

***Not Their War to Fight:  
The Afghan Police, Families of their Dead, and an American War***

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I first met Zakir 18 months after his father, Mirza, had died. Mirza had been a police officer and an instructor for new cadets in the Afghan National Police Academy. He died in a spectacular suicide bombing which took the lives of 35 people, including ten cadets, thirteen police instructors, a bus driver, and 11 bystanders in the center of Kabul on June 17, 2007. The explosion was so powerful that it sheared off the bus' roof and sides and scattered shards of glass and metal for miles, injuring more than 50 additional bystanders. At the time, it was the deadliest attack on civilians and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) since the exit of the Taliban from Kabul in 2001. Due to the magnitude of the losses, and because it took place in the heart of the capital city, the suicide bombing immediately made both national and international headlines.

In a public announcement, the spokesperson for the Taliban claimed responsibility for the bomb blast and boasted about the Taliban movement's reach, its "successful" attack, and its ability to gain access to the police center in the capital city. In an unusual move not made in thousands of previous deaths of security forces, then-President Hamid Karzai immediately referred to the victims of the attack as "martyrs" and announced that the Afghan State was organizing (and would pay for) the funeral for each police cadet and instructor killed. In addition, Karzai announced that a special fund would be created to provide for the families of the "martyrs," as they had been killed while in the line of duty and while serving and defending their fellow Afghans.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the disarray and grief, the mothers, wives and children of the dead police instructors and cadets quickly began calling each other, making sure that all knew about Karzai's announcement and encouraging each other to go to the Ministry of Interior to claim their right as families of the "martyrs." The process of claiming these rights, however, turned out to be a long drawn-out, frustrating, and often humiliating matter. Furthermore, while the families left behind by the police instructors and cadets killed in the attack certainly felt entitled to compensation from the government, as time progressed, they became increasingly uncomfortable with the designation of "martyr." This has to do with the complicated history of the concept of "martyrdom" in contemporary Afghanistan in the course not just of the current 13-year war against the Taliban, but in the series of wars that have now lasted more than 35 years.<sup>3</sup> Although the term *shaheed* (martyr, in Dari and Pashto) is an honorable concept rooted in Islam, it has become a contested term for Afghans. Throughout the 35 years of serial war, the word *shaheed* has been used far too often

for political purposes, thus often stripping the term of the honor it carries. Whether Afghans confer honor, disgust, sarcasm, or otherwise at each particular usage depends on who deploys the term and in what context.

The families of the dead policemen felt that it was disingenuous of the Afghan government to claim their loved ones as martyrs. That is not only because these policemen generally had not died because they felt a duty to secure a country or to defend the state of Afghanistan, but because of their obligations to provide livelihoods for their families. Jobs with the police force were the only form of stable employment the victims of the attack had been able to find. In addition, because of the long drawn-out bureaucratic processes required for the families to get the official distinction of martyrdom as well as the material benefits that came with it, the families of the killed policemen resented that their loved ones were referred to as martyrs while they had to struggle for any form of care from the state. Based on fieldwork in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan over four years, between 2006 and 2011, I can offer a brief window into the lives of the families who lost a loved one in that particular 2007 blast as an example of the effects of the 35 years of serial war and occupation that have profoundly shaped the lives of Afghans. By offering a view of the Afghan National Security Forces that is rooted in socio-economic and historical conditions, I hope to provide a necessary corrective to recent portrayals of the Afghan Security Forces in United States media. Finally, I will demonstrate that this most recent 13-year war is not one that Afghans feel is - or ever was - *their* war. This point needs to be made for a variety of reasons - reasons that are particularly pertinent now, at what has been referred to as the “formal end of the war” in Afghanistan for the US and NATO forces (even as US troop withdrawals were subsequently slowed and their continued involvement in combat acknowledged).<sup>4</sup>

### **Portrayals of Afghan National Police in US Media**

Afghan National Police officers are repeatedly portrayed in US media - from the *New York Times* to *Fox News* - as illiterate, drug-using, and prone to desertion.<sup>5</sup> While these descriptions may not be inaccurate, much relevant context is conspicuously missing from such reports. A prime example for such representations of the Afghan National Police was an episode of *60 Minutes* with Anderson Cooper, which aired in November 2010.<sup>6</sup> Cooper spoke to the Lieutenant General in charge of training, William Caldwell, and to the former UN Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, Peter Galbraith.

#### Excerpt 1: Anderson Cooper (AC) and William Caldwell (WC)

WC: The Police have to succeed.

AC: If the Afghan Police fail, we fail?

WC: We do. The sooner we can develop an effective police force, the sooner US forces will be able to have less of an active combat role.

AC: If we had a better trained Afghan Police, at this point, that would save American lives?

WC: There is no question, that would be true.

Excerpt 2: Anderson Cooper (AC) to William Caldwell (WC)

AC: Some say that 90% of the police force are illiterate.

WC: I would say at least 80% are illiterate.....

AC: While Afghans may be known as fierce fighters, teaching them to become professional police officers, or even to do basic exercises, is a massive challenge. Not only are most of the police illiterate, it turns out, many of them also have a drug problem.

Excerpt 3: Anderson Cooper (AC) to Peter Galbraith (PG)

AC: What type of a task does General Caldwell have ahead of him in trying to reform the police, re-build, create them?

PG: The police are incapable of being reformed.

AC: Incapable?

PG: It cannot be done.

AC: You mean it is just going to take a long time?

PG: Well, it cannot be done within a time horizon that you or I or the American people will find acceptable. We are talking about something that will take 100 years, generations.

AC: You think it will take 100 years to equip, train, create an Afghan National Police Force?

PG: Well, you can equip them, you can provide some training, but you cannot make them honest, you cannot make them literate, you cannot make them committed to the notions of policing that we have in the West.

Each of these exchanges focus on how difficult it is to train the Afghan National Police to effectively fulfill their policing mission. However, what is this mission? Who defines it? Excerpt one seems to imply that the Afghan police are expected to take over from US service members. This would mean that the war against the Taliban is either primarily a policing rather than a military problem, or that it would be preferable if Afghan police fight and die in this war rather than American soldiers. The contradiction here is that if the Taliban are a policing issue now, why were they not a policing issue back in 2001? Would that not mean that a full-scale war and occupation could have been avoided?

Excerpts two and three bring up concerns of illiteracy, of drug use, and of the commitment of the recruits joining the police forces. In order to address these concerns, one needs to consider what 35 years of serial war have done to Afghan society. Afghanistan was already a poorly developing country prior to the Soviet Occupation (1979-1989). Yet the continuing cycles of war and occupation have left Afghanistan with the consistently poorest social and health indicators in the world. National literacy rates for the adult Afghan population in general are estimated at around 31 percent.<sup>7</sup> Due to serial wars and the accompanying displacements, many Afghans have had their education interrupted, or never had access at all to

educational opportunities. For decades, university professors and doctors fled as refugees to Pakistan and Iran and if lucky, became teachers, but more frequently, had to make their livelihoods as drivers or in other professions, not utilizing their knowledge or skills. In its critique of the Afghan police force, the international community unrealistically expects educated or literate Afghans to join the police force. In the years following the NATO invasion of 2001, however, the educated elite has been competing for high-paying jobs in the administration or in international organizations. Such bureaucratic jobs are, of course, much more attractive options than the police force, where salaries are low and dangers to life are very real.

Because of the chronic nature of low-paid, low productivity forms of employment in Afghanistan, as well as the absence of both pensions and unemployment insurance, the Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Labor, Social Services, Martyrs and Disabled have created specialized criteria to better reflect the unstable forms of employment in Afghanistan. International standards that define unemployment as being completely without work and/or seeking work are simply not suitable for the Afghan context. At any given time, very little of the active labor force is completely unemployed, as this is just not an option for the poor. The report for the 2011-12 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) states that “for the largest part people have to – and actually do – find any work during a week time, however poorly paid and for however few hours.”

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the NRVA thus found that between 81 to 90 percent of jobs in Afghanistan are vulnerable or temporary forms of employment.<sup>8</sup> Seven point four million people are out of jobs or in “a precarious form of employment.” In addition, the NRVA report calculates that “25 percent of the labor force in the country is not gainfully employed and that the labor market is short of 1.8 million jobs that provide persons with a sustainable living.”

These findings about employment in Afghanistan are quite relevant for understanding recruitment for the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Security Forces, in general. From the early post-NATO invasion phase until at least 2011, the streets of Kabul were lined with day laborers waiting to be picked up for work. They were often the most dispossessed populations, both socially and economically, but as the international presence in Afghanistan, along with construction projects, are waning, even such precarious jobs are now few and far between. Those joining the Afghan National Police force are from among this group of the socially and economically dispossessed, and they do so out of sheer necessity to earn a livelihood.

Until General Caldwell took charge in 2010, ANP salaries were remarkably low. An average salary for police officers is now about \$230 USD/month, which is above the \$100 USD/month average for Afghans with employment.<sup>9</sup> Many who join the ANP do so only for this salary and for no other reason, as the risk to their lives is too great, as witnessed by the high casualty rates for Afghan National Police in 2014,

as will be discussed below. Furthermore, there is little prestige associated with a job with the ANP, as most people in Afghanistan understand that it is a job one takes to transition into other, more stable, less dangerous work. The attrition rates among the Afghan National Police that the US media point to are thus high because, for many Afghans, working for the police is a temporary position, a compromise until something else, hopefully better, comes along.

Finally, the rampant drug use allegations for the ANP mirror the use of drugs in the Afghan general population. Many use hashish recreationally, as is common throughout many parts of the world. Yet opiates, according to the Afghanistan National Urban Drug Use Study in 2012, are estimated to be the drug of choice for 1.5 million Afghans.<sup>10</sup> This number may not surprise, considering that Afghanistan supplies 90 percent of the world's opium poppies, and opium and heroin are cheaply and easily available there.<sup>11</sup> Afghans who use heroin have cited losing loved ones prematurely to war as reasons for their drug use.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, linking the opium trade in Afghanistan to employment, Vanda Felbab-Brown, an expert on counter-narcotic efforts in Afghanistan, states that, "There's no legal economy in Afghanistan that can match the profits and the amount of people opium can employ."<sup>13</sup> Opium production is both profitable and labor-intensive. While local war profiteers and the Taliban certainly do benefit from opium, it is the wealthy elites, often with clear ties to the government, who gain the most from continuing the cultivation of opium, which perhaps explains why serious efforts have not been made to eradicate it. A May 2014 VICE News article says: "The best way to be a drug dealer in Afghanistan is to be part of the Afghan government or closely associated with it."<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, Felbab-Brown sums up the strategy as follows: "Western forces try to target Afghanistan's drug producers when they know profits go to the Taliban or to terrorist groups like al Qaeda. But when the illicit cash goes to allies of the Afghan government, they're more likely to look the other way."<sup>15</sup> Thus while the US alone has spent \$7.5 billion on opium eradication, the approach deployed thus far has focused on short-term goals and has failed to link opium production with violence and war in Afghanistan. "We have never been able to integrate narcotics in a serious manner within the top priorities for Afghanistan," Jean-Luc Lemahieu, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) director of policy analysis, told VICE News: "It may look great on your opium map the year after, but it may have no sustainability and you may have increased the poverty and human rights abuses by threefold, fivefold."<sup>16</sup>

It is thus rather disingenuous to criticize the high desertion rates, the illiteracy and the drug use of the Afghan police forces without contextualizing them within serial war and its effects on Afghans. Furthermore, early on in the segment quoted above, Anderson Cooper emphasizes the amount of money (\$9 billion) and time spent (nine years) by the US in trying to build an Afghan National Police Force (up until 2010, when the episode of *60 Minutes* aired). But to think that pouring billions of dollars into training a police force would address larger problems caused and exacerbated by serial war, such as illiteracy, lack of confidence in the state, an economy centered on international aid and the international drug market, as well as

chronic and precarious underemployment, is exemplary of the ignorance and neglect with which the billions of dollars were poured into Afghanistan over the past 13 years. Money that might have funded education, agriculture, and other forms of economic development were instead spent ineffectively on security forces, drug interdiction, and [expensive and often ineffective US corporate infrastructure contracting](#), with little to no care or understanding for the needs of ordinary Afghans and for what serial war has done to Afghans and their country.

### **Killed in the Line of Duty: Dutiful Fathers, Dutiful Husbands**

As I proceed in introducing readers to Zakir's family, who lost their father, husband and friend in the June 2007 suicide attack, I hope to offer a much needed contrast to the caricatures made of Afghan National Security Forces in such media reports and US Army statements. I arrived at Zakir's house at 7:30 in the morning. His mother was preparing tea while his wife was laying out a typical Afghan breakfast of fresh bread and cream, with homemade jam. Zakir's youngest siblings and his two children were asleep, while he had already left for the Ministry of Interior (MoI) office in downtown Kabul. His mother told me that Zakir wanted to ensure that he was the first one at the Ministry when the office doors opened. "He leaves the house so early every day and comes back feeling completely discouraged," she said. Over the previous three months, Zakir had been telling me how he had dedicated the majority of his days to collecting 22 official signatures as required by the Land Distribution Office of the Kabul Municipality. Obtaining these 22 signatures was only one of many requirements to be completed by families of police officers who died in the line of duty in order to claim a plot of land which is their entitlement as set by laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for families of officially declared "martyrs." It was an immensely frustrating and humiliating process, which Zakir described as forcing him to repeat daily to officials that his father was a "martyr." However, for at least one year after the blast, Zakir had had a hard time referring to his father as a "martyr." As he described it, he was still trying to adjust to a world without his father alongside him. Furthermore, over the course of the years that Zakir had been trying to get rightful compensation from the Afghan State, he became more and more resentful of that designation for his father. He was sure that "martyr" was a designation that misrepresented who and what his father had lived, and died, for. His father was killed in the line of duty, but not a duty to a nation (or national cause), but an economic duty to his family.

I eventually sought out and met with 27 of the 31 families who lost a loved one in the 2007 blast. Most of the police cadets who were killed were in their early twenties, while the instructors were in their late forties and fifties. All of the cadets were from lower class families living in faraway districts in the outskirts of Kabul City. In fact, most of the families (barring a few of the police instructor families) had been too poor to migrate as refugees to Iran or Pakistan throughout the wars in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s. However, each of the families had undergone a series of internal migrations (within Afghanistan fleeing the different conflicts and wars), and some had migrated to Kabul only after 2002 for employment

opportunities. The widows of the cadets were all under the age of 20, and six of the 17 widows were pregnant with their first child when their husbands were killed (One miscarried upon receiving news of the bomb blast. Another went into premature labor, causing the baby's leg to get caught in the birth canal, and the baby thus to be born disabled). While all of the families were joint families, as is common in Afghanistan, meaning several brothers living with their respective spouses together in one house, these households were poor, as most of the family members were either unemployed or day laborers.

At the homes of each of the dead cadets, I met the victims' mothers as well as the widows, and in most houses, their siblings as well. During my visits, each family recounted the day of the blast, shared pictures of their son or father, and recited how painful it had been for them to have to relive that horrific day over and over as they became ensnarled in the bureaucratic processes required to obtain the official declaration of martyr status, and to pursue the financial and land compensations to which they were entitled. As I visited these families more frequently, they reported that they had felt neglected by the Afghan State and detailed how they had had to fight to gain any of the promised compensations. It was already 18 months after the bomb blast at the time, yet all the families were still deeply embroiled in bureaucratic procedures.

### **Misappropriation of Martyrdom**

The meaning of the term "martyr" is complex, bearing as it does the histories of prior wars. The significance of the term has changed with each war, each bomb blast, each promise. As mentioned above, there is much dismay and suspicion voiced by ordinary Afghans over the political uses of the heroic label of martyrdom (especially by the State, its foreign sponsors, the Taliban and other non-state actors, particularly in light of the contemporary history of wars and occupation). Similarly, Afghans often express strong disapproval of how those who fought admirably against the Soviet occupiers throughout the 1980s yet subsequently killed fellow Afghans in the 1990s and/or have profited from the current war and occupation as allies of the US are still referred to with honorable terms (*mujahideen*, freedom fighter) by political allies. Many Afghans view these people as murderers, human rights abusers, and war profiteers. In the course of the years I spent with the 31 families from the June 2007 bomb blast, they repeated over and over how honorable labels, such as martyr, were quite troubling for them to digest, especially when uttered in government offices. It became clear that the term martyr carried meaning primarily for the Afghan State and the occupying coalition forces, while for Afghan families it was largely relevant only as a means to gain rightful compensation for their loved ones who were killed in the "line of duty." It was made clear to me repeatedly that economic considerations were the sole reasons for their respective family members to have joined the police force in the first place. They were killed in the line of duty, yet it was a duty to their families, and not to nationalistic ideals of serving country (or humanity) or building a sustainable security force to combat

Afghanistan's enemies (given that many Afghans are very aware of how distinctions between "enemies" and "allies" can be redrawn at any given time).

The families of Afghan National Police who I have met are well aware of the ways their family members' lives have been instrumentalized in the ongoing war. While alive, Afghan police have been caricatured as drug addicted and prone to desertion, and as people who, in their lack of commitment, put American lives at risk. In death, they have been labeled as martyrs for national and international causes that their loved ones did not sign up for and for a war that is not their war.

### **Symptoms of Withdrawal**

Flag lowering ceremonies in Kabul ushered in the year 2015, with public declarations of the "formal end" of combat operations in Afghanistan, and the formal closure of the joint US and NATO headquarters for the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). Such ceremonies centered on the performance of gratitude by the Afghan state. Despite the show of appreciation, the announced "formal end" of combat operations occurred at the end of a year with a remarkably high number of civilian deaths. According to the UN, 3,188 civilians were killed in 2014, a 19 percent increase in deaths from 2013, and the highest number since 2009, when the UN began systematically documenting civilian deaths in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, NATO and the US point to body counts showing a reduction in ISAF personnel killed in Afghanistan to demonstrate that Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) had "virtually all" responsibility in 2014, and will be "taking the lead" for the security of their country from 2015 onwards (more on these differentials in death statistics later).<sup>17</sup> However, there are at least two things wrong with the narrative that has ANSF now in charge of the country's security: (1) it obscures the actual role the US will be playing in counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan in 2015 and onwards,<sup>18</sup> and (2) it ultimately attempts to hold ordinary Afghans responsible for the mayhem in their country, mayhem that was not of their making.

Even more fundamentally, this narrative, common in Western media, suggests that the role of the international military and humanitarian presence in Afghanistan is a form of assistance to Afghans, aiding them in ridding their country of its terrorists, or terrorists of its making. As has been shown time and again by many others, the Taliban have their origins in the Cold War with the seminal support roles played by the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia in creating, arming, and substantially funding them.<sup>19</sup> Ordinary Afghans are quite aware of the specific actors and conditions that created the contemporary Taliban, and the origins and links to the current war and occupation.

In light of this, it is clear to Afghans that this is not their war. As the case of Zakir's father and of the other cadets and instructors killed in the 2007 attack clearly shows, most Afghans who join the ANSF do so due to a lack of livelihood alternatives. They have very little at stake in fighting this war, but because of the



war, their lives are at stake. The notion that ANSF are taking over the responsibility from ISAF for fighting the war against the Taliban has several problems. First, it obscures the history of the origins of the Taliban, and, second, it construes Afghanistan as indebted to the international community for invading their country, while simultaneously forcing ordinary Afghans to continue to bear the unrelenting costs of war.

According to the US Department of Defense July 2013 issue of the biannual report, "Progress towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan," the Afghan National Security Forces "have grown to approximately 96 percent of their authorized end-strength of 352,000 personnel, and are conducting almost all operations independently."<sup>20</sup> ANSF include the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). As of November 2014, of those 352,000 personnel, 156,000 are in the ANA, and 155,000 in the ANP. As a result of this increased independence of the ANSF, the Defense Department report boasts that, "ISAF casualties are lower than they have been since 2008." But while ISAF deaths were the lowest since 2008, 2014 was the deadliest year on record for ANSF: 5,588 Afghan security forces died in 2014, 3,720 of whom were police officers, double the number of soldiers killed on the job.<sup>21</sup> Approximately 23,470 ANSF (including military and police) were killed in the last 13 years of war, with at least 16,511 officers and soldiers wounded as of early 2014.<sup>22</sup> A *New York Times* piece further noted that the Afghan death toll is far "higher than that of the international coalition, which has lost 3,425 soldiers — 2,313 of them Americans — during the 13-year conflict."<sup>23</sup> Statements by ISAF spokespersons as well as various media reports imply that such differential death statistics are justified, and that Afghan soldiers and police personnel *should* die in greater numbers – because, after all, it is "*their*" war and "*their*" country. Yet it is exactly this narrative which my research in Afghanistan since 2003 challenges. My research shows that Afghans feel that the war against the Taliban may be taking place in their country, but it is certainly not an enemy they feel disproportionately responsible for, nor one that they should have to disproportionately die for. When the Obama administration speaks of "handing over control to Afghan National Security Forces," one can hear the accompanying handover of responsibility for the problems that the US-led war has bequeathed to Afghans in the first place.

### **Who Owns the War in Afghanistan?**

The Asia Foundation conducts annual polls of the Afghan people. Similarly the Gallup poll frequently carries out much smaller sample polls in Afghanistan on a variety of key issues. The validity of such polls and surveys in Afghanistan, however, should be treated as suspect considering that Afghans, both urban and rural, have become quite skilled at figuring out what narrative is desired by those who conduct the surveys. Furthermore, decades of war and violence have created widespread suspicions, making it entirely possible that surveyed Afghans do not trust surveyors when they assure them of confidentiality and describe what the information will be used for. In the context of serial war, it thus becomes understandable why

interviewees would only give information that will not put themselves or their families in harm's way.<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the problematic nature of surveys and polls in such a context, the Asia Foundation, the Gallup Poll, and several others over the past 13 years, have periodically asked a sample of Afghans about their views on the continuing presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. A poll conducted in 2010 by the Afghan Center for Socioeconomic and Opinion Research (ACSOR), a for-profit marketing and opinion research firm in Afghanistan, showed that while

the vast majority of Afghans — 74 percent — still support the U.S.-led invasion that toppled the Taliban, they are now convinced that they would be better off alone. This, according to Western observers, is part and parcel of Afghan psychology. “They just do not want us here,” said one foreign diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. “The Western troops, when they came here [in 2001] said ‘the Soviets were invaders, we are liberators. But for Afghans it is all the same — we are all ‘foreigners.’ They will fight anyone who comes here.”<sup>25</sup>

The most recent ACSOR/Asia Foundation study, the 2014 "Survey of the Afghan People," found that 56 percent of Afghans still think that the Afghan National Security Forces need foreign support to do their job properly (i.e., provide protection to Afghans).<sup>26</sup> Finally, a Gallup Poll conducted at the end of 2014 found that four in 10 Afghans believe they will be worse off with the withdrawal of the majority of US and NATO forces at the end of 2014.<sup>27</sup>

What is remarkable about these survey results is that while Afghans show what appears to be at times considerable support for the continued foreign presence in Afghanistan, analysts and media inaccurately interpret such polls as indicating Afghan support for the presence of foreign troops. Where Afghans are cited criticizing the foreign presence, journalists and others have often resorted to explanations that focus on “Afghan psychology,” in that phrase explaining away any legitimate resentment or considered political opinions that Afghans may express in regard to the foreign occupation. However, my research has consistently demonstrated that Afghans do not feel they should have to fight in a war that is not their war.<sup>28</sup> Rather, many or most Afghans believe that it is foreign troops who are obligated to fight this war. Interpreting these polls as Afghans supporting a foreign occupation would certainly be misleading. It certainly warrants the question: Why have Afghans never been asked if they feel that the war in Afghanistan is their war to fight?

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Karzai's announcement came in the form of Presidential Decree 5330.

<sup>3</sup> Although the ongoing Afghan War is the longest war in US history, for Afghans, it is part of a much longer trajectory of wars that have come to their country, a 35 year period of serial war and occupation: (1) the Soviet War and Occupation, 1979-1989; (2) the Kabul Wars, 1990-1995; (3) the Taliban regime, 1996-2001; and (4) the US/NATO backed war and occupation, 2001-present.

<sup>4</sup> US and NATO Formally End War in Afghanistan. (2014, December 28). *The New York Times*.

<sup>5</sup> Norland, Rod. (2010, February 2). "With Raw Recruits, Afghan Police Buildup Falts." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/03/world/asia/03afghan.html?pagewanted=all>; Afghan Police Training Hampered by Illiteracy, Betrayal. (2010, November 30). *Fox News*. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/11/30/afghan-police-training-hampered-illiteracy-betrayal/>.

<sup>6</sup> The full *60 Minutes* coverage can be viewed here:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/afghanistan-good-cop-bad-cop/>

<sup>7</sup> The overall literacy rate is 31 percent (17 percent for women, 45 percent for men). Source: Central Statistics Organization (2014). "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12." *Afghanistan Living Condition Survey*. Kabul, CSO.

<sup>8</sup> Central Statistics Organization (2014). "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12." *Afghanistan Living Condition Survey*. Kabul, CSO.

<sup>9</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled. (2009). *An Urban Area Primary Source Study of Supply & Demand in the Labor Market*. Retrieved from

[http://molsamd.gov.af/Content/files/research/An%20Urban%20Area%20Primary%20Source%20Study%20of%20SupplyDemand%20in%20the%20Labor%20Market\(En\).pdf](http://molsamd.gov.af/Content/files/research/An%20Urban%20Area%20Primary%20Source%20Study%20of%20SupplyDemand%20in%20the%20Labor%20Market(En).pdf).

<sup>10</sup> US Department of State. (2012, December). "Afghanistan National Urban Drug Use Survey." *INL Demand Reduction Program Research Brief*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/212957.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2014, November 12). "Afghan opium crop cultivation rises seven per cent in 2014; while opium production could climb by as much as 17 per cent." Retrieved from

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2014/November/afghan-opium-crop-cultivation-rises-seven-per-cent-in-2014-while-opium-production-could-climb-by-as-much-as-17-per-cent.html>.

<sup>12</sup> This assessment of the connection between heroin use and the war is based on anthropological fieldwork I conducted in heroin shooting galleries and harm reduction programs in Kabul, Afghanistan and in shooting galleries with Afghans living in Pakistan.

<sup>13</sup> Sperti, Alice. (2014, May 21). "Afghanistan's Opium Economy is Doing Better Than Ever." *Vice News*. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/article/afghanistans-opium-economy-is-doing-better-than-ever>.

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<sup>14</sup> Speri, Alice. (2014, May 21). "Afghanistan's Opium Economy is Doing Better Than Ever." *Vice News*. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/article/afghanistans-opium-economy-is-doing-better-than-ever>.

<sup>15</sup> Rettig, Jessica. (2011, July 21). "War on Drugs in Afghanistan Complicates War on Terror." *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2011/07/21/war-on-drugs-in-afghanistan-complicates-war-on-terror>.

<sup>16</sup> Speri, Alice. (2014, May 21). "Afghanistan's Opium Economy is Doing Better Than Ever." *Vice News*. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/article/afghanistans-opium-economy-is-doing-better-than-ever>.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of Defense (2014, April). *Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*. Retrieved from [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/April\\_1230\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/April_1230_Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> In a press conference at the White House on March 24, 2015, Afghan President Ghani asked for an extension of US troops and Obama announced his decision to maintain the current strength of 9,800 deployed US troops to 2016, a clear change in his original plan to halve the number of US forces in Afghanistan by the end of 2015.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Coll, Steve. (2004). *Ghost wars: The secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. Penguin.; Marsden, Peter. (2002). *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan*. New Africa Books.; Rashid, Ahmed. (2001). *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press.

<sup>20</sup> This is the eleventh report of a series which requires one report every 180 days. The July 2013 version of the report covers progress in Afghanistan from October 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, Azam. (2015, March 4). "The Hardest (and Most Important) Job in Afghanistan." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/magazine/the-hardest-job-in-afghanistan.html?emc=eta1&r=0>.

<sup>22</sup> Crawford, Neta. (2015, May 22). "War-related Death, Injury, and Displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001-2014." <http://www.costsofwar.org/sites/default/files/articles/14/attachments/War%20Related%20Casualties%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%202001-2014%20FIN.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Nordland, Rod. (2014, March 3). "War Deaths Top 13,000 in Afghan Security Forces." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/04/world/asia/afghan-cabinet-releases-data-on-deaths-of-security-personnel.html>.

<sup>24</sup> I taught research methods courses in the two main universities of Afghanistan over four years and always encouraged students to recognize the difficulties of relying on data generated through surveys, no matter how well they are constructed, given the context of Afghanistan.

<sup>25</sup> MacKenzie, Jean. (2010, December 13). "Afghanistan War: Public Opinion Turns Sharply Against US Forces." *Global Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/afghanistan/101208/afghanistan-war-us->

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troops-counterinsurgency-public-opinion.

<sup>26</sup> The Asia Foundation. *Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan People, Executive Summary*. Retrieved from

<http://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/ExecSummaryAG2014.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ray, Julie. (2015, January 14). "Many Afghans Expect Life to be Worse After Troops Leave." *Gallup*. Retrieved from

[http://www.gallup.com/poll/180965/afghans-expect-life-worse-troops-leave.aspx?utm\\_source=afghanistan&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/180965/afghans-expect-life-worse-troops-leave.aspx?utm_source=afghanistan&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=tiles).

<sup>28</sup> Daulatzai, Anila (2014, March 24). "What Comes After the After? Notes on a Post-Conflict Afghanistan." *Fieldsights – Hotspots, Cultural Anthropology Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/503-what-comes-after-the-after-notes-on-a-post-conflict-afghanistan>;

Daulatzai, Anila. (2013). *War and What Remains: Everyday Life In Contemporary Kabul, Afghanistan*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from Johns Hopkins University.