the same period in 2012. The government thus faces an 11 percent decline in revenues in nominal terms.

2.4.2. Growing economic indicators and growing insurgency: a paradox?

The World Bank explains the economic slowdown observed from 2012 as being a consequence of the uncertainty surrounding the political and security transition. Economic theorists of civil wars identify low GDP per capita and low economic growth as causes of civil war. In this case, however, we do not observe low figures for these indicators in the year when the civil war began (2006/07). On the contrary, figures are high (even if they exclude opium production) and should demonstrate evidence of a strong state, where the risk of rebellion is low, and where there should be more economic opportunity for people to engage in production activities rather than the appropriation of resources through insurgent activities. Nevertheless, we have already observed that the level of civil violence grew constantly from 2007 to 2014. Hence, motivation for rebellion and increasing economic growth have coexisted since 2007. We suspect that this paradox lies within more complex reasons, so we have to dig deeper in order to understand it.

The sub-sections below show first how the economic performance of the country has been biased by foreign influx; and secondly, explore the influence of the population dispersion variable already mentioned in the theoretical framework and identified in a study.

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138 Ibid., p. 5.
139 Ibid., p. 14.
140 During the first seven months (January – July) of 2013, only 2,000 new firms registered with the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), compared to 3,500 new firm registrations over the same period in 2012.
aiming to improve the CH model.\textsuperscript{141}

2.4.2.1. A nascent economy on a drip

Previously, we saw that the Taliban regime that followed the first civil war in 1996 basically dragged the country back to the Middle Age of development. After the U.S. intervention, everything from basic infrastructures to the state itself had to be rebuilt, and we saw that there is still an enormous amount of work to do to reach these goals. The figures of the Afghan economy could appear encouraging until 2012, but the country’s legal economic growth has been tied to international aid and security spending.\textsuperscript{142} Donors have covered the gap in the budget with an annual aid of US$8 billion until 2016\textsuperscript{143} and the ANSF financing is totally dependent on foreign aid: currently US$7 billion per year but expected to fall to US$4 billion after 2014, with a planned reduction of ANSF size from the present 352,000 to 228,500 in 2015.\textsuperscript{144}

Therefore, Afghanistan’s economy is tied to an international drip to insure its viability. As a consequence, the numbers are inflated and give us a biased overview of the country’s economic performance further proven by the impressive drop in all the economic indicators in 2013 and expected to continue for 2014. This drop is explained by the lack of confidence among the international donors about the security situation. They are less and less willing to inject money into the country, and less foreign assistance means lower economic performance.

This lack of confidence has several explanations. First, at the 2012 Tokyo Conference Karzai promised to increase tax revenues from 5 to 15 percent but it never happened. A second reason of distrust is the inability of the government to improve tax and customs collection, reduce massive corruption and prevent the diversion of both aid and public finance, and stop capital flight.\textsuperscript{145} Thirdly, the promise that the country’s mineral resources would generate revenues to reduce Afghanistan’s dependence on foreign aid (and opium trade) was not fulfilled either.\textsuperscript{146} Chinese investors who have bought mining licenses do not want to invest in costly infrastructures citing a lack of security and debilitating corruption. Therefore, opium poppy cultivation continues to grow and remains the sole source of revenue.

\textsuperscript{143} THE WORLD BANK, “Afghanistan Economic Update”, October 2014, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 174.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 175
for a large part of the poorest population. Overall, Afghanistan failed to meet 14 out of the 17 benchmarks specified at the Tokyo conference and Norway has already cut a portion of its foreign aid. The U.S. Congress has also raised concerns on the dependence of the aid on the condition of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). This situation is likely to see the foreign aid drop further if essential reforms are not made at state level, thus explaining the poor figures projected for 2014. There is a clear confidence problem on the capacity of the country to take over security on its own.

As a conclusion, the Afghan economy is volatile and at risk. The forecast for the year to come confirms the dependency of the country’s economical stability on the influx of foreign funds, thus explaining the paradox between the figures and the reality of the current civil war. However, even if the figures do not represent the reality of the economic situation, foreign aid is still arriving in the country. Therefore it is legitimate to question where the assistance goes. In order to answer this question and further assess the economic situation, we need to take a closer look at the population dispersion variable.

2.4.2.2. Population dispersion: the warlord issue

Economic theories of civil wars found that population dispersion facilitate insurgency as large uncontrolled areas can offer hideouts for rebels. Afghanistan is 81% rural and only a dozen cities number more than 70 000 inhabitants. As demonstrated previously there is a large uncontrolled periphery unreachable by the state. Furthermore, the periphery’s socio-economic structure is articulated around competition for the access of resources dominated by local warlords.

In 1989, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan defeated by militia commanders backed by the United States. These particular actors turned into powerful warlords controlling vast areas, possessing an army and funded by diverse sources of income, but where the Taliban defeated them in 1996. However, after the US intervention in 2001, the Bush and Karzai administrations co-opted and re-armed former warlords to fill the security gap. Consequently, the warlords progressively regained power and influence within their

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individual strongholds. In short, the US forces took advantage of what was “there” without developing a long-term strategy for the Afghan security sector:

[...] local warlord militia forces “led every mounted patrol and most major operations,” partly because “they knew the ground better and could more easily spot something that was out of place or suspicious.”

At the present time, warlord militias’ security function is orientated towards the protection of the warlord and its network/clientele, the latter consisting of a tribal or ethnic community living and operating within a defined territory. These warlords detain the monopoly of the use of violence in their territories without being controlled by the state. Indeed, for some warlords, the state was considered an enemy threatening their quest to strengthen their networks (tribes, patrons, ethnic ties, family, militias) to which there is linked their strong legitimacy. However, a number of them have a very close relationship with the central state and are often “contracted as a kind of para-state actor.” Therefore, in order to decrease the power of warlords in the country, the Karzai administration offered them government positions; the aim being to detach warlords from their strongholds and keep a close eye on them once they were based in Kabul. A number of them refused these offers but others saw the opportunity to pursue their own interests. Indeed, while their network was still operating in their power bases of origin, they took over positions like “governors, ministers, police chiefs, or military officers”.

[These warlords] pursue their own interests and do not hesitate to deploy state resources to accomplish their private goals [...] the relationship between warlords and the state can be described as a process in which the former take over state positions and simultaneously fail to fulfill state functions and to obey the state rules.

Additionally, once in place, these warlords establish their clients in key local security

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152 Ibid.
functions enabling a process where their militia are integrated into regular army units.¹⁶⁰ Not only this situation threatens Afghanistan’s national security, but these warlords prevent and often stop key core political goods from being provided to the population. Therefore, the country entered into a vicious circle that decreases the legitimacy of the state, as the population does not benefit from the state-building process and are subjected to the daily exaction of warlords who remain unpunished.¹⁶¹

Besides the deviation of assistance to the benefit of warlords, another element that increases the population’s frustration is the strategy of the central government. More precisely, the government seems to use economic assistance for ideological aims in order to present impressive socio-economic indicators in its assessments: e.g. the government builds modern schools in districts where the number one problems are malnutrition and drought.¹⁶² As a consequence, these schools constitute the first military targets of the insurgents.¹⁶³

To conclude, the cleavage center/periphery is again emphasized in order to explain how assistance is misused by the government or deviated by warlords reigning in rural areas. The latter control large areas and capture foreign assistance in order to strengthen their own networks instead of providing the population with the public goods they need. At this point, we can ask ourselves how the Taliban fit in this economy of predation. How are they able to grow in power and capability in this particular context? Our aim is to understand the dynamic behind the economic cause of the civil war that started in 2007. In other words, how the insurrection was motivated by the economic context.

2.4.3. Greed versus grievance and the Neo-Taliban

Economic assistance rarely reaches the population in the periphery, thus exacerbating local economical conflicts. People are abandoned by the state in a competition for the access of resources. In order to survive, the population exports opium, wood or precious stones and metals.¹⁶⁴ However, to achieve that, one has to search for a powerful protector (warlord) who will provide external resources and protection in exchange for territorial obedience and a

¹⁶³ Ibid.
percentage of the benefits. As we noted before, a considerable number of these warlords fulfilled security tasks for the government and were appointed governors, district chiefs, or chiefs of police. In the province of Helmand, a citizen gave evidence of the worsening of the situation following the appointment by the government of a former warlord to chief of police in his district:

In the first six months when we had the council, everything was going well. Everything was done by advising and in contact with the local villagers. When the official police chief and district chief arrived ... day by day the situation got worse. There was lots of extortion and stealing, and people were killed, and someone was even burned in their car by these government people, and day by day people got fed up with this Afghan government and welcomed the Taliban back into their districts.

This situation created frustration and sometimes a violent response when people decided to fight back and constituted small independent communities or criminal groups with the aim of targeting government targets. Therefore, opposition between, on the one hand, warlords and their clienteles benefiting from government largesse, and on the other, oppressed and neglected tribal communities, hardened. Impunity and abusive governance led to a situation where the population welcomed the return of the Taliban presenting themselves as the party of law and order (shari’a).

The Taliban exploited this frustration among the peripheral population. Indeed, we have previously observed an expansion in the Taliban influence and attacks since 2006/07, which marks the beginning of the civil war. This expansion is principally due to the co-optation by the Taliban of these communities in conflict with the government authorities or even the militia aligned with the government.

Furthermore, from 2007, the Taliban began to attract a significant number of discontented and marginalized mujahidin and young men who found in the insurgency a way to improve their social status. Through them, the Taliban were able to achieve the first phase of penetration into a specific territory or area. Taliban leaders based in Pakistan first sent small infiltration teams to prepare the ground for a progressive intensification of

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167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
171 Ibid., p. 177.
Once they arrived, the Taliban distributed money and weapons and started to issue directives. They soon encouraged their young recruits to attack schools, police stations, or any actors linked to state authority. At the same time, they deliberately did not establish an administrative structure in order to avoid conflicts, except for the insurgency centres tied to opium production (Helmand, North Badghis), or a radical madrasa (Gazni, Kunar), or a logistic strategic crossroad (Uruzgan). In these areas, the Taliban established weapon stocks and authorized their local fighters to collect taxes (*ushr* and *zakat*) for themselves and a percentage for the Taliban post of command, a method in phase with the economy of predation.

Unlike their conquest of the country in the nineties, the Neo-Taliban did not infiltrate these areas with their flag, ideology, political grievances or Pashtun ethnicity. They knew that the population would not be attracted by those in the first place; instead they exploited local economic frustrations. Their goal was to secure strategic routes in order to coordinate more impressive attacks. In short, the Neo-Taliban were, at the beginning, a distributor of “franchise” as they co-opted individuals linked to the opium trade, marginalized former warlords, young men, Al Qaida elements and so forth. In other words, at the start of the civil war, the Taliban acted as an umbrella organization co-opting groups that did not share their ideological beliefs but that were primarily interested in the financial advantages of the rebellion, similar to mercenaries. This was especially the case for young men. Indeed, as an elder explained in an interview: “They were jobless, the young. They didn’t talk to the mullahs, they went straight to the Taliban. They saw it as work.”

Therefore, greed seems to have been an important source of the motivation behind starting the rebellion. At least it permitted the Neo-Taliban to expand their power and influence to the whole country. However, it is important to note that as the insurgency gained in importance, the call for jihad against foreign and national troops also represented an important motive for volunteering to join the Taliban as the intensification of ISAF operations in 2006 left a large number of civilian fatalities in these areas.

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174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
180 Ibid., p. 853.
Conclusion: the dynamics of the Neo-Taliban resurgence

After the Taliban regrouped and re-organized, a rise in insurgent activity was observed in the year 2006. Besides the multiplication in the number of attacks, the Taliban gained the capacity to carry out frontal assaults on government targets with groups of more than 100 fighters, situations that never occurred after the defeat of the Taliban in 2001. This next stage in the level of civil violence led the country to an internal war in 2007 as Afghanistan brought together all the constitutive elements of a civil war. Identifying the persistence of a civil war has enabled us to present a theoretical framework on the causes of civil war providing us with the necessary tools to analyse the Neo-Taliban insurgency. At the end of the process, we identify three major dynamics, which intertwine and explain the emergence of the insurgency, and which still condition the enduring violence today: the center/periphery cleavage, the economic frustration and the challenge to state authority.

A fragile state and an abandoned rural peripheral area characterize the center/periphery dynamic. Therefore, official power is exerted in Kabul and other large cities, while remaining absent in vast rural areas. Moreover, we have assessed the fragility of the Afghan state, which is considered the third most failed state in the world. As a consequence, the Afghan government is not able to provide the essential public good of security to its population and has been several times marred by corruption and scandals. Hence, the state is in the hands of a small group of people capturing state resources for their own benefits with a majority of the population living in a persisting context of violence. This situation, combined with the image of a state dependent on the support of foreign funds and forces, creates an atmosphere within which the government loses its credibility and legitimacy.

This first dynamic engages a second one where economic frustration arises. The cities/villages or center/periphery cleavage enables the population dispersion variable to emerge and produces economic frustration in rural areas. We assessed that these areas are for the major part under the rule of warlords pursuing their own interests and who never hesitate to deploy state resources to achieve private goals. As a large number of these warlords are co-opted as para-state actors, they can take over state positions and at the same time fail to fulfill state function and obeying state rules. Assistance is thus misused and captured by government agents in rural areas. It consequently never reaches the population most in need. In short, the situation is one in which warlords and their clientele are benefitting from government largesse while oppressing rural communities. In these areas, people left with no resources have the
choice either to sign an oath of allegiance to the warlords in order to survive or to engage in criminal activities.

The first and second dynamic interlocked and allowed the Taliban to take advantage of the frustration in peripheral areas to a point where they were welcomed by the population as a party bringing back security, law and order. This took place first in the Helmand province and rapidly expanded to the Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces. Indeed, we have previously observed an expansion in the Taliban influence and attacks since 2006/07, the period that marks the beginning of the civil war. This expansion is principally due to the co-optation by the Taliban of these communities in conflict with the government authorities or even the militia aligned with the government.

The third and final dynamic is the constant challenge the Taliban pose to the sovereignty of the state. This paper demonstrates how the Taliban progressively infiltrated villages and gained the support of the population. They also gradually introduced shadow governors in the country. In 2008, 13 operating shadow Taliban courts were identified in the southern part of Afghanistan alone. These shadow governors and courts are coordinated from the Quetta shura and de facto control areas that have fallen outside the range of control of the central state. In these areas, this parallel government carries out attacks, channels aid for the population and, more importantly, renders justice in accordance with shari’a law and Pashtunwali code. In short, apart from the use of violence, the Taliban strategy is to provide the population with services that state institutions do not have the capacity to offer. As a result, the population supports the Taliban in certain areas of the country. In fact, a survey carried out by the Asia Foundation found that rural Afghans trust the Taliban’s shadow justice system more than that of the government and that a third of Afghans had are supportive of armed opposition groups, primarily the Taliban. What is more, nearly two-thirds of Afghans currently believe that the government should reach a settlement with the Taliban to stabilize the country. On one hand, we observe that the Taliban are gaining in military power and legitimacy in the peripheral areas. On the other hand, the government is progressively losing control of these areas and suffering higher fatalities.

As a result, the Karzai administration has tried to launch talks with the Taliban over a possible settlement for the future but no concrete results have emerged so far. However, the Taliban central command has repeatedly declared that it was out of the question to negotiate with what they term a “puppet” government serving the interests of the United States. Thus, we are facing an existential battle over the form of government implemented in Afghanistan after international troops leave and assistance is reduced.
Finally, we understand that the three dynamics intertwine and gave rise to a persistent civil war in Afghanistan started in 2007 by a Neo-Taliban insurgency using economic frustration of the peripheral areas without stating any ethnic, political or religious grievances. Afghanistan is in a situation of permanent conflict over the access of resources. We believe that the issue of the civil war will be decided in the periphery, an area that seems not yet to be totally won over by the Taliban or the government. Therefore, authorities should focus empower local communities to debate over their needs in order to sequence the assistance adequately and provide the population with the most urgent public goods. This practice should reduce the economic frustration and stop the vicious circle resulting in the interlocking of the three dynamics identified.
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**Theses**


Appendices

Appendix 1: Fragility Indices

Failed State Index (FSI): Using the Conflict Assessment System (CAST), the FSI evaluates the risk of state failure. Through sophisticated search parameters and algorithms, the CAST software separates the relevant data from the irrelevant. Guided by twelve primary social, economic and political indicators (each split into an average of 14 sub-indicators). The FSI ranks 178 countries using the following indicators: demographic pressures, refugees and IDPs, uneven economic development, group grievance, human flight and brain drain, poverty and economic decline, state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, security apparatus, factionalized elites, external intervention. In this index, the higher a value a country has, the higher its degree of fragility. On the other hand, lower values indicate a better state capacity.

The Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger (PCIL): The PCIL ranks 163 countries by measuring their risk of future state instability. It combines publicly available statistics, which include the following indicators: regime consistency, economic openness, infant mortality, neighbourhood wars and militarization.

Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP): The CIFP is a global fragility ranking of 197 countries. It is based on country-level structural indicators in order to build effective responses to intrastate conflict. The CIFP measures 3 fundamental properties (authority, legitimacy and capacity) through 74 indicators covering several themes: governance, security and crime, economics, human development, demography, gender, and environment.

State Fragility Index (SFI): the SFI ranks 164 countries in terms of effectiveness and legitimacy across 4 dimensions of state functions: economic development, social development, governance and security. It uses a variety of indicators in order to assess the performance of states.

Index of State Weakness (ISW): the ISW ranks the 141 developing countries according to their relative performance in 4 critical spheres: economic, political, security and social welfare. It uses 20 indicators in order to assess the state's weakness according to its effectiveness, responsiveness and legitimacy across a range of government activities.

## Appendix 2: Fragile states indices, top ten countries

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### Failed States Index Top 10 Lists, 2005-2013

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Appendix 3: Afghanistan ethnic groups and Pashtun geographical spread in Afghanistan and Pakistan


Source: AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, South Asia, [online], http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/southasiamasala/files/2012/06/map-cropped1.jpg
Appendix 4: density of security incidents (2008-2013)


Appendix 6: non-civilian and civilian casualties

Fig. 1: Civilian fatalities (2006-2013)

Key: Anti govt forces, Pro-govt forces, non attributable.


Fig. 2: Estimated percentage of Afghan Civilian Fatalities by Group which caused (2006-2013).

Key: Anti govt forces, Pro-govt forces, non attributable.

Appendix 7: Afghanistan-Pakistan tribal areas

Source: LE MONDE, Tuerie de Toulouse: retour sur les évènements, [online],
http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/03/23/tuerie-de-toulouse-retour-sur-les-
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Appendix 8: Economic Indicators

Per capita GDP at current prices (US dollars)