The Bright and Dark Faces of Globalization in Afghanistan*

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Abstract

Afghanistan offers an excellent case study for exemplifying the bright and dark sides of globalization. This paper seeks to provide a nuanced and balanced picture of the effects of globalization and regionalization as viewed through the lenses of Afghanistan's narcotics trafficking, the media, and foreign aid. No other element in Afghanistan's economy bears so clearly the marks of globalization as does narcotics, both in contributing to the country's economic survival and in serving as a threat to its success as a state. Global market forces, unmitigated by Afghanistan's weak post-2001 institutions, have made poppy growing and opium production the best of a poor range of options. Yet among several unintended consequences, the beneficiaries of global trade have included the Taliban insurgents, who tax production and exact payment from drug traffickers in exchange for protection. Afghanistan has meanwhile undergone a media and communications revolution. The country's exposure to foreign television programming has raised public expectations of more responsive governance and

* This article is expanded and revised from a paper presented at a symposium on Governing Globalization at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on March 31, 2017.

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service delivery. There have been opportunities to strengthen people's national identity and gain access to difficult-to- reach populations. However, freedoms for the press and media have also laid the ground for more regressive, ethnocentric, and divisive tendencies. And the international development aid that has provided Afghanistan large sums of money for building economic and political institutions has also served to fuel corruption and to undermine government incentives for extracting taxes and taking responsibility for the country's security.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Soviet invasion, Cold War, Globalization, Economy, Pakistan, Resources, Democracy

Introduction

South Asia has been a prime beneficiary of globalization. Access to foreign educational institutions and ideas has produced some of the world's best doctors and engineers, and foreign direct investment has created new industries and helped to turn cities into hubs of commerce. With the diffusion of knowledge, the well being of the poor over vast swathes of the region has improved. Increasing mobile phone and Internet penetration has resulted in a more aware populations that demands greater government services and accountability from their rulers.

However, with globalization's benefits have come tradeoffs: unfettered markets often fail to promote social good, empowered unaccountable institutions can lead to state capture and subsequently predation, and wider access to information enables benevolent and malevolent actors indiscriminately. In the region, Afghanistan offers a unique case study of globalization, elevating from a disintegrated state isolated from the world to one where the fate of international politics was set to reveal itself for more than a decade.

Foreign influence prior to the mid-twentieth century was limited to Afghanistan's small elite. The Cold War brought attention to the country in the form of competing us and Soviet development assistance. The ouster of the Durrani monarchy in 1973 and subsequent political infighting and Islamic insurgency prompted the Soviet invasion and occupation. As the civil war in the 1990s gave way to the Taliban ascendance, Afghanistan was ignored by and virtually cut off from the rest of the world. However, with the American military intervention in 2001, the country was suddenly inundated with foreign aid and exposed to global forces. Long a social and economic backwater, Afghanistan was set on a course intended to build a modern state and economy.

International engagement has on the face of it been a positive aspect of Afghanistan's connectivity with the global community. Political and economic institutions were erected and gains have occurred in education and health for a country with some of the world's lowest socioeconomic indicators. Heavy international military assistance boosted economic growth sharply and created conditions for attracting foreign investment. Yet more than fifteen years later, it is clear that international interest and engagement in Afghanistan has also carried perverse effects, including unsustainable and distorted economic growth, wider and deeper corruption, and flourishing markets for illicit goods.

Because much of the global integration that has occurred since 2001 was managed and mediated by foreign powers, our understanding of Afghanistan's encounter with globalization has tended to emphasize its benefits rather than its costs. It is also a byproduct of the tendency to gauge Afghanistan's progress against its dark past (before 9/11) instead of what was expected and supposed to be achieved after 2001. This paper seeks to provide a more nuanced and balanced picture of the effects of globalization and regionalization as viewed briefly through the lenses of Afghanistan's narcotics trafficking, the media, and foreign aid.

Before discussing these three areas and how globalization has affected them, it is imperative to define globalization in the particular

context we are studying. We apply the generic and broadly accepted definition of globalization as the interconnectivity and interdependency across the world caused by the growingly freer flow of information, labor, capital, goods, and services. In Afghanistan, however, the military invasion of 2001 by the US-led NATO coalition played a fundamental role in throwing Afghanistan into the international scene. The connectivity of Afghanistan to the outside world was only a symptom of a strategic calculation on the part of big powers to fight a global war on the Afghan territory making sure it never poses a threat to the national security of those countries. How that militaristic nature of the post-2001 process affected globalization in Afghanistan is what we have taken deeply into consideration in the pages that follow.

Narcotics Trafficking

No other element in Afghanistan's economy bears so clearly the marks of globalization as does narcotics, both contributing to the country's economic survival and serving as a threat to its success as a state. Afghanistan's narcotics trade is a deeply entrenched economic institution. The illicit economy, of which narcotics constitutes a large part, was the only mature part of Afghanistan's economy to survive on through decades of war. While its production was already well integrated into the global economy by 2001, foreign anti-opium policies and global market forces have since solidified Afghanistan's place as an opium producer. Today, the area of opium cultivation (in hectares) amounts to two and one-half to three times that of the 1994-2002 period and production has grown steadily since 2002.[1] Afghanistan produces approximately 90 percent of the world's opium, providing virtually all the opium and morphine base for heroin found in Eurasia.

Opium cultivation at the household level is far from nefarious. In fact, it is part of a carefully calculated subsistence strategy that results from a lack of workable alternatives. Growing poppy is exponentially easier than

[1] "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Executive Summary," New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017.

other crops and plantations that might have equally high revenue or grow in the similar environment such as saffron, cotton, and pomegranates. It is much more resistant to bad weather and natural conditions than other comparable crops. Cheap and plentiful labor have further cemented the dominance of this labor-intensive crop, a phenomenon that will continue to be exacerbated by tightening migration laws across the global but more particularly in Europe that restrict household abilities to diversify income streams. Opium has also proven to be a boon to local economies. Opium cultivation allows farmers to invest in agricultural infrastructure and purchase household commodities. More negatively, this income had an inflationary effect on markets across Afghanistan.

The extent of heroin demand emanating from Europe and Asia makes opium at least thirty times more profitable than wheat, and the absence of crop insurance or agricultural subsidies preclude poorer Afghans from substituting licit crops.[2] Lack of credit, independent of opium, has also made growing at least some opium a necessity.[3] Heightened access to information on agricultural techniques and variety types has increased opium productivity and profits, while traditional knowledge related to the cultivation of licit crops has eroded over the last several decades. With only 12-15% arable land in Afghanistan, growing poppy and the high revenue emanating from it makes it more attractive to farmers. There is only so much land to be used for agricultural purposes and years of conflict and irregular irrigation has deteriorated its fertility. The high price of opium makes it a logical crop in a country where more than 60% of the population subsists on farming.

An important aspect of narcotics in Afghanistan is its political economy. Opium is cultivated primarily in areas where there is extensive

[2]Fishstein, Paul. "Despair or Hope: Rural Livelihoods and Opium Poppy Dynamics in Afghanistan." Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2014.
[3] Anderson, Camilla. "Counterproductive Counternarcotic Strategies?" *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Volume 95, No. 4: 917-931. 22 Feb. 2015.

insecurity. The local war economy creates a vicious cycle where insecurity prepares the environment for poppy cultivation and the narcotics funds the insecurity in an almost fundamental way. There are also local drug traffickers who might not necessarily be related to the insurgency ideologically but find the partnership profitable enough for their businesses. Weak state institutions have allowed the provincial and district level government officials to engage in drug trafficking to enrich themselves. Kandahar's Police Chief, General Abdul Raziq, for example, is known to be a sworn enemy of the Taliban. Many, however, believe his main animosity with the group is not over their regressive ideology, but family feuds, and more importantly, the revenue from opium[4].

The intersection of economic interests of different actors in the government, the local tribal structures, and the insurgency, have facilitated the formation of networks of production and trafficking across the country, especially in provinces close to the main trade routes. In the northern network, opium is transited from Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan to Tajikistan where it is then distributed or traded by large Central Asian and Russian mafias that stretch all the way to Eurasia and Eastern Europe. In the Southern route, the trafficking is controlled much more closely and rigidly by the Taliban which has a stronger grip over the territory. Helmand, in the South, is the single largest producer of opium in the world. Its production is often shipped off to the Gulf States and Africa through Pakistan's Karachi port. In the Western side, opium from Farah, Herat, and Badghis is often trafficked to Iran where there is a large consumer market with millions of drug addicts. Through Iran, it also easily transits to Turkey and Europe. In all of these areas, the political violence goes hand in hand with the criminality of the narco-trafficking.

The interdiction and eradication policies pushed by the international community have also had the perverse effect of exacerbating the extractive nature of opium production and alienating the rural

[4]Aikins, Matthieu, "The Master of Spin Boldak: Undercover with Afghanistan's drug-trafficking border police." *Harper's Magazine*, Dec. 2009. https://harpers.org/archive/2009/12/the-master-of-spin-boldak/2/

population. When enforced, these policies spearheaded by the United States have often crippled local economies and led to widespread destitution in opium-dependent areas.[5] In many cases, if not all, these policies have targeted farmers in the villages who receive the smallest share of the revenue from opium and who do not have much of a choice in abandoning poppy cultivation. The insecurity does not allow them to grow other crops with regular access to markets, both domestically and regionally. Additionally, powerbrokers have corrupted eradication policies as a means to eliminate competitors, leading to the vertical integration of the narcotics market.[6] Farmers alienated because of crop eradication have in some areas welcomed back into their communities those Taliban factions promising to provide security from eradication.[7] The absence of security in rural areas and along trade routes leaves farmers open to extortion not just from criminal elements. This global trade has also profited the Taliban insurgents, who tax production and exact payment from drug traffickers in exchange for protection.

After 2001, some European countries spearheaded by the UK tried to legalize opium cultivation in Afghanistan[8]. The argument underlying their position was that eradicating poppy in Afghanistan is an arduous task hard to be accomplished. By legalizing its plantation, the revenue comes to the Afghan government and allows for the state institutions to rely on their own funding. Taking away the criminality aspect of it, legalizing opium will also, they argue, connect Afghanistan to large markets of pharmaceuticals where opium is considered a key ingredient for many drugs. It could have hypothetically contributed significantly to the

[5]Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Counterinsurgency, Counternarcotics, and Illicit Economies in Afghanistan: Lessons for State-Building." in *Convergence: Illicit Networks*, edited by Michael Miklaucic, 189-208. Washington: National Defense University Press, 2013.
[6] Hogg, Richard, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd, and Andrew Beath. 2013. *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking beyond 2014;Directions in Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
[7] Ibid.
[8]Patey, William, "The War on Drug is Lost – Legalize on the Heroin Trade." *The Guardian*, Jun. 14, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/25/war-on-drugs-heroin-trade-afghanistan

weakening of the Taliban insurgency by drying up the largest source of their revenue. Given that Helmand was the main station for British troops, it is very likely that the exorbitant growth in poppy cultivation in the province after 2001 was partly a byproduct of the reluctance British troops might have had while they were fighting on the political fronts to legalize it. The Afghan government and the United States, however, were not sold on the proposal. While funds continued to be appropriated for eradicating poppy cultivation and policies were formulated, the progress has been sluggish at best.

Media

For decades Afghans have been avid consumers of media despite chronic poverty and underdeveloped communications infrastructure. Persistent conflict magnified the importance of news access, providing information that was critical to decision-making at the household level. Since 2001, Afghanistan has undergone a media and communications revolution, driven by demand that reflects the value the average Afghan continues to place on gathering news. The country's exposure to foreign television programming has raised expectations among the public for more responsive governance and service delivery. Media has also presented the opportunity to strengthen people's national identity and to access populations, such as women and the rural poor, that are normally so difficult to reach. The freedom for the press and media to operate has also laid the ground for more regressive, ethnocentric, and divisive narratives and discourses.

After 2001, however, the media took an unprecedented turn in Afghanistan. With the ratification of the 2004 constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech and press, private media blossomed in the country. Until 2003, there only was the Afghanistan National Television airing taped programs for five hours a day. It wasn't until several years later that its news service went live for the first time. Today, Afghanistan is home to more than 40 private television channels, over 100 radio stations, and above 1000 print publications (newspapers and

magazines).[9] While security and access to information remain as major obstacles for journalists, the proliferation of the media is yet one of the most solid achievements of Afghanistan with the support of the international community. Foreign support, both political and financial, has been essential to protecting the free media against more conservative forces and its expansion and development.

Media broadcasting is also one of few ways the international community can reach Afghans in far-flung or dangerous areas. Aid organizations have long recognized this reality, and they have shaped programming to bring about normative shifts in Afghan attitudes and behaviors. There is convincing evidence from qualitative studies and randomized trials conducted in Afghanistan in the 1990s that the content of popular BBC programming led to knowledge acquisition and behavioral change amongst Afghans.[10] After 2001, the role and influence of media in shaping social behavior and promoting public discussion have only grown more prominent.

The goal of American funding for Afghan media after 2001 was to ensure it is free, independent, and liberal. Though this vision has failed to materialize in full, the media has proven to be resilient despite the stifling effect of government regulation and the threat of violence by anti-state actors. Journalism training programs have had some degree of success in creating a cadre of young professional journalists, though the dangers of such a job lead to high turnover.[11] Increased Pashto language programming is another positive development, allowing non-Taliban media to compete for hearts and minds in Afghanistan's south and east.[12]

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[9] "Afghanistan Profile – Media." The BBC, April 18, 2017. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12013942

[10] Adam, Gordon. "Radio in Afghanistan: socially useful communications in wartime," in *Media & Global Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*, ed. Oscar Hemer & Thomas Tufte (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005), pp. 358-359.

[11] Ayres, Sabra. "Can Afghanistan's press survive without the West's support?" *Columbia Journalism Review*. New York: Columbia University, 2012.

[12] Fraenkel, Eran, Emrys Schoemaker, and Sheldon Himelfarb. "Afghanistan Media Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding," Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010.

Promoting accountability of public officials has been something the media can be credited with more than any other institution. Investigative journalism in the print and television have surfaced cases of senior officials misusing public authority and resources for private gains. In 2016, the largest newspaper in the country, 8 AM, revealed documents that the cabinet had decided to divert the direction of a major power line, TUTAP, which brought electricity from Turkmenistan to Southern Afghanistan. Residents of central highlands, where the power line was initially set to pass through, took to the streets in protest calling the decision an act of discrimination against the Hazaras, an ethnic minority that populates the central parts of the country. Had it not been for that investigation by the newspaper, the ensuing street politics that projected the real extent of public movements in Afghanistan would have not taken place.

Several other aspects of this media revolution are more ambiguous. While the media leads Afghans toward increased political participation, people are also more likely to be critical of the government.[13] The increased availability of opposing viewpoints probably contributes to a sense of skepticism towards the status quo,[14] more so than when BBC and VOA were the only sources of news.[15] Many perceive the media to be divided along ethnic lines, and consider individual outlets to be biased.[16] Zhowandoon, for example, is a television channel that is known to commit itself to promoting an ethno-centric discourse in favor of the Pashtuns.[17] At several incidents, it hosted programs with handpicked guests during a heated national discussion over the new identity cards. While it is unclear whether the media has sparked ethnic tensions, the difficulty inherent in sifting through all the news available in pursuit of

[13]Burbridge et al., *Survey of the Afghan People* (Washington: The Asia Foundation, 2016), 131.
[14]Fraenkel et al.
[15] "Afghan Media Survey: Report Prepared for BBC Trust." D3 Systems & ACSOR Surveys, 2008. Also see Burbridge et al. 131-140.
[16]Fraenkel et al., Burbridge et al. 131-140.
[17] Stern, Jeffrey, "Afghanistan's Growing Identity (card) Crisis." *Foreign Policy*, Jan 21, 2014, http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/21/afghanistans-growing-identity-card-crisis/

the truth has prompted many Afghans to rely on traditional filtered sources such as their village *shuras* and *maliks* for news.[18]

More negatively, this revolution has strengthened the ability of insurgent elements to influence the population and recruit anti-state forces. New technologies that have contributed to unifying and securing the country have also been used by a more media savvy Taliban seeking to bring down the Afghan government and transform the state and society. Cheaper and more widely available communication technology has allowed insurgent and anti-state actors to disseminate their message beyond their co-ethnics to wider and more varied audiences.[19] The Taliban recognized the importance of media early into their resurgence, and today the Taliban takes measures to disseminate its own media and to intimidate those news outlets critical of its actions.[20] In 2015, the Taliban targeted a shuttle bus carrying Tolo TV's staff to work accusing them of criticizing the Taliban unfairly. They later issued warning for Tolo and 1 TV Media, the second largest private network in the country.

The self-styled Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has, however, taken the use of media to another level. Meticulous propaganda messaging through radio channels and the Internet has been the cornerstone of their global outreach and recruitment strategy. ISKP has also been ramping up its profile on social media in an attempt to draw recruits away from the Taliban.[21] In 2016, the Afghan government finally managed to shut down the group's radio channel in the eastern province of Nangarhar, the group's main stronghold. Warlords and regional powerbrokers have also adopted media as a tool to tighten their control. Tamadon, a television channel particularly popular among conservative Shias, is run by an old cleric close to Iran, Asif Mohseni. Other warlords

[18]Burbridge et al. 131, 136.
[19] Ali, Obaid, "The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North: A case study from Badakhshan," Afghan Analysts Networ*k*. Kabul: AAN, 3 Jan 2017.
[20] Zahid, Noor, "Afghan Journalists Fear for Their Lives Amid Terror, Militant Insurgency," Washington, D.C.: Voice of America, 27 Aug. 2016.
[21] Osman, Borhan. "ISKP's Battle for Minds: What are its main messages and who do they attract?" *Afghan Analysts Network*. Kabul: AAN, 12 Dec. 2016.

such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Abdul Rasul Sayaf and Salahudin Rabbani also have their own television channels that they use primarily to get their political messages across to their constituencies.

Another extension of media in Afghanistan has been the exponential growth of telecommunication. Today, there is at least one cell phone in every Afghan household and high-speed Internet penetration is increasing. It is equally increasingly getting cheaper. The most obvious effect of that is expanding and low-cost access to Internet and social media. The social media has surpassed all limitations of control and censorship for the Afghan youth in main city centers. Public campaigns, demonstrations, and advocacy initiatives are easily organized through social media with the possibility of reaching the widest audience. In 2015, eight civilians including a 13-years old girl were slaughtered by the Islamic State's affiliates in the southern province of Zabul. After their bodies arrived in Kabul in a late night, a group of young people put a public call on Facebook inviting everyone to gather for a demonstration. The next morning, hundreds of thousands of Afghans from all ethnic groups gathered and marched to the presidential palace carrying coffins of the dead bodies and demanding the government to secure major highways. The possibility of such mass mobilization through social media has significantly overshadowed the ability and monopoly of old traditional leaders to gather and rally people behind them.[22] By extension, the television channels owned by these leaders are also less important now than they once were. Social media has also undermined the ability of the state institutions to monitor—and censor if deemed necessary—public discussion and the content of media programming.

Foreign Aid

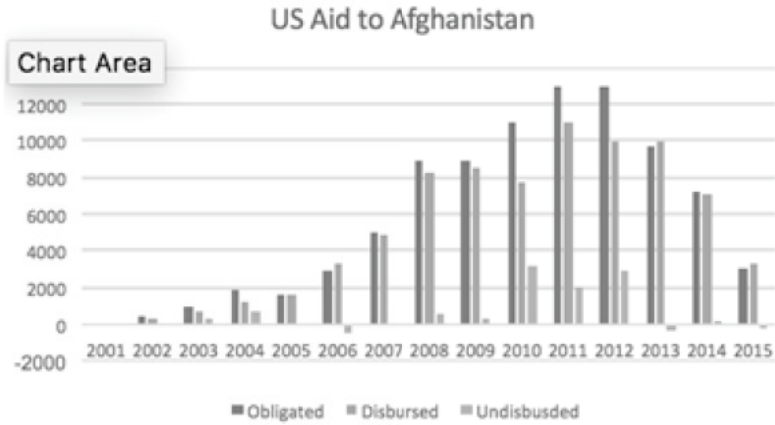
Driving nearly all these positive and negative developments is foreign aid, large sums of money poured into Afghanistan to defeat terrorism and to

[22] Crews, Robert, "Kabul's Rising Street Politics." *The Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 26, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2015-11-26/kabuls-new-street-politics

develop political institutions. The efficacy of billions of dollars that went to Afghanistan is fiercely debated. It fed a vicious corruption network by making funds available to a fickle bureaucracy unable to spend it. This aid also undermined incentives for building Afghan institutions since the government did not have to worry much about taxation and its extractive capabilities–both central to the survival of a modern state. At times, the traces of foreign aid could even be found to spark insurgency and insecurity. Overall, however, foreign aid has not been entirely good or bad for Afghanistan. It is the aid management that most determines how useful and constructive it can be. And in Afghanistan, it was managed very poorly.

From 85 million in 2001, only the U.S. aid grew to $13 billion in 2011 and 2012 when it was at its peak. Almost 90% of the overall obligated money was spent. In one decade from the collapse of the Taliban regime to the peak of insurgency, American aid increased nearly 15300%. The money from other countries poured in a similar pace, but in a much smaller scale. The total non-US aid to Afghanistan was no more than $22 billion since 2001. The decline, however, also followed the same speed and pace. The total money that Afghanistan is expected to receive from the US government for 2017 is around $4 billion, only 30% of the 2012 amount—a 70% decline in only five years.[23] Other members of the coalition supporting the Afghan government have shrunk their contributions significantly after pulling their troops out of the country.

[23] "Afghanistan." Foreignassistance.gov. http://foreignassistance.gov/explore#



year	Obligated	Disbursed	Undisbusded	% Undisbursed
2001	85	34	51	60
2002	453	345	108	24
2003	984	703	281	29
2004	1900	1200	700	37
2005	1700	1700	0	0
2006	3000	3400	-400	-13
2007	5000	4900	100	2
2008	8900	8300	600	7
2009	9000	8600	400	4
2010	11000	7800	3200	29
2011	13000	11000	2000	15
2012	13000	10000	3000	23
2013	9700	10000	-300	-3
2014	7300	7100	200	3
2015	3100	3300	-200	-6
Total	**88122**	**78382**	**9740**	**11**

Many blame the low capacity of the Afghan government for billions of international money gone to waste. When the Afghan government was set up in early 2002, the bureaucracy as conventionally understood was almost non-existent. Government offices were anything but workplaces. The organizational structure, and overarching rules and regulations, were old and outdated, if existent at all. Years of war and conflict had taken countless lives and millions of others had fled the country. Initially, then, the actual human capital capable of administering a bureaucracy was a rare commodity. Middle and low-ranking bureaucrats who had survived the years of brutal civil war were old and disconnected from the modern world. Relying on them to restart the Afghan bureaucracy was far from

ideal, but inevitable. As a result, formulating and implementing public policies with foreign aid remained a task for foreign advisors who had little knowledge of the country. The largest number of Afghans who had returned from abroad also lacked the know-how. Few had had administrative experience and like several members of the Karzai family ran small businesses. Those in senior positions often only enriched themselves through building extended networks of corruption that took advantage of the available money.

Most of the foreign money was spent directly by donor countries off the Afghan budget. Its consequences for institution building were dire. First, it created a parallel structure to the Afghan government. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) from NATO member countries in different provinces gave away small contracts to build schools, clinics, and roads. The demand for the accountability of the Afghan government in the early years of the conflict was minimal, mostly because there was not much to be accountable for. Second, it created a large coterie of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and private contractors who provided public services paid for directly by the foreign money. The salary in the government remained extremely low, far from enough to support an Afghan family. Those who returned from abroad and the newly educated class joined any sector but the government. With that, not only did the capacity of Afghan government grow very slowly, wide spread corruption marked the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Afghanistan has constantly been reported as one of the three most corrupt countries in the world with its key government institutions, namely the judiciary and the police, paralyzed and dysfunctional.

Yet the most important problem with foreign aid in Afghanistan was the complexity of incentives in the part of different actors, both those who donated and those who received. The primary purpose of the United States and the military coalition it led remained security-centered – to defeat terrorism and ensure Afghanistan would never pose a threat to the U.S. national security – even after the mission expanded to a wide

state-building effort. The focus on security inadvertently directed the money to areas that could potentially pose a security threat. Foreign soldier and money poured into Southern and Eastern Afghanistan to "buy security". As the insurgency grew stronger and wider in the South, the international community only poured more money assuming it could buy security.

In the South more so, but across the country in general, security/insecurity was a business opportunity. Protecting military bases, guarding logistic and oil convoys, and building roads and schools in the most insecure areas brought the best return on investment. It, however, needed connections and network to have the trust of donor countries and get the contracts. The initial method many used was providing information on the Taliban and insurgents like what Kandahar governor Gul Aga Sherzai did. Locally powerful leaders branded their rivals as Taliban sympathizers in order to gain the trust of foreign military mission. In the process, they also eliminated those rivals once and for all. Later as they entrenched their economic interests, there was little they could give up. Many believed that people such as Hashmat Karzai, Ahmad Wali Karzai, Gul Agha Sherzai, Jan Mohammad Khan, and others manufactured violence to maintain their economic interests.[24] Private security firms were the most lucrative business. In 2010, nearly $2 billion was spent only in Kandahar, from which almost 90% went to two families, the Karzais and the Sherzais.[25] Helmand Province, neighboring Kandahar, if were an independent state, would have been the fifth largest recipient of foreign aid.

Foreign aid empowered a small group of political elite to be the largest economic actors and at points even the most notorious criminals. Professor Ishaq Naderi of New York University wrote in 2001 that,

[24]Gopal, Anand. *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes*. New York: Picador, 2015.
[25]Partlow, Josh. *A Kingdom of Their Own: The Family Karzai and the Afghan Disaster*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

> "for decades investment, principally foreign but also domestic, has gone into either the opium business or politics – that is, into guns. The amounts have been large; the return has been mainly devastation. The first task is to feed the Afghan people, a critical political as well as humanitarian challenge: the people who control the guns must not become the people who control the food."[26]

Through foreign aid, the people who controlled the guns became the same as the people who controlled the food. Large oil importers, construction firms, private security companies, and even narco-traffickers were all connected to high-ranking officials in the government. Desperate to curtail the insurgency, the U.S. and its allies appropriated little effort into keeping these men into account. In 2010, an anti-corruption task force detained Mohammad Zia Salehi, a mid-ranking official at the Afghanistan National Security Council over charges of corruption. Hours later, he was released under pressures not just from his boss, President Karzai, but also the CIA station chief who had Salehi in his payroll as an informant.[27] Also in 2010, the Kabul Bank crisis implicated the brothers of President Karzai and his vice president, Qasim Faheem's, in a one-billion-dollar scandal. No severe punishment followed; in fact, they were not even detained. Many to this day remain skeptical of the government in claiming that Mahmoud Karzai and Fahim have paid their debts to the bank. Targeting actors as such could threaten the stability of the government. American and NATO forces were already fighting an ever-growing insurgency and did not want to pick a fight with their allies in palace too.

The focus on security also dictated the nature of projects that were funded by the foreign money. Long-term large infrastructure projects

[26]Nadiri, M. Ishaq, "Rebuilding a Ravaged Land." *The New York Times*, Nov 26, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/26/opinion/rebuilding-a-ravaged-land.html
[27]Filkins, Dexter and Mazzetti, Mark, "Karzai Aid in Corruption Inquiry is Tied to C.I.A." *The New York Times*, Aug. 25, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/26/world/asia/26kabul.html?ref=topics

received little attention. Most of the money went to financing the Afghan security forces and to small projects aimed at gaining public approval so they could deny safety and sympathy to the insurgency. The lion's share of the money never reached the people who were supposed to the beneficiaries. Funds that were actually used to build schools, roads, and clinics in rural Afghanistan were often destroyed by the continuous fighting. A decade and a half later, the southern and eastern Afghanistan still resembles a ravaged land untouched by development. Those provinces like Badakhshan and Bamiyan, for many years the peaceful in Afghanistan, remained equally underdeveloped, but for the opposite reason. Their relative peace and stability did not make them seem important enough to receive foreign aid.

Interestingly, the general public in Afghanistan, despite their continued resentments toward the Soviet Union, sees its investment as far more effective for leaving behind major highways, tunnels, power dams, and housing complexes. To them, American money is most highly visible in the flamboyant houses of the capital's corrupt officials that destroyed neighborhoods, and their armored SUVs that disrupt the traffic.

Conclusion

Other areas of the Afghan economy and its society and governance also exemplify the bright and dark sides of Afghanistan's global connectivity. Not always appreciated is the global contribution to what amounts to one of the most remarkable changes in Afghanistan since 2001, the growth of human capital on which the country is able to draw. These are mostly younger, educated individuals who not only have so much to contribute to their country but have a strong personal investment in its future. Initially, this capital came from what was brought back from exile in Pakistan and the West. They received educations there and on returning many found employment with NGOs and within the bureaucracy. Today, public and private educational institutions – many drawing on Western models and with financial assistance from abroad –

are producing qualified individuals.

- Millions of children and young people, including girls and women, have benefited from both basic and higher education and become acquainted with the outside world through contact with foreign educators and partnerships with Western universities and aid organizations. With education can come a better appreciation of fruits of global but also the value of regional connectivity. Regional countries can have a large role to play in the furtherance of education in Afghanistan. India has provided opportunities in higher and specialized education, and Pakistan has also admitted Afghan students to its universities. Of particular importance is the need to expand the numbers with vocational skills, including those technical skills needed for those occupations that Afghanistan will need in time to be internationally competitive.

- But with the advantages in having a more educated population comes the challenge of growing an economy able to provide employment. The youth bulge presents an especially critical problem of absorption.[28] Failure to absorb these individuals with their higher expectations creates frustrations leaving many who can to leave the country. Among the most alienated, there is the possibly of their choosing violence. While the outflow of immigrants to developed countries in recent years may contribute to expansion of links to the rest of the world, it also robs Afghanistan of some of its most talented citizens.

International donor funding has been the mainstay of the country's security sector, stimulating its economy, and helping to build vital institutional administrative capacity. But massive military aid and

[28] Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations in the world, with an estimated 41 percent (some 13 million children) under the age of 14, nearly 64 percent under the age of 24. *The CIA World Factbook 2017*, https://www.amazon.com/s/?ie=UTF8&keywords=cia+world+factbook&index=aps&tag=geminipcstand-20&ref=pd_sl_1jcfo1cpl8_e

generous economic and development assistance also stands accused of fueling corruption and distorting the Afghan economy. While private investment has injected capital and know-how into the economy, it has mostly attracted investors interested in extracting quick profits and has done little to contribute to sustainable economic growth. And the future riches promised by Afghanistan's export of its mineral wealth could also invite the "resource-curse" associated with countries whose dependency on nonrenewable commodity exports paradoxically leaves them with weak economic growth, slowed development, and less democracy – primarily due to the lack of institutional strength in the first place to manage the revenue from natural resources for economic development.

The political economy of the war created a small group of actors who controlled political power and economic wealth. The economy revolving around the international military intervention and more than a hundred thousand troops stationed in Afghanistan was highly inflated. After 2014, with massive drawdown of foreign personnel and money, economic growth also declined. The unemployment rate is increasing with every year far more people graduating from universities. With political uncertainty shadowing the fate of the current government, private investment, both from Afghans and foreigners, has plummeted. Insecurity has restricted the ability for many Afghans to work outside of city centers. Decreasing international assistance has curtailed the employment opportunities that came with development projects. All this throws doubt on the sustainability of all that a foreign-pushed globalization has achieved in Afghanistan. More positively, however, Afghanistan has become, as already noted, a more educated country with far greater human and physical capital than ever before. The society is more liberal and susceptive to modern values than any time previously. The Afghan media is a prime example of that transformation.

Whatever the costs of being exposed to global and regional influences and forces, the price for Afghanistan of isolation or neglect is far greater. A modern Afghanistan cannot be walled off. However, to optimize the

opportunities offered by global engagement and avoid the pitfalls that can come with openness, Afghanistan needs political leadership and institutions able to manage the pace and scope of interconnectivity. The political cohesion, legal framework, and infrastructure required to take advantage of globalization and minimize its vulnerabilities are unfortunately not yet in place. Nor is the security and stability that make successful global and regional connectivity ultimately possible. Globalization can be most successful when international actors, in this case states, are not just subjects of global events, but also agents of them. Unless Afghanistan contributes to this process – most likely through export of economic commodities and mineral resources and the growth and expansion of tourism – it can only gain so much from merely being connected.