Corruption and Social Trust in Afghanistan
Qiamuddin Amiry

"Someone begs President Karzai to control corruption in his administration. After listening carefully, Mr. Karzai asks him: 'How much would you give me to do that?'"

- Contemporary Afghan joke

Since 2001, one of the main obstacles for good governance and development in Afghanistan has been the existence of pervasive corruption in the country. Donor countries have repeatedly pressed President Hamid Karzai to address issues of corruption. In turn, Mr. Karzai has placed blame on the members of his cabinet and the deputies in parliament.[1] Besides President Karzai and leaders of donor countries, ordinary Afghans are equally frustrated with corruption. For instance, "according to a survey conducted by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, *corruption is endemic,* with two-thirds of respondents considering corruption to be an established practice."[2] In 2005, Afghanistan dropped from 117th to 176th in 2008 on Transparency International's corruption index, and the country's place rose from 11th to 7th on the failed states index.[3] In addition to corruption in the government, Afghan society suffers from high levels of distrust within the general population.

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Why has Afghanistan become mired in social distrust and corruption? Do corruption and distrust, as some scholars have claimed, have cultural roots? The lack of strong and efficient institutions has harnessed a pattern of distrust among the Afghan people that was already in place, which in turn has led the country into a "social trap." It is very difficult to get out of this trap, unless Afghanistan creates strong and trustworthy institutions to replace the presently corrupt infrastructure.

The concept of the "social trap," was invented by psychologist John Platt, who examined the question, why in some countries do people trust other people, while in other countries people

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are generally distrustful of strangers? This theoretical approach to corruption provides a lens through which to analyze the relationship between Afghani state and society. In order to understand whether or not there may be something unique about the Afghans' relationship with their government that feeds a habit of distrust, I will use this framework to look at the

history of state building and social distrust in Afghanistan These two sections will lead to an explanation of how a weak and corrupt state has harnessed a pre-established pattern of distrust in society. In conclusion, I will look at some of the implications of distrust and corruption for development.

SOCIAL TRAP AND NON-COOPERATIVE GAME THEORY

Corruption in a society is related to the level of trust, or lack of trust, among the members of that society. As corruption has become pervasive in Afghanistan, the Afghan people have become more skeptical of the motives of others: the society is caught in a "social trap." The psychologist John Platt invented the concept of the "social trap," which can be considered "an 'umbrella term' for a number of strategic situations in which social actors find themselves, in which the central element is that their behavior is determined by their assessment of the future action of others."[4] The logic of the social trap is built off of the principles of non-cooperative game theory, which state

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1. Everyone wins if everyone *chooses to cooperate*.

2. "But if people cannot trust that 'almost everyone else' will cooperate, it is meaningless to cooperate, because the end is *contingent on cooperation by almost everyone else*."[5] The conclusion is that "efficient cooperation for common purposes can come about only *if people trust that most other people will also choose to cooperate*.

3. Lacking that trust, the social trap will slam inexorably shut. That is, we end up in a state of affairs that is worse for everyone, even though, everyone realizes that they would profit by *choosing to cooperate*."[6]

In such a situation of distrust, in Professor Rothstein's words, "the end result of individual rationality may very well be collective irrationality."[7] In acting upon their own best interests, people will not cooperate with another, even though their cooperation would bring more benefit to the community. This pattern of non-cooperative game theory is more common in some countries than others.

Despite the fact that human beings are believed to be rational utility-maximizing individuals, there is great variation in the level of social trust among people in different countries. In some countries, trust becomes a very rare commodity. Francis Fukuyama defines trust as "the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on part of other members of that community."[8] Thus, social trust "can be seen as an example of what Douglass North has called the informal institutions in a society, which are established systems of beliefs about the behavior of others." [9] In their research, "Political Corruption and Social Trust- an Experimental Approach," Bo Rothstein and Daniel Eek found out that 16 percent of Romanian students thought that "most people can be trusted," while 60 percent of Swedish students thought that way.[10] These findings led Rothstein to argue that there is a higher level of corruption in Romania than in Sweden. Rothstein has argued "that high levels of corruption would cause low social trust;" and has presented three interrelated causal mechanisms for his corruption-trust theory (adopted from Rothstein 2005, ch. 5): [11]

1. **The inference from public officials:** If public officials in a society are known to be corrupt, citizens will believe that even people whom the law requires to act in the service of the public cannot be trusted. They will therefore conclude that most common people cannot be trusted either.

2. **The inference from the general population:** Citizens will perceive that most people in a society with corrupt officials must take part in corruption in order to obtain what they feel is their rightful due. They will therefore conclude that most other people cannot be trusted.

3. **The inference from oneself**. In order to act in such a society, citizens will, even though they may consider it morally wrong, also begin to take part in corruption. They will therefore conclude that since they cannot be trusted themselves, other people cannot be trusted.

If a society is mired in social distrust, it does not mean that dishonesty is in the genes of its citizens, or that they are inherently and culturally mendacious. Countries with very similar cultures, such as Singapore, Hong Kong and China, perform very differently with respect to social trust and corruption. In the latest measurement published by Transparency International, Singapore was rated to have an index of 9.3 on a scale of 0-10, Hong Kong was placed fourteenth, and China, with an index of 3.5, was in fifty-ninth place.[12] As professor Rothstein says: "people who take bribes or evade taxes may hold values by which they actually consider what they do to be morally wrong. The reason why they continue to act treacherously or opportunistically is not necessarily that they suffer from some kind of moral defect, but rather that there is no point in being the only honest player in a rotten game at which everyone else cheats – or is perceived to cheat."[13] In order to build social trust, large groups of the population need to change their view of society. This will require strong and corruption-free institutions (such as the police and the judiciary) that govern by the rule of law and punish corrupt civil servants. This way, the state plays an impartial role within society. However, this brings us to a dilemma: "where do you find the uncorrupted judges, bureaucrats, and policeman in a society where corruption is rampant?" [14] Most judges and policemen may be willing to act honestly, but only if they trust that most other policemen and judges to do the same. Afghanistan has been struggling with this dilemma, and the state has failed to build corruption-free institutions necessary to gain the trust of the population.

STATE AND SOCIETY IN AFGHANISTAN: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In a country composed of multiple ethnicities, the state has to be impartial to win the trust of the people. This has not been the case in Afghanistan. The Afghan state has functioned, in one form or another, as a patrimonial state where one clan, tribe or family rules over a heterogeneous society and the government's resources are distributed as patronage to those loyal to the ruling clan. To use Sudipta Kaviraj's metaphor, the state's relation with the rest of society has been like a circle of circles. Each of these circles a distinct cultural identity within Afghanistan. The ruling clan or regime has come from one of the circles. The ruling circle, whether it is a regime, a clan, or a family, has often either come from one of these circles, or from an elite group that created a new circle. Either way, the state or ruling regime has never been like a thread running through all the circles. Instead, it has either marginalized society or has been marginalized by it. Due to many reasons, the relationship between the other circles has not been harmonious.

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The Afghan state has always existed within a deeply-rooted tribal society. The equilibrium between tribes has more or less defined the relationship between state and society in Afghanistan throughout its history. There exists an entire canon which discusses the complexity of tribal societies in Afghanistan and their successful resistance to authority. Thus, a profound discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will briefly look at the creation of

Afghanistan as a distinct political unit under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Durani in 1747, the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901), the rule of Amir Habibullah Khan and his son Amir Amanullah Khan (1901-1929), the reign of the Musahiban brothers (1929 – 1978), the Communist regimes in the1980s, and Afghanistan under the Mujahedin in early 1990s. This historical background will give context to a discussion of social distrust in Afghanistan today, and how it undermines efforts of state building and development.

However, before discussing the nature of state-building in Afghanistan and the state's relationship with 'Afghan society,' it is important to define the notion of state, and differentiate between a *traditional state* and a *nation state.* According to Charles Tilly, traditional states rarely "directly administered areas outside of cities and towns. They dealt with most rural or nomadic population as corporate groups. Control faded out toward ill defined frontier rather than shifting suddenly at monitored borders."[15] Nation states are different from traditional states in many ways. Tilly defines modern states as those "governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures."[16] The notion of "governing" is important here. Nation states govern their subjects, while traditional states rarely do so. Afghanistan has struggled to become a nation state.

The nature of Afghanistan's foundation as a distinct political unit in 1747 had many implications for the state's rapport with the society and its subsequent political history. Ahmad Khan Abdali, the founder of Afghanistan, "came from a small clan, the Saddozai branch of the Popolzai Pashtuns, themselves a major sub-tribe of the Abadalis."[17] The Abdali-led confederation "was a loose alliance of tribes sharing a strong Pahstun cultural identity. Their common aim was conquest, pillage, and the extraction of tribute from conquered peoples and territories."[18] Even within the Pashtun confederation the ruler's clan was one of the many clans.; and "Ahmad Shah was in the traditional tribal context only a chief among equals."[19], "He led the Durani confederation and ultimately the united Pashtun tribes in the conquest of non-Pashtun lands… the tribes, their group-feeling cemented by a charismatic leader and the sharing of loot ruled over towns and villages."[20] Thus, they created a circle with a goal that was alien, not to mention vicious, to the non-Pashtun population. Ahmad Shah's tribal confederation fitted Ibn Khaldun's tribal model. Ibn Khaldun, (1332-82) the North African historian, sociologist and philosopher, developed a tribal model that "depicts tribes largely [as] self-governing groups of people united by a "group feeling" based on a belief in common kinship."[21] In this way, the tribal state ruled by Ahmad Shah was totally detached from the major part of the society that it "ruled," which included: Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aymaks, Farsiwans, Brahuis, Baluchis, Turkomens, Nuristanis, Kohistanis, Pamiris, Kirghiz, Gujar, Moghols, Arabs, Qizilbashis, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. These non-Pashtun societies were never part of the united Pashtun circle. Ahmad Shah failed to create a sense of common identity for Afghans by stitching these different circles together. Therefore, oppressed identity groups bore a sense of skepticism towards the tribal state from the very beginning of Afghanistan's history.

Although the basic form of a modern state in Afghanistan emerged under Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, also known as the 'Iron Amir,' the lack of trust between state and society only increased. Using resources provided by the British, Abdul Rahman Khan created a state structure that endured until the fall of Najibullah in 1992; he was "a Pashtun ruler using external resources to reign over an ethnically heterogeneous society while manipulating that social segmentation to weaken society's resistance."[22] Iron Amir

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"described his task as putting in order all those hundreds of petty chiefs, plunderers, robbers and cut-throats."[23] In his twenty year reign, "rebellions were punished by mass executions or deportations such as the forced resettlement of thousands of Ghizali Pashtun tribesmen, chief rivals of the dominant Abdalis in regions where they were neutralized in the midst of hostile Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Tajiks."[24] Not only did he foster intense resentment against his state by society in general, he also created hostility among different ethnicities within Afghanistan. For instance, he mobilized the Ghizalis in a jihad against the Shi'ite Hazaras, whom he considered heretical. The Ghizalis plundered, displaced and sold the Hazaras into slavery.[25] This resentment and hostility that resulted from this conflict would haunt Afghanistan for decades to come.

Although Abdul Rahman tried to create "one grand community under one law and one rule,"[26] equality before the rule of law did not exist to harness a sense of trust between state and society. For instance, he created an "elite class of bureaucrats dependent on him alone and detached from their tribal or ethnic affiliation. The core of this elite was from the royal family and from among the leading chiefs of the Mohmmadzai clan."[27] He recruited "slave boys, *ghulam bache*, from areas forcibly brought by the Amir under his control and from leading non-Pashtun families, who were trained like the Janissaires in the Ottoman Empire."[28] Thus, the line between master and slave was made boldly clear during his reign.

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The Amir failed to give Afghans a sense of common identity. As a British general Sir Henry Rawlinson, observed: "The nation consists of a mere collection of tribes, of unequal power and divergent habits, which are held together, more or less loosely, according to the personal character of the chief who rules them. The feeling of patriotism, as known in Europe, cannot exist among Afghans, for there is no common country."[29] The Amir, in association with his Mohmmadzai clan, wanted to implement his idea of a modern state over a heterogeneous population that did not share his vision for a common future.

After Abdul Rahman Khan's rule came to an end, his son Amir Habibulla Khan (1901- 19) and his grandson Amir Amanullah Khan (1919 - 29) both dramatically changed Afghanistan's state policies. Haibbullah Khan opened the country to modern education for the first time, and allowed the Mohammadzais exiled by his father to return.[30]

After Habibullah Khan's assassination, his son King Amanullah Khan took radical measures to reform Afghanistan. He targeted three areas to reconstitute social control: taxes, land tenure, and transportation.[31] Amanullah Khan was the first Afghan king who penetrated deep into rural Afghan communities and linked the peasant-tribal system to both the state and the market; he attempted to create the crucial thread running through different cultural circles within the country. One of Amanullah Khan's radical measures was that "he regularized the system of taxation, abolishing tax farming and requiring that all taxes be paid in cash."[32] He ended indirect rule through the tribal leaders and increased direct tax on land and livestock, which brought him into conflict with the landowning khans. He encouraged trade by planning a new transportation network and expanded the education system, opening it to foreign influence. Furthermore, he encouraged the participation of women. Amanullah gave Afghanistan its first constitution in 1921, according to which even the king's actions were, in principle, subordinated to law. Through the constitution, he introduced the notion of universal citizenship and declared that citizens had rights. This was the end of slavery for marginalized ethnicities like the Hazaras. Strengthening the army, however, was not his first priority. His radical modernization of the country brought him in conflict with the tribal leaders and the Islamic *ulamas*. Habibullah, also known as *Bacha-yi Saqao* (son of water carrier), toppled Amanullah's regime.

Bacha-yi Saqao was soon replaced by the Musahiban brothers of the Mohmmadzai family, and the distribution of patronage remained in its

place. Under the Musahiban the government relied heavily on foreign aid. For instance, "from 1958 to 1968 and again in the 1970s the state financed over 40 percent of its expenditure from revenue accruing directly from abroad."[33] The monarchy continued the patronage-oriented system of governing. In the words of Rubin:

> [Government] expenditures showed the domestic consequences of becoming an allocation state; they presented the distribution of foreign aid as patronage to favored groups. The beneficiaries of most of the irrigation projects were tribal Pashtuns. Eastern Pashtuns dominated the trucking industry, especially because much of the profit derived from smuggling across the nearby Pakistani border. Many of those recruited into the new middle class were also tribal Pashtuns; indeed, the Musahiban made a concerted though ultimately unsuccessful effort to Pashtunize the predominantly Persian-speaking civil service….the Musahiban rulers used the resources obtained from their international connections to create a patronage network calculated to strengthen Pashtun nationalism, which they hoped would in turn prove an ideological buttress for their rule.[34]

Meanwhile, the foreign aid the government took on certain "development" projects created new types of constituencies. For instance, "after the mid-1950s the school system expanded with foreign, largely American, aid."[35] Some of the secondary boarding schools, such as Rahman Baba and Khushhal Khan Schools, enrolled only Pashtun students from eastern tribes.[36] Under this period, as the government took a non-confrontational approach with the rural khans, it created constituencies in the cities that were newly educated and loosely considered intellectuals: "the state educational process led to weakened traditional social control over those who went through it. Schooling separated village youth from their kin groups and from most of the population, in which the literacy rate remained under 10 percent."[37] The core leadership of both the future Mujahedin and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) were educated in this period. Thus, during this time a new circle was created from among the existing circles, and the new one was very alien to the old ones.

The newly-educated elite "intellectuals" founded or joined social and ideological organizations; For instance, "the principal communist organization was the PDPA. The Soviet Union provided the PDPA leaders some protection from government repression."[38] The PDPA was divided into Khalq (people) and Parcham (Flag), who fought over the leadership of the Party. Meanwhile, a new Islamic movement was gaining influence among the Kabul University students under the name of Muslim Youth Organization.

In 1973, Sardar Mohmmad Daud Khan, the king's cousin, carried out a coup, ended the monarchy, introduced the Republic, and declared himself the president. He cracked down on the Islamists, whose main activists and leadership fled to Pakistan. Daud Khan also expelled the Parchamis, who had assisted him with the coup. Khalqis and Parchamis reunited, and the PDPA army officers began planning a coup and toppled Daud's regime. This change of regime was a battle between the elites, while the majority of the population, especially the rural people, watched the scene unfold from the margins. Soon, conflict broke out again within the PDPA. Babrak Karmal and the rest of the leadership of the Parcham wing were sent into exile. The Khalqi government had its own internal conflicts; Hafizullah Amin wanted to carry out a revolutionary transformation of Afghan society by decree and terror, while Noor Mohmmad Taraki, the General Secretary of the Party, wanted more moderation. When Amin felt that the Soviet Union planned to replace him with a Taraki-Karmal coalition, he had Taraki killed and he took over.[39]

Amin's rule marked one of the most brutal periods between the Afghan state and society. Amin's goal was to use the state apparatus to destroy all competition for social control in all sectors of Afghan society. He wanted to neutralize both tribal aristocracy and rival intelligensia. He wished that "the masses liberated from

domination would then be enlightened through a mass literacy program and would gratefully support the Khalqis; the regime was dominated by Ghilzai and Paktia Pahstuns of tribal origins."[40] Amin's regime used mass arrests, torture and secret executions on a scale Afghanistan had never seen before even under Abdul Rahman Khan. He targeted any social groups that could have threatened his regime: students and teachers, army officers, religious leaders, Islamists, Parchamis, Maoists, bureaucrats, and members of ethnic groups who have revolted against the government such as Nuristanis and Hazaras.[41] The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, assassinated Amin, and put Babrak Karmal in power. By then the Islamist factions based in Pakistan were actively organizing an opposition to the regime in Kabul with the help of the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Afghanistan experienced more social fragmentation following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, as both the United States and the USSR suspended military aid to their clients in Afghanistan. Rubin observes that "the fragmentation of the political and military structures of the resistance prevented the mujahidin from turning local victories into a national one. For many commanders, the personal obligation of jihad ended with the Soviet withdrawal."[42] With weapons at the disposal of the Mujahedin, they engaged in a struggle for power at the local level, with each faction backed by its own foreign supporter. For instance, the Islamic Party, led by Gulbudin Hikmatyar, was supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan because both countries feared that the domination of Afghanistan by a Persian-speaking regime would lead to the rise of an Iranian influence in the country. Since ethnic identity was much stronger than national identity, and some factions of Afghan society had deep-rooted resentment against others (such as Hazaras against Pashtuns), the battle for Kabul was waged between alliances

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that "largely followed ethnic patterns in composition if not in ideology."[43] In this battle, hundreds of years of resentment and hostility among ethnicities came to the surface. The majority of Pashtun fighters gathered around Hekmatyar, and one of the bloodiest wars was fought between Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami and the Hazara faction of Hizb-e Wahdat. The international community, however, tried to bring the Mujahedin together, which resulted in the The Peshawar Agreement of 24 April 1992, which was brokered by Pakistan. When the accord failed, Kabul turned into a battleground for warring ethnicities. Hekmatyar launched a barrage of rockets against Kabul that destroyed half of the city, and took some 25,000 civilian lives.[44]

With the collapse of the pro-communist regime in Kabul, there was no legitimate state in Afghanistan. Thus, it is difficult to see a relationship between the state and society at all—additionally, the shaky relationship between different circles was destroyed too. Since even individual circles were divided into subsections, Afghani people became skeptical of those who were not in their immediate family or circle of close friends.

The state of brutality and chaos in the country led to the rise of one of the most religiously conservative regimes that Afghanistan has ever experienced -- the Taliban. Although the Taliban brought security by driving the warring factions out of major Afghan cities, they failed to create strong, impartial and efficient institutions. Pashtuns and religious extremists dominated the Taliban regime. Therefore, anyone who did not share the regime's dogma was marginalized and terrorized. This is again a familiar pattern in the Afghan relationship between state and society: a regime with a particular ideology trying to rule over a heterogeneous population that does not share the ideology of the regime. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Karzai's regime inherited a society that was not only skeptical of the state, but

also fragmented into pieces—with each piece loyal to a different khan, a warlord, or a religious leader and suspicious of all others. Could Karzai create a sense of trust among these people?

PRESIDENT KARZAI'S GOVERNMENT: 2001-PRESENT

For President Karzai to win over the people and create a sense of social trust among them, he needed to build strong, efficient and corruption-free institutions that could offer people an alternative to the warlords' protection. This way, he could signal to different circles that a new era of politics was at hand. However, Karzai's administration started poorly because international donors operating in Afghanistan–chiefly among them the United States – were not ready for state building. As Ahmed Rashid puts it, "United States policymakers had concentrated on waging war but had not considered how to wage the peace."[45] The consequences of this half-hearted nation-building had many critical implications for Afghans and their future government.

The Bush administration tried to fix Afghanistan on the cheap as the United States diverted its effort and interest from 2002 onwards to Iraq. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the United States turned to the warlords, such as Gul Agha Shirzai to "stabilize" the country. Ironically, by supporting these warlords the United States was undermining the authority of the very government that it was meant to protect. Warlords such as Gul Agha Shirzai are known for dolling out government contracts to family and friends. In Afghan politics this was a familiar business – a system run on patronage. Therefore, the task of building trust between state and society was hard to achieve from the very beginning.

Running Afghanistan cheaply also meant that the international community did not invest the resources to create a strong Afghan bureaucracy. Nevertheless, this bureaucracy was essential, so instead, the international community relied on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry out quick impact projects. This way, "Afghanistan was stripped of the capacity to help itself, the donors rushed to fill the gap with

technical assistance contracts running into hundreds of millions, more foreigners came to fill these open vacancies jobs that Afghans could easily be trained for."[46]

The system not only failed to train new people for the government, it also had the unintended effect of attracting top Afghan professionals to the NGO world, rather than leaving them in positions where they could strengthen the government. Mr. Ghani, the former finance minister, recalled in an interview with the BBC News: "Within six months of starting my job as finance minister, my best people had been stolen by international aid organizations who could offer them forty to a hundred times the salary we could."[47] As the "NGOs sucked away most of those who had been working as professors, engineers, doctors and teachers to highly paid positions supporting the donor circus," a handicapped government bureaucracy became even less functional.[48] "To rebuild, states need to establish government institutions that do broadly what they are

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supposed to do, and that invest heavily in higher education and skills to create a competitive work force."[49] For instance, South Korea and Japan owed their success in post-war state building to a large extent to their efficient bureaucracy. The Afghan bureaucracy, on the other hand, became so weak and ineffective that it could hardly spend its budget. In 2005 and 2006 the government spent only 44 per cent of the money it received for development projects. Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Finance, donor countries spent about $500 million on poorly designed and uncoordinated technical assistance."[50] In Afghanistan, the NGOs have repeatedly competed with the government over the resources necessary for building an effective civil service system.

A weak central government was not in a position to hold these NGOs accountable because the NGOs were only accountable to their donor

countries. Ironically, a poor and devastated country like Afghanistan became a place for people to get rich. With billions of dollars of humanitarian aid flowing into the country, sub-contractual layers turned into a common business: "by one estimate, international contractors are responsible for almost three quarters of the U.S. development assistance in Afghanistan."[51] And while corruption is an endemic part of the Afghani government, the "layers upon layers of subcontracting appear to Afghans as a case of many hands legally taking a cut before funds reach the target program."[52] This means that by the time the money gets to the last contractor, who really does the physical work on the ground, there is not much money left to finish the project. The case of a small village in a remote part of Bamiyan province, in Afghanistan's central highlands, serves as a good example:

> In 2002, $150 million could have transformed the lives of the inhabitants of villages like this one. The money was received by an agency in Geneva, who took 20 percent and subcontracted the job to another agency in Washington DC, who also took 20 per cent. Again, it was subcontracted and another 20 per cent was taken; and this happened again when the money arrived in Kabul. By this time, there was very little money left; but enough for someone to buy wood in Western Iran and have it shipped by a shipping cartel owned by a provincial governor at five times the cost of regular transportation. Eventually some wooden beams reached to the villages. A young man explained: 'the beams were too large and heavy for the mud walls that we can build. So all we could do was chop them up and use them for firewood.'[53]

Unfortunately, this example is certainly not an isolated case, but rather a common practice; too often, money for development projects is "burned" by the time it gets to the site of construction.

Cases such as Bamyan tell a story that is familiar to the Afghan people: ordinary Afghan society is marginalized, while elite groups who are supposed to be helping the people are helping themselves by filling their own pockets. This feeds pre-established social distrust among people. This case also highlights the fact that under Karzai's regime, resources are distributed unequally. Those with connections and "contracts" get rich on behalf of those who need help. There should be no doubt that such an approach to state building and reconstruction has a devastating effect, not only on the relationship between state and society, but also on the pillars of social trust among people.

Equal distribution of resources and opportunities reflect roots of generalized trust in a society. Bo Rothstein and Eric Uslaner argue that "the distribution of resources and opportunities plays a key role in establishing the belief that people share a common destiny and have similar fundamental values. When resources and opportunities are distributed equally, people are more likely to perceive a common stake with others and to see themselves as part of a larger social order. If there is a strong skew in wealth or in the possibilities for improving one's stake in life, people at each end may feel that they have little in common with others."[54] This is one way of explaining the pervasive corruption in government institutions. If a civil servant feels that he or she makes one hundred times less than his or her neighbor who works for an NGO, the individual might feel great resentment against the system. And if he or she feels that most fellow civil servants are taking bribes – due to a low-paying salary – that person will most likely take bribes because there is no reason to be the only honest one in a rotten game. The massive inequality of opportunity and distribution of resources, along with non-cooperative game theory, goes a long way to explain why government bodies suffer from pervasive corruption.

THE POLICE AND THE JUDICIARY

A corrupt police force is the gateway for the loss of a society's trust and faith in the government. After all, "a trusted law enforcement

institution would assist nearly everything that needs to be achieved in the country from security, through gender rights and minority rights, to building investor confidence and development goals."[55] It is the police force that is responsible for bringing corrupt officials to the judiciary, thus giving people a reason to trust in the government. Afghanistan lacks this law enforcement institution. According to an article in the *New York Times*, at all levels Afghan officials misuse their positions in the civil administration and the police force for quick profits.[56] The article notes that "the lack of trust, coupled with the absence of security forces in almost all villages, further strengthens the hand of the Taliban as the only real power here [Ghazni province of Afghanistan]. The list of schemes that undermine law enforcement is long and bewildering, according to American and Afghan officers who cite some examples: police officials who steal truckloads of gasoline; judges and prosecutors who make decisions based on bribes; high-ranking government officials who reap payoffs from hashish and chromites smuggling; and midlevel security and political jobs that are sold, sometimes for more than $50,000, money the buyers then recoup through still more bribes and theft."[57] Investigations show that the Afghan police force is ill-trained and low-paid. While these factors do much to explain widespread corruption within the police force, this corruption has also created a situation in which the police force does not trust Afghanistan's political leadership.

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The leadership's character and outlook affects every level of the administration. When civil servants feel that their bosses are cheating, this enables them to find a reason to take bribes too -- especially if their salaries hardly pay for their families' expenses. This ultimately makes common citizens feel suspicious of others in society because their civil servants are cheating. Thus, Afghan society is caught in a social trap, where everyone feels that everyone else is cheating. This hierarchy of corruption is very common in Afghanistan. For instance, "a raft of investigations has concluded that people at the highest levels of the Karzai administration, including President Karzai's own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, are cooperating in the country's opium trade, now the world's largest. In the streets and government offices, hardly a public transaction seems to unfold here that does not carry with it the requirement of a bribe, a gift, or, in case you are a beggar, "*harchee*" — whatever you have in your pocket."[58] President Karzai publicly acknowledged that corruption "is contributing to the collapse of public confidence in his government..."[59] It is widely acknowledged that "the two fatal weak points in Afghanistan's government today are the Ministry of the Interior and the judiciary. Both are deeply corrupt and plagued by a lack of basic skills, equipment, and resources. Without effective and honest administrators, police, and judges, the state can do little to provide internal security -- and if the government does not provide security, people will not recognize it as a government."[60] "Community leaders complain forcefully about judicial corruption, which has led many to demand the implementation of Islamic law, or sharia -- which they contrast not to secular law but to corruption. One elder from the province of Paktia said, "Islam says that if you find a thief, he has to be punished. If a murderer is arrested, he has to be tried and executed. In our country, if a murderer is put in prison, after six months he bribes the judge and escapes. If a member of parliament is killed ... his murderer is released after three to four months in prison because of bribery."[61]

CONCLUSION

If Afghani civil servants such as police and judges, whose job it is to hold others accountable, are corrupt themselves, then how can people trust normal citizens? On the other hand, if law enforcement agencies were deemed to be corruption-free by society, the general population would actually rely on these agencies, and Afghan citizens would obey the rule of law. Unfortunately, bringing about such a change

would be no simple task: social distrust in Afghanistan has historical roots, and the majority of the Afghan population has always been marginalized. Afghanistan's resources and opportunities have historically been in the hands of a few and the rest of society has felt that it is not part of a larger social order. Therefore, Afghan citizens have always remained within their own circles, and trusted people within that circle. The ruling circle has repeatedly failed to encompass all of society, especially the rural areas, and give them the feeling that they share a common destiny. The 'state' either did not bother to engage with rural populations, such as the Musahiban brothers, or it took an elitist approach when it confronted them. The latter approach was evident under Abdul Rahman Khan, Amanullah Khan and later under the communist regime: the discourse that they tried to introduce into Afghan society was alien to the people.

Today, Karzai's government faces the challenge of stitching these circles together with a single thread. With a weak central government,

this will be a difficult task. The warlords, although not strong enough to topple the government, are still very influential. They command loyalty based on ethnic lines. The presence of the foreign troops and their airstrikes causes hundreds of civilian casualties and gives people the feeling that either their government does not care about them or is not in a position of authority; this makes the task of creating social trust even harder. In order to break out of Afghanistan's social trap, it will be necessary to change the way the majority of Afghan people view their society. This task will require a strong, corruption-free and impartial government that punishes dishonest officials and creates a sense of national identity that is stronger than regional or ethnic circles.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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