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Rethinking Afghan Local Governance Aid After Transition

Summary

- The conclusion of the U.S.-led "surge" of 2009 onward and the closure of provincial reconstruction teams and other local civil-military installations have affected how aid is delivered in Afghanistan's more remote and contested areas.
- The time is ripe for a recalibration of donor approaches to local governance and development in areas previously targeted by the surge.
- Specifically, foreign stakeholders should reexamine three central principles of their previous subnational governance strategy.
- First, donors should revise their conception of assisting service delivery from the previous approach, which often emphasized providing maximal inputs in a fragmented way, to a more restrained vision that stresses predictability and reliability and acknowledges the interlinked nature of politics, justice, and sectoral services in the eyes of the local population.
- Second, donors should reframe their goal of establishing linkages between the Afghan government and population by acknowledging that the main obstacles to improving center-periphery communication and execution are often political and structural rather than technical.
- Third, donors should revise the way they define, discuss, and measure local governance progress in contested areas, away from favoring snapshots of inputs and perceptions and toward capturing longer-term changes on the ground in processes, structures, and incentives.
- The coming political and development aid transition provides an overdue opportunity for Afghan governance priorities to come to the fore. At the same time, the ever growing chasm between Kabul's deliberations on the one hand and local governance as experienced in more remote, insurgency-wracked areas on the other presents renewed risks.
- In the short term, donors let the air out of the aid bubble carefully. In the long term, resolving Afghanistan's local governance challenges continues to demand sustained commitment and systematic execution.

Introduction

If every year has been deemed critical for post-Taliban Afghanistan, 2014 is particularly so: It ushers in major transitions in the Afghan political, military, and development arenas. On the political front, a milestone election that took place in the spring will, it is hoped, enable Afghanistan's first transfer of power from one elected president to another. Militarily, in the wake of the ambitious U.S.-led surge launched in 2009, adding foreign troops mainly in the south and east of the country, a significant drawdown is under way. Afghan National Security Forces have assumed increasing responsibility for their country's stability in the face of a resilient continued insurgency. This has been accompanied in the development sphere by a major downsizing of foreign aid budgets and staff. In particular, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs)—long key components of international efforts to distribute aid and engage local politics outside Kabul—are closing down, dramatically changing how donor-funded local governance and development programs will be administered.

As these transformations occur, how will the international military and civilian drawdown affect local governance in more volatile areas previously targeted by the surge? As PRTs and other forms of local-level international official presence phase out, how should foreign assistance strategies adjust? This report argues that 2014 marks an important opportunity for donors to recalibrate their approach to subnational governance and development aid in Afghanistan's more unstable or remote areas. In particular, the international community should reexamine three central tenets of its previous approach to governance aid in contested regions that have often led to misguided tactics or unintended negative consequences.[1]

Background: The Surge and the Drawdown

Upon Barack Obama's inauguration as U.S. president in 2009, his administration launched an expanded campaign in Afghanistan, arguing that the Afghan government faced a "resilient and growing" Taliban insurgency and risked failure without a fully resourced counterinsurgency strategy.[2] The resultant U.S.-led civilian and military surge injected an unprecedented level of international personnel and resources, particularly into Afghanistan's southern and eastern regions, where the insurgency was strongest. The surge brought the number of combined U.S. and allied International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in the country to about 140,000; their goal was to halt and reverse insurgent momentum and shore up Afghan security forces. Simultaneously, the civilian effort was significantly expanded. After years of a relatively light international community footprint in Afghanistan, at first mainly circumscribed to Kabul and then extended to a limited set of regional and provincial outposts, foreign officials would now increase their presence around the country with and deploy far more local resources in an attempt to stabilize Afghanistan from the bottom up.[3]

Since late 2009, nearly a thousand officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State, and the Department of Agriculture have been deployed to Afghanistan's provincial and district levels, overseeing additional thousands of nongovernmental contractors implementing U.S. programs. PRTs—joint military-civilian enclaves sponsored by donor nations serving as a provincial locus for development projects and local engagement—had operated in Afghanistan since 2003. The surge dramatically increased the number of U.S. and allied personnel at PRTs operating in Regional Commands South and East; further, it launched a collection of new district support teams (DSTs) to bolster Afghanistan's lowest formal unit of administration in its most volatile areas.

Once deployed in greater numbers, ISAF officials sponsored projects directly at the local level, working largely through provincial and district governors' offices and in collaboration

with local consultative bodies, such as provincial councils and district development assemblies.[4] In U.S.-led PRTs, civilian projects were supported by a combination of USAID and State Department supported streams. Meanwhile, military officials continued to spend local development aid through the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). A typical PRT or DST initiated a range of projects focusing on basic roads, school and clinic refurbishment, public affairs, agricultural support, water and sanitation, and community-government engagement, all aiming to address local priorities and assist local Afghan administrations.

In some ways, the military and civilian surge was an appropriate shift in the international community's support for Afghan local administration and development. Rather than continue to wait for trickle-down governance and reform to arrive through the country's vertical line ministry systems—a process that had borne limited fruit during the previous nine years of Kabul-centric aid strategy—the new mandate acknowledged Afghanistan's decentralized insurgency and politics. Noting that the local level was "where most Afghans encounter their government,"[5] ISAF resources aimed to "incentivize improved performance, accountability, and transparency" among local Afghan officials.[6] Consistent with doctrine articulated in the newly minted U.S. Army/Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, the increased resources and mentoring were intended to help the Afghan government earn the support of its population, thereby decreasing the appeal of the insurgency.[7]

However, despite some discrete, local achievements, the surge fell short of its stated governance and development ambitions.[8] When read literally, U.S. (and Afghan) statements about its aims amounted to a profound technical and social transformation of local governance structures within about two years. The focus on reforming Afghanistan's roughly four hundred district administrations, rather than its provincial structures, exceeded what was feasible.[9] The surge's strategy depended on the assumption that the new, improved local accountability structures it tried to build from the bottom up would, in the medium term, be institutionalized by top-down reform by the Afghan government in Kabul.[10] These reforms, however, did not take place. At the same time, the surge's bottom-up aid delivery prompted unintended consequences. Injecting projects directly at the local level and largely through governors' offices, though often expedient as well as effective for short-term gains, was largely disassociated from national government decisions and ultimately undermined the improvement of vertical line ministry systems that the Afghan constitution envisaged.[11]

The surge was always seen as a temporary measure. Its goal was to buy time and space for the Afghan government to prevail in its military struggle against the insurgency, which was also seen as a contest of governance. In July 2010, Afghan and international officials agreed on a process of transition by which the surge would be drawn down. At its May 2012 summit, NATO pledged to phase out the PRTs and DSTs or to turn their premises over to the Afghan government by the end of 2014. As of early 2014, about 55,000 ISAF troops remained in country, down from the high of 132,000 in 2011.[12] The surge's most visible local structures—PRTs and DSTs—are already largely closed down. A parallel civilian drawdown is already under way: Remaining officials are increasingly based in Kabul and thus less able to oversee local projects. The era of international-backed surge and counterinsurgency has given way to the Afghan-led transition and the "transformation decade" that is hoped will follow.[13]

Subnational Governance Aid Beyond 2014

Despite the significant resources expended during the surge, the contest for governance between the insurgency and the Kabul government has not been decisively resolved. A major task for the new Afghan administration will be to attempt to control the areas previously targeted by the surge, but with likely fewer resources, both civilian and military. The

time is therefore ripe for a recalibration of donor strategy for Afghan local governance and development in contested areas.

The post-2014 environment requires that foreign stakeholders reexamine three central principles that animated previous PRT-based project implementation and partly explain their failings. First, they should revise their often disjointed conception of assisting service delivery that overly focused on inputs and spending money to a more restrained approach that emphasizes the importance of predictability and reliability, as well as the ways in which local politics, justice, and service delivery are linked in the eyes of the local population. Second, they should acknowledge that the obstacles to improved center-periphery communication and execution are political and structural as well as technical and should reconceive their programs to establish these linkages accordingly. Third, they should revise the way they define, discuss, and measure local governance progress in contested areas, moving away from relying on snapshots of inputs and perceptions and toward capturing longer-term changes on the ground in processes, structures, and incentives.

Rethinking Donor Conceptions of Service Delivery

The perceived imperative by donors to assist the Afghan government in delivering services has anchored myriad local governance initiatives over the past decade. As Astri Suhrke notes, this reflects a notion of government legitimacy deriving from the Western concept of the social contract: If the Afghan state provides a certain amount of goods and opportunities, the Afghan population will, it is assumed, provide their support and loyalty in return.[14] The theme pervades key documents, from the 2006 Afghanistan Compact's goal that the Afghan government will "expand its capacity to provide basic services to the population throughout the country,"[15] to the 2008 Afghanistan National Development Strategy's placement of "delivery of public services" as a central pillar,[16] to the 2010 Subnational Governance Policy's 152 mentions of some variation of "service delivery."[17]

At first blush, delivering services seems commonsensical in a country that sorely lacks them. It is also a central component of most contemporary foreign-led efforts to assist statebuilding. But the surge of 2009 to 2012 marked a decisive intensification as donors ramped up an action-oriented program of service delivery that injected resources directly into districts and municipalities from a fragmented set of platforms—the local PRTs or DSTs. In his initial commander's assessment, which described the intellectual premise of the surge, ISAF Commander Stanley McChrystal argued that for the international community to help the Afghan government earn the support of its population, it needed to recognize that "this is a deeds-based information environment where perceptions derive from actions…such as how quickly things improve."[18] The symptom was poor public perception of the government; the cure was vigorously "improving things."

With this theoretical basis, the surge greatly expanded a (hyper)active interpretation of service delivery on the ground level. The enlargement of PRTs and creation of DSTs provided visible platforms for project delivery—in many places, the first stationary manifestations of the international good governance support machine that rural Afghans had ever seen. The infusion of a greatly increased aid budget, comprising both civilian and military development funds and often implemented by nongovernmental organizations, provided a dramatically swollen volume of projects, usually delivered to citizens in (at least nominal) conjunction with local Afghan government officials.

Further stimulating the tempo of local project implementation was that the sheer number of personnel, agencies, and nationalities operating at the subnational level often fueled bureaucratic competition among the internationals overseeing the aid. Civilian and military

personnel noted that funding projects was the principal means to demonstrate utility to Afghan government counterparts who could often shop around for a willing underwriter for their preferred initiative.[19] Sponsoring projects was also a way to respond to congressional staffers fixated on "burn rates,"[20] to placate higher-ups within multiple international chains of command, and to assert interagency relevance to other "whole-of-government" counterparts jockeying for their own position in a crowded local playing field. As one former official noted, against the backdrop of Afghanistan's immense needs, the prevailing refrain was "to just MSH: make [stuff] happen from the moment we hit the ground."[21]

Even as the 2014 transition has radically altered the environment and resources have decreased, current donor plans for future local governance programs largely echo the same theory of change: International help on service delivery will ultimately improve Afghanistan's state-society relationship. Documents for the major forthcoming U.S. subnational governance assistance initiative notes that the program

> will improve [the Afghan government's] ability to prioritize service delivery....This will lead to services that more closely respond to all citizens' needs in health, education, security, justice, and urban services. As all citizens benefit from public services, their perception of government legitimacy will increase.[22]

Looking ahead to a post-PRT era, improving service delivery is, at some level, an obvious area for continued international support. But donors must address several interrelated weaknesses in how they have understood and operationalized local service delivery.

First, donors often confused their ambition to cultivate recurring services with their reality of launching a constellation of discrete, unsystematic, and often unsustainable projects. Service delivery ideally implies instating mechanisms for sustained performance of certain basic government functions. But PRT- and DST-based initiatives often termed any local-level project "service delivery," though many of them were one-time distributions or events that did not foster lasting systems or take future operations and maintenance needs into account.

Further, civilian or military actors often launched projects without a comprehensive underlying assessment of the services most needed. At the height of the surge, internationals rarely lacked for information on local conditions: They heard from diplomatic reporting channels, the giant military and intelligence apparatus, a proliferation of independent research consultancies, local counterparts, and the frequently polled Afghan public. But triangulating and synthesizing these inputs, assessing their veracity, establishing priorities, and then defining a systematic program to address them—in conjunction with Kabul-based line ministries—was largely beyond the scope of locally based project managers. Instead, PRT-based projects tended toward those that could be most feasibly tackled given the limited time, implementation ability, local capacity, and mobility. The pressure to deliver defined the services delivered.

Predictably, Afghan communities grasped this dynamic and learned to express their desires for projects framed in terms of international community buzzwords. At the height of the surge, this often amounted to echoing the counterinsurgency marching orders to implement projects targeted at "sources of instability." As one Afghan interviewee noted, "Communities learned to explain that all sources of instability [SOI] could be addressed by a culvert repair, a boundary wall refurbishment, a repair of an irrigation canal in their backyard. What if the real SOI is corruption? We don't list any SOIs like this."[23] A cyclical and cynical dynamic emerged: When all foreigners had to offer was a hammer, the local Afghan populace would learn to identify a lot of nails.

A second flaw with how basic services were delivered as a tenet of PRT-based governance aid was that it perpetuated confusion on what basic services actually are from an Afghan

perspective. The international community's notion proved maximalist. The embrace of the U.S. military's *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* as a primary doctrinal text meant that uniformed U.S. personnel internalized that they should "be prepared to help reestablish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services" that included, in one example, "police and fire, water, electricity, schools, transportation networks, medical, sanitation."[24] The manual's description of support to governance included

> controlling military and police activities; establishing and enforcing the rule of law; public administration; justice (a judiciary system, prosecutor/defense representation, and corrections); property records and control; public finance; civil information; historical, cultural, and recreational services; an electoral process for representative government; disaster preparedness and response.[25]

Most of these services had never existed in Afghanistan's rural communities. Nonetheless, during the surge, myriad international personnel fanned out to ask locals, "How are the services?" As Afghan interpreters admitted, there was confusion among them in even how the word *services* should be translated.[26]

Spectacular as the confusion over defining basic services was, the presence of PRTs further muddied the murky waters regarding which Afghan actors are supposed to provide them. Afghan government structures formally assign vertical line ministries, such as those of education, health, agriculture, or irrigation, and livestock the task of distributing services in their sector. Many of these agencies lacked district-level representation in the most volatile areas, and improving their performance in remote areas required top-down reform that had not taken place in most ministries and that was often impeded by Kabul-level interministerial competition. In the interest of efficiency or convenience, PRT and DST-based service delivery projects thus often ended up designating the local district governor, provincial governor, or district development assembly to serve as the public face of project distribution. Recently, a parallel problem has emerged through the renewed international focus on municipal structures: Aid delivery is concentrated through mayoral offices, but formally, the authorities of municipalities are fairly limited (though still being negotiated in the form of a long-pending municipal law).[27]

A third weakness with service delivery as a hallmark of PRT-based governance aid was that donors often encouraged popular demand for projects that exceeded historic precedent or local capacity and inadvertently conditioned the population's support for their government on continued delivery of the newly provided services. Consistent with the philosophy that Afghan government legitimacy would derive from project delivery, locally based foreigners encouraged citizen mobilization to request projects. Ad hoc surveying tools used especially by the U.S. military, such as the Tactical Conflict Assessment Planning Framework, launched a proliferation of man-on-the-street interviews. Afghans were repeatedly asked, "What is the biggest problem facing your village? What should be done first to help your village?"[28] Inevitably, local expectations were raised.

Donors further encouraged regular community meetings where they exhorted locals to voice their desires to their officials. A remote population's mobilization to express their requests was framed—and logframed—as an indicator of success.[29] Tools such as the District Stability Framework instructed locally based international civilians and military officers to measure requests to the district government as part of the "stability indicators" for evaluating progress in a given district—the more requests, the better.[30] Responding to this incentive, international military and civilian officials inevitably encouraged more and more local lodging of requests.

But significantly, once a certain "basic" level of local demand was met, no evidence indicated that the population was pledging its unwavering support to the Afghan government. Instead, demand was elastic: As one DST-based official put it, "People no longer complain

they're afraid of getting shot. They complain about school supplies."[31] Rising expectations is a predictable human response, but it also reveals a central flaw in the theory that donors could imbue local Afghan officials with long-term legitimacy through short-term project delivery. Lack of continuity was a related problem: A recent impact evaluation of the effects of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) found that during the time when its block grants were being implemented, a community's opinion of Afghan government officials improved; however, after the project was completed, there was no evidence of their lasting political value. As the authors note, "This seems to imply that the continued provision of public goods is necessary to increase government legitimacy."[32]

Revising Donor Approaches

As PRTs and DSTs vanish, donors' previous notion of service delivery in contested areas will to some degree inevitably have to shift. But rather than an ad hoc adjustment, the new environment merits conscious strategic and rhetorical changes.

First, donors should refocus their efforts on reforming top-down systems and middle-level processes rather than inciting bottom-up demand. They should redouble efforts to push for line ministry focus on subnational priorities to include supporting ongoing efforts on provincial budgeting and planning. This will require acknowledgment that improving these ministries' performance is not a question solely of capacity but also of politics: In truth, patronage and senior-level rivalries significantly influence implementation of ministerial plans. Focus should be on incorporating provincial-level priorities into ministerial plans and ensuring that district-level administrative systems are compatible with provincial ones. Beyond that, at the district level and below, international actors should rein in rhetoric about encouraging grassroots mobilization to demand specific wish-lists of projects.

For many rural communities that have received significant DST- or PRT-provided support, the decreased foreign aid environment will inevitably prove to be a harsh adjustment. Once the international community defined Afghan government legitimacy in terms of its ability to deliver an ever-increasing bundle of goods, the demand signal for tangible action was pushed to unsustainably high levels.[33] Expectation and risk management are therefore in order. Donors should strive to let the air out of this bubble slowly rather than abruptly by strategic use of the remaining year of stabilization program funds to support vulnerable communities and through coordination with the NSP, which will continue to work at the local level.[34]

Second, emphasis should shift toward bolstering predictability and reliability of local government offerings rather than quantity. Historically, rural Afghans harbored fairly low expectations for local government provision of goods or services—but for certain vital functions, tolerance is now scant for an administration that doesn't deliver. As one interviewee noted, "When we walk miles, for the first time in years, to ask for a *tazkira* [national identification card], will there be someone there at the district center that day?" Another underscored that "it's not like the U.S.—it doesn't matter to people whether there is a fancy trash pickup. They want a functioning clinic with someone there." A third noted, "When we go to the agriculture department, we don't expect fertilizer for free. But we expect that the guy will be knowledgeable."[35] Donors should further emphasize supporting provincial-level systems to achieve reliability of service provision within their boundaries, rather than focusing directly on district administrations.

In particular, donor vision of the roles of district and provincial governors needs to be more realistic. The governor will no longer be the centerpiece of international project distribution, passing out, in one Afghan interviewee's words, "all these exotic things that make a proposal very nice."[36] Instead, the conception must shift toward a more traditional role of the governor as the lynchpin in the "government of relationships" that characterizes much

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of Afghanistan—a person who convenes, resolves conflicts, makes connections, and acts as an intermediary between the periphery and Kabul.[37]

If the governor is central because of what he does rather than what he distributes, what can the international community do to support him and, by extension, local governance? There are real limits on this score, and previous international capacity building efforts have often overemphasized the governor's technical role rather than his political one. Despite long-standing donor pushes for merit-based appointments, influencing who serves in these jobs will largely remain beyond the reach of foreigners.[38] Rather than trying to engineer a subnational appointment and oversight process that largely defies external influence, donors should focus on the actual levers available to them to improve basic predictability of local administrations. They should focus on supporting the filling of *tashkeels* (government official slots) at each district center, recruitment of hard-to-fill roles, and systems to counter absenteeism. Technical aid can help ensure revenue transfer for salary payments and operations and maintenance as well as safeguard the safety of remote officials.

As a third recalibration of service delivery, the international community must acknowledge that from a rural Afghan perspective, the questions of sectoral services, politics, and justice are deeply intertwined. Sharp distinctions between health services, education services, agricultural aid, democracy and governance sector programs, and justice sector programs mirror the foreign aid bureaucratic apparatus and the Kabul-level ministry structure. Among the subnational population, however, these divisions are not particularly meaningful, and the foreign approach to providing support this way has often yielded unintended consequences. When donors provide a given service to one community but not to another for technical reasons, for example, the decision is often considered locally to be a fairness issue rather than a technical one. Communities that do not receive the same aid as their neighbors may become increasingly alienated from the government, and the community receiving assistance, as noted, may not feel significantly more loyal.

In particular, for most Afghans, justice and security remain the predominant concerns. Although internationals often choose to address these grievances through projects that are discrete from "governance" programs, this approach is counterintuitive for many locals. Internationals should incorporate the justice realm into local governance program design, bearing in mind that, as Noah Coburn notes, the Western focus on ideas of retribution and adversarial proceedings varies from Afghan perspectives of justice that emphasize reconciliation and community harmony.[39]

Rethinking Government-Citizen Linkages

A second tenet of contested-area aid that is ripe for reconceptualization is donors' impulse to help the Afghan government and the Afghan population to "link up" with each other. Internationals have argued that a major driver of disenchantment among Afghans is a lack of relationship with their national or local government. Donors understood this state-society disconnect to stem from technical shortcomings: Afghan officials simply required help and encouragement to communicate with their constituents about constituent concerns. International support would enable officials to meet these needs, and a more satisfied population would emerge.

At the height of PRT and DST engagement, this assumption permeated central documents for U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.[40] On a more local level, donor diagnoses of district or communal "drivers of instability" frequently cited lack of government reach.[41] Current U.S. planning for subnational governance aid echoes these ideas, citing "strengthened top-down and bottom-up information flows" as a central problem to be addressed and "fostering a combination of top-down and bottom-up consultative processes between central and provincial levels" as a key goal.[42]

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Several interrelated weaknesses with this approach emerge. First, the strategy disregards the reality that significant segments of the Afghan population have no desire to connect with their government, regardless of how many handouts are on offer. Especially in some rural areas targeted by DST aid during the surge, government presence is often viewed as foreign and extortive. Intrusion of government could actually fuel instability to a degree that no amount of goods proffered could outweigh.[43]

Second, even for those areas that do want better center-periphery communication, donors have considered cultivating that exchange as largely a technical endeavor rather than a political and structural one. Yet Afghan and foreign interviewees alike questioned the premise that Afghans need help figuring out how to reach one another. After all, Afghanistan has long featured a "government of relationships" in which personal petitioning is widely acknowledged as a way to move causes forward.[44] Citizens have not, historically speaking, lacked the resourcefulness to get in touch with the right person when needed, although those without *wasita* (connections) to find that right person may not bother.

Instead, evidence suggests that the main impediment to center-periphery exchanges is the lack of structural and political incentives to do so. Crucial questions on subnational governance authorities have still not been resolved; the joint Afghan-international oeuvre of local governance policy documents from the past thirteen years reads like a catalogue of aspirational wish lists. The 2010 Subnational Governance Policy suffers from its catch-all nature, lack of prioritization, and spectacular disconnect with the Afghan context.[45] A follow-on prioritization exercise and the 2012 National Priority Programme for Local Governance in 2012 have made some progress.[46] But actual resolution of subnational structural questions awaits—as a first step—the passage of three key laws clarifying the authorities of local institutions.[47]

This lack of structural and political incentives for better communication resulted in years of local capacity-building programs that were more romantic than strategic. Donors trained provincial council members in oversight and accountability but had no set authorities on which to base their curriculum.[48] Instruction for district-level consultative bodies was based on an implicit yet inaccurate assumption these groups were at the time electorally accountable to their constituents. Capacity-building sessions for local officials often provided skills seemingly mirror-imaged on Western aid program manager functions: writing proposals, drafting reports, monitoring and evaluation, taking minutes, facilitation skills, and procurement. Donor-supported government services fairs were heavy on printed booklets and posters—often out of step with local literacy levels and preferred mode of ingesting information. Many trainings and workshops relied on flipcharts and acronyms, inconsistent with councillors' intrinsic motivations to undertake complicated tasks that were more likely to fall in the lap of Western contractors or their ability to maintain these practices going forward. Other evidence suggests that trainings either perpetuated significant confusion on government officials' proper roles or contributed to inflated expectations.[49]

Still, some donors argued that training Afghan authorities on more general capabilities, such as democratic principles, checks and balances of government, and outreach, could be worthwhile: Officials would be ready to draw on these skills when and if their incentive structures were laid out accordingly. Given resource constraints, however, donors understandably focused almost entirely on a small pool of individuals who would not necessarily be the relevant individuals in the years ahead. Looking forward, massive Afghan government turnover looms: Governorships, line ministries, and leadership within the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) will likely change hands with a new administration, and a new slate of provincial councillors has just been elected. Applications for immigrant visas are soaring, meaning that many skilled individuals who played significant roles within civil

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service, often as national technical assistance or as staff on aid contracts, may well leave the country.[50] Any capacity-building program, however well conceived, risks irrelevance if it targets only individuals who are no longer in the roles envisioned.

A third associated weakness to donor conceptualization of "linking up" state and society relates to the goal of PRT-based projects to go beyond simply improving center-periphery communication to assisting the Afghan government with the logistics of actually delivering for its citizenry. Here also, international stakeholders perceived the challenge as largely technical, whereas once again political and structural incentives were the main obstacle. As one international analyst noted, "Local populations often have a lot more indigenous capacity to get things done when they want to than our programs acknowledge."[51] Another recalled that when PRT announced a surplus of building supplies to be given away within the following twenty-four hours, the same municipal official who had been receiving donor logistical and travel support to launch aid projects found a quick way to come and collect the materials.[52] Indeed, in some ways, the famously resilient illicit markets for poppy and timber provide a natural (if unfortunate) experiment showing evidence for indigenous Afghan resourcefulness and implementation capacity. Given an intrinsic motive (in this case profit), even against the famously challenging Afghan landscape, these industries' logistics, transport, and communication systems have all clearly fallen into place.

Revising Donor Approaches and Acknowledging Afghan Priorities

Looking ahead, as donors acknowledge the political obstacles to improving government-citizen communication, they should in particular rein in their impulse to launch romantic capacity-building projects. Any training curriculum should be based on existing political accountability relationships; programs should be realistic about what level of appetite local officials will have for Western mirror-imaged notions of key skills going forward. A key question is what those accountability relationships will actually be. Diplomatic leverage and technical support should encourage Afghan clarification of a few key subnational roles and relationships through refinement and passage of the three pending local governance laws. But internationals should be realistic that the final products will still likely not be as unambiguous and easily implemented as they would prefer.

More broadly, the international community should accept an overall shift in Afghan local governance policy that has occurred over the past thirteen years, and in particular in the past three: Afghan voices have subtly asserted increasing agency over questions of how Afghan subnational governance should look. Early documents such as the Afghan Constitution (ratified in 2004) and the Subnational Governance Policy (finalized in 2010 but based on years of prior discussion pushed by the donor community) reflected a strong international community hand in conceptualizing Afghan governance and an Afghan willingness to formally assent. This resulted in documents that called for a high degree of formal administrative complexity—for example, village, district, and municipal councils to be elected by free, fair, general, and direct elections.[53]

In truth, these declarations greatly exceeded actual Afghan appetite and capacity—as well as donor resources and follow-through—to instate complicated local-level formal administration. The proposal to hold nationwide district council elections encapsulates this disconnect. It would require Afghan stakeholders first agreeing on the number of official districts,[54] formalized district boundaries, a revised census, Independent Election Commission administration, and abundant logistical support. Implementing council elections for each of Afghanistan's estimated forty-two thousand villages would pose still more stark feasibility questions.

The international community should accept an overall shift in Afghan local governance policy that has occurred over the past thirteen years: Afghan voices have subtly asserted increasing agency over questions of how Afghan subnational governance should look.

Over the past few years, these more ambitious decrees have, quite simply, just not been carried out. One longtime international observer speculated that Afghan policymakers in the early years deemed it pragmatic or collegial to assent to even unrealistic governance goals, but that when it comes to actual execution, "The Afghan government has no problem just not implementing parts of the Constitution."[55] Meanwhile, the well-documented donor challenges of personnel turnover, coordination problems, resource constraints, and strategic schizophrenia have prevented the international community from pushing these reforms through themselves. Whether as a purposeful Afghan strategy to manage international community hyper-ambition, or just a long series of triage decisions based on limited resources, the result has been that the complicated local formal governance plans envisioned soon after 2001 are still unlikely to be realized anytime soon.

Significantly, however, the past year has demonstrated that governance policy progress can be made in areas that Afghan stakeholders prioritize. At the time of writing, parliament is in ongoing debate about the relative authorities of the new provincial council law. The resulting legislation will likely not meet the international community's hopes for a more empowered provincial council. But, in the eyes of one observer, "The Afghan parliamentarians will get the law they want."[56]

Recent developments regarding district-level councils also demonstrate that Afghan priorities are increasingly ascendant in local governance implementation. The past decade witnessed a multiplicity of district-level *shuras* springing up as temporary stopgap measures while the described logistical, technical, and financial obstacles prevented (and will likely continue to prevent) actual district council elections from being held.[57] In many areas, these councils served as proxies for competition between their Kabul-based parent entities, such as the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) or IDLG, and donors also distributed considerable resources through still more district-level bodies they created in many places.[58] The resulting district governance picture—often confusing, destabilizing, and prone to manipulation—was widely recognized as problematic yet long resisted rectification.[59]

In the past year, however, a temporary solution for district-level bodies has been brokered. With international backing, the leadership of the IDLG and MRRD agreed on a joint policy proposing to streamline all such bodies into one set of district coordination councils and to standardize their access to resources.[60] At the time of writing, many questions remain on the implementation and the realism of the rollout timeline, resource availability, and the new presidential administration's position on the proposal. Further, the measure is stated to be yet another stopgap until district council elections are eventually held.

Nonetheless, both the Provincial Council Law and District Coordination Council initiatives suggest that Afghan preferences are coming to the fore on subnational governance plans. Both initiatives have genuine Afghan constituencies and compromises behind them. Although the specifics of the arrangements may not be technically ideal from a Western standpoint, they present both opportunities and limitations for international community assistance. Donors can continue to assist in the process of clarifying subnational authorities and roles, but based on select, demonstrated Afghan priorities rather than a maximalist, overcomplicated vision of local administration. When relevant legislation or policy is finalized, the foreigners should focus on disseminating information based on those decisions and accept that they will likely codify some continued degree of strategic ambiguity.

Separately, based on the observation that greater indigenous capacity for project execution exists than many donors assume, newer, more out-of-the-box approaches to local sectoral aid could also be explored. Internationals could investigate approaches like cash on delivery (also known as payment for results), which would provide performance-based incentives for completion of certain sectoral deliverables and let Afghans figure out how

to achieve them. The mechanism bases payments on specific agreed-upon indicators, and, in the words of its advocates, "rebalances accountability, reduces transaction costs, and encourages innovation."[61] Although most appropriate for certain sectors, such as health and education, and conditioned by independent verification, Afghanistan's new aid environment merits exploration of new approaches.

Rethinking Definitions of Progress in Governance

Finally, as international stakeholders look beyond 2014, they should consider shifting how they conceive of and measure local governance progress in contested areas away from an approach that favors snapshots of inputs and perceptions.

Since 2001, the international community has embraced a series of distinct conceptions of what it was aiming to achieve through PRT-based projects.[62] In early years of international engagement, PRT aid (particularly military-funded efforts) was often considered a way to convince local Afghan "hearts and minds" to support the foreign presence and to forge relationships with communities that might provide intelligence.[63] Projects also often aimed to assist the Afghan government, but this goal was largely in concert with improving the relationship between the Afghan population and foreigners. Further, this approach assumed that the economic benefits of a discrete project would support local stability based on the belief that poverty directly drives insecurity. Monitoring and evaluation approaches were disparate and often incomplete during this period, but common indicators, particularly in military-funded projects, included money spent and projects nominally completed.

This approach generated significant critiques. Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder argued that most drivers of instability were actually political—relating to resource competition between groups or predatory government behavior. In such cases, projects designed based on the assumption that economic grievances generated insecurity, and that attempted to resolve these complaints through socioeconomic interventions such as infrastructure, training, and goods distribution, were thus misdirected. Further, they sometimes actually fueled instability by providing more fodder for intergroup competition and feeding government corruption.[64]

With the explicit launch of a joint civilian-military counterinsurgency strategy in 2009, donor emphasis shifted to improving Afghanistan's citizen-state relationship. PRTs and DSTs in the country's south and east largely attempted to deliver their swelling volume of projects through Afghan officials. The theory of change was that if communities increasingly viewed their local authorities, and not insurgent elements, as able and willing service providers, they would throw their support behind the government. This altered strategy attempted to incorporate lessons of previous eras by acknowledging that political factors drove insecurity. PRT and DST personnel were counseled to identify "sources of instability," often through tools such as the Tactical Conflict Assessment Planning Framework and the District Stability Framework and design projects that would alleviate these factors.[65]

However, these newer approaches had their own weaknesses. First, international officials often lacked deep, triangulated local knowledge to determine what constituted a source of instability. Designing discrete projects that actually ameliorated these factors—which were often highly complex and entrenched—was even harder. Further, military actors in particular often supposed that once "sources of instability" were identified and addressed, more complex projects would be enabled, and local governance progress, like security progress, would proceed in a generally linear fashion, from "clear" to "hold" to "build" to "transfer"[66]—all reasonably distilled into a PowerPoint chart. This assumption was rarely borne out by evidence or experience.[67]

Second, more recent evidence has refuted some of these projects' fundamental theories of change, such as the assumption that small aid projects would durably improve Afghans' perception of their government. As noted, evidence shows that the National Solidarity Programme did

not improve citizens' opinions of local officials beyond the lifetime of the project.[68] Research also questioned the ISAF counterinsurgency policy of funneling money into more volatile areas to improve state-society relations. Some data shows that aid projects have a positive effect on villagers' perceptions of their government and sense of well-being only in areas that were initially more stable.[69] Other analysts note that local populations complained that insecurity seemed to be rewarded by more money,[70] whereas others found that populations in stable areas felt more positive about aid projects than those in unstable areas.[71] Implementers argued that aid was both harder to deliver and harder to monitor in insecure areas, making it more prone to fraud and elite capture.[72]

What should the future strategy for local governance aid in contested areas be? Over recent years, Afghans have witnessed a parade of donor theories of change—though these prevailing theories were often implemented differently by different international actors. Now, as the drawdown unfolds, the concepts of stabilization and counterinsurgency are falling out of favor with many in both international and Afghan quarters because of concerns over their resource-intensiveness and mixed results.

At the same time, no new dominant animating theory has emerged beyond a general impulse toward transition. In many instances, language has shifted from decreasing "sources of instability" to increasing "social cohesion" or "resilience."[73] In some cases, projects that look remarkably like stabilization programs have simply been rebranded as "countering violent extremism."[74] Whether identified under the earlier hearts and minds paradigm, the later sources of instability paradigm, or the still later resilience paradigm, localized projects often look remarkably similar: roads, culverts, wells, flood protection, boundary walls, training sessions, and community events. As one longtime development official admitted, "We are in an echo chamber with our own jargon on this."[75]

Although the unifying strategy for local governance aid post-PRTs remains unclear, consistent with broader development industry trends, all stakeholders agree on one thing—the need for better accountability. In some ways, the timing is good to operationalize this overdue priority. The decreased assistance budget may force better prioritization of aid projects and prove more manageable for both foreign and Afghan stakeholders to oversee.[76] Increased mobile phone and GPS technology, and innovative approaches such as community based monitoring, provide opportunities for better triangulation.[77] The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework documents a formal commitment between donors and the Afghan government to better measure results. The IDLG's new Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Directorate, M&E units within MRRD programs, and donors' new multitiered approaches to monitoring all demonstrate that key stakeholders view improved accountability mechanisms as crucial for both programmatic effectiveness and political optics.

But to meaningfully improve accountability, and by extension the impact of governance programming in remote areas, the international community needs to contend with several shortcomings in their approach.

First, more monitoring and evaluation does not necessarily mean *better* monitoring and evaluation, particularly when trying to understand the complexities of subnational governance in volatile areas. Just as the widely heralded strategy of stabilization once launched a thousand implementation approaches, the newly embraced imperative for accountability has prompted a proliferation of data inputs from independent firms, development actors, and official foreign reporting channels. As PRTs close down and projects become still more distant from project managers, donors have moved to launch still more, often creative, approaches of capturing information.

These responses to the remote monitoring challenge are natural, but often the central problem is not that donors lack enough information; rather, it is that they lack holistic, synthe-

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sized, and verified information. As donors have sought to capture more and more inputs, they have often not fully exploited existing valuable sources of data—sometimes including earlier data-capturing initiatives they are in fact still funding.[78] Better triangulation and analysis is needed, but attempts to share and integrate knowledge have largely overemphasized the newest technological platforms and technical tools. Personal interaction among stakeholders has been an underrepresented mode of sharing insights due to staff turnover, logistics, and donor mobility restrictions. If resource concerns demand a better use of existing data, so do moral imperatives: Afghan citizens monitoring far-flung projects often do so at considerable personal risk.

A second and related flaw in current M&E approaches is that amassing a huge collection of data points does not necessarily help establish causal links between any specific international intervention and local-level changes. Recent M&E efforts have begun capturing a wide array of local, largely quantitative indicators that track current perceptions of governance and stability (itself a debated and debatable term). But myriad factors beyond the control of external aid programming affect local conditions: government authorities (appointed by Kabul), provincial council behavior (a function of elections), military operations that push insurgents one direction or the other, pacts between local powerbrokers, insurgent leadership, and now the closures of ISAF installations and the resultant impact on the local political economy. Further, the beneficiaries of soft projects, such as community meetings or trainings, often do not match up neatly with the boundaries of survey data. Despite international attempts to control for many of these variables, in a saturated and fluid aid environment, donors themselves admit that deriving specific causal chains between projects and outcomes is hugely challenging.[79] Although newly introduced monitoring approaches have been in some ways more precise in capturing what is occurring in a given village, evaluation methods have not necessarily become more accurate or useful in explaining why places become more or less stable. Overemphasis of quantitative data at the expense of qualitative analysis presents a related risk.

Third, current M&E efforts rely too heavily on local perceptions of progress at the moment of survey and do little to indicate durability or direction of that progress going forward. Experts have long debated the reliability of large-scale quantitative perception surveys in Afghanistan. But even assuming that the numbers captured are accurate for that moment in time, they do not necessarily reveal future trajectories when the aid and political environment is changing rapidly. Program design for subnational governance still too often presupposes linear, forward progress—whereas reality is often considerably more meandering.

Revising Donor Approaches

The international community needs to recalibrate the way it measures "progress" by capturing changes to structures and incentives on the ground. Donors should avoid overprivileging fleeting perceptions or outputs that are wholly enabled by short-term foreign inputs. Instead, consistent with the earlier recommendations in this report, donors should seek to understand how well the joint Afghan-international project has fostered predictable and reliable local structures that can stand without massive foreign inputs, emphasizing provincial rather than district administrations. Qualitative assessments will be vital to understanding context and causal links and will require further development of an Afghan professional cohort to undertake such work. For quantitative assessments, indicators should encompass the truly basic services constituents hope their government will provide across the governance, development, and justice sectors, such as filling tashkeels and preventing absenteeism at each district center, line ministry distribution of supplies down to their provincial departments, and number of land conflicts registered in the *cadaster* (land titling record). To

assess meaningful linkages between center and periphery, donors should follow the money by measuring Kabul-based entities' records of disbursing funds downward.

In addition to avoiding M&E approaches that capture fleeting and ephemeral perceptions, the international community should also strive to avoid M&E strategies that are themselves fleeting and ephemeral. The past decade's proliferation of civilian and military reporting regimes has turned Afghanistan into the graveyard of spreadsheets. Before launching any new platform, assessment, or evaluation donors should meticulously review existing platforms, assessments, and evaluations and learn from and build on previous efforts wherever possible. A crucial, undertapped resource is assessments and documents from the litany of subnational governance programs over the years. In particular, some of those labeled as failures offer important lessons—for example, the District Delivery Program provides crucial insights into the challenges and mechanics of center-to-provincial-to-district linkages.

Conclusion: Minding the Gaps

As the international community considers Afghanistan beyond 2014, this report has argued that it needs to revise several central tenets of its local governance and development aid in contested areas. Although the emphasis here is on reframing donor strategies, the incoming Afghan presidential administration will also bear significant responsibility for a new way forward. Over the past thirteen years, some of the most notable examples of a mismatch between stated goals and Afghan realities stemmed from documents at least nominally produced in collaboration with components of the Afghan government. As the transition continues, foreigners will no longer play a disproportionate role in influencing Afghan structures, enacting local programs, or defining the terms of their success. The gap between international visions for Afghan governance and Afghan ones will become less germane. If foreign aid policies often overestimate the importance of technical factors and underestimate the importance of political ones, the good news of post-2014 is that Afghan priorities and politics will finally come to the fore.

Simultaneously, however, another critical gap has emerged: the chasm between visions for subnational governance spawned in Kabul—by Afghans and internationals alike—and realities in more remote regions. The rising sophistication of the Kabuli technocratic class has generated a proliferation of administrative frameworks, pilot programs, and strategic refinements with an additive, increasingly complex character. The continuous intellectualization and debate of ideas on paper often stand in disconnect with local experience in outlying areas, many still battling a brutal insurgency. The divergent realities of local vehicular traffic provide a useful metaphor: where Kabul now has [some] traffic lights, pavement, and generally observed rules, outlying villages have not moved past bumpy roads with loosely interpreted driving customs. And as one rurally based interviewee complained, urbane Afghan interlocutors running development programs sometimes seem obsessed with the Afghan equivalent of a first-world problem: "They keep asking us about traffic signs, but we don't have bread to eat."[80]

Statebuilding is a decades-long project. The international community should carefully manage the risks that the next twelve months pose—hoarding, psychological insecurity, brain drain, and local political economy shocks are already accompanying the contracting civil-military footprint. The aid bubble should not be popped overnight. But more broadly, the changed environment provides an overdue opportunity to get away from debates between bottom-up and top-town reform and move to genuinely long-term, multilevel institution-building. A premium should be placed on making Kabul's deliberations relevant to the rest of the country. Going forward, all the traditional recommendations for strength-

The changed environment provides an overdue opportunity to get away from debates between bottom-up and top-town reform and move to genuinely long-term, multilevel institution-building.

ening Afghan subnational governance still apply.[81] Genuinely building Afghanistan's local institutions requires better donor coordination, longer time horizons, strategic deployment of money, and focus on addressing key structural challenges rather than capturing fleeting but unsustainable shifts. It demands awareness of the limitations of exogenous technical "solutions" compared with Afghan-led initiatives. The end of the surge and the beginning of transition offer a crucial chance for these goals to finally be realized.

Notes

1. This report focuses mainly on the U.S. effort in contested areas because it was the predominant national actor in most areas targeted by the surge. However, other donors in some cases took similar approaches.

2. Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," CRS report no. RL30588 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 2014), 36.

3. Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, February 24, 2010), ii.

4. Provincial councils, mandated by the Afghan constitution, have existed in every Afghan province since their 2005 election. Elected district councils are also constitutionally mandated but have not been actualized. As discussed later, a variety of ad hoc district-level consultative bodies have emerged throughout the county.

5. Office of the Special Representative, "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, December 2009), ii.

6. Ibid., 9.

7. U.S. Army/Marine Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

8. Frances Z. Brown, "The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance," Special Report no. 316 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, September 2012).

9. The surge did not claim to aspire to remake all of Afghanistan's district administrations at once, but even ISAF-designated key terrain districts exceeded one hundred. For further discussion of why the surge's strategy unfolded as it did, see Brown, "The U.S. Surge," 13–14. For Afghan stated aims during the surge time frame, see the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, *Sub-national Governance Policy* (Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010), http://jawzjan.gov.af/Content/Media/Documents/SNGP-English-Afghanistan307201192625245553325325.pdf.

10. Brown, "The U.S. Surge."

11. Frances Z. Brown, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing, Again," *The American Interest*, November/December 2012.

12. International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition," Asia Report no. 256 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 2014), i, www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/256-afghanistan-s-insurgency-after-the-transition.pdf.

13. International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, "Afghanistan and the International Community: From Transition to the Transformation Decade," December 5, 2011, http://eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/docs/2011_11_conclusions_bonn_en.pdf.

14. Astri Suhrke, "The Case for a Light Footprint: The International Project in Afghanistan," Anthony Hyman Memorial Lecture, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2010.

15. Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme*, Final Report (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2013), 3, www.nsp-ie.org/reports/finalreport.pdf.

16. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008–2013* (Kabul: Afghanistan National Development Strategy Secretariat, 2008), i, www.undp.org.af/publications/KeyDocuments/ANDS_Full_Eng.pdf.

17. Independent Directorate of Local Governance, *Subnational Governance Policy*. This count of 152 includes mentions of "service delivery, "delivery of services," and "basic services."

18. Stanley A. McChrystal, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment (Unclassified)," *Washington Post*, August 30, 2009, 2.

19. Brown, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing."

20. Burn rates are the rates at which donor aid contract money is spent.

21. Former international official, interview, February 2014.

22. USAID/Afghanistan, "Solicitation SOL-306-14-000026: Initiative to Strengthen Local Administrations (ISLA) Program" (Kabul: U.S. Agency for International Development, February 2014), 14.

23. Afghan implementer of Kandahar-based international assistance program, interview, Kabul, March 2014.

24. U.S. Army/Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 5–15.

25. Ibid.

26. Afghan implementing partner, correspondence, May 2014: "There are several terms that represent basic services in Pashto. Interpreters might have translated it as *Ibtidayi khidamat* or *Bansateez Khidamat* [God knows better]."

27. The municipal law is still pending at the time of writing and may be renegotiated by a new Afghan administration. The subnational governance policy notes that "Services which central agencies are mandated to provide, such as agriculture, communication and information technology, infrastructure, trade and commerce are to be planned, programmed, and provided" by line ministries themselves.

28. U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, "Center for Army Lessons Learned, Handbook 10-41," May 2010, appendix 1, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/10-41/app_a.asp.

29. Multiple international interviewees cited "project requests to the district center" as a key indicator of governance progress on which they were asked to report.

30. Counterinsurgency Training Center-Afghanistan and USAID/Afghanistan, "District Stability Framework," Powerpoint presentation, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADY159.pdf.

31. International official, interview, Kandahar, February 2012.

32. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation*, 69.

33. See, for example, Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship Between Aid and Security in Afghanistan* (Medford, MA: Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, 2012).

34. NSP's plans for further programming do not fully match districts in which stabilization programming is ending.

35. Afghan government official and Afghan NGO employees, interviews, Kabul, March 2014.

36. Afghan NGO employee, interviews, Kabul, March 2014.

37. Hamish Nixon, "Subnational State-Building in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008), 36.

38. See, for example, Martine van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

39. Noah Coburn, "Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan," Peaceworks no. 84 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2013), 7.

40. See, for example, Office of the Special Representative, "Afghanistan and Pakistan,"; Karl W. Eikenberry and Stanley A. McChrystal, United States Government, Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan (Kabul: U.S. Embassy and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, August 2009), www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB370/docs/Document%209.pdf.

41. International community assessments of SOI were captured through the District Stability Framework (DSF) and other project documents. No official centralized record of DSF documents is available; however, that lack of government reach was among the most frequent SOI cited is substantiated by numerous author interviews from 2011 through 2014.

42. USAID/Afghanistan, "Solicitation SOL-306-14-000026," 14.

43. Brown, "The U.S. Surge."

44. Nixon, "Subnational State-Building."

45. The four-hundred-page document seems more certainly an effort to please perceived donor interests: see its mentions of district governors being responsible for Millennium Development Goals, a "performance measurement system" and "local governance handbooks" to be used by every provincial council, a "citizen report card" proposition for line directors who do not meet minimum standards, and its focus on "long-term biodiversity cultivation."

46. Aarya Nijat, "Governance in Afghanistan: An Introduction" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2014), 29–30, www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1402E-GOVERNANCE%20IN%20AFGHANISTAN.pdf.

47. These new or revised laws are the Provincial Council Law, the Municipal Law, and the Local Administration Law. At time of writing all three are pending in parliament or the cabinet and may be reopened by a new presidential administration; current drafts do not fully dispose of all murkiness regarding subnational authorities anyhow.

48. The legal existence of provincial councils (PCs) is based on Articles 138 and 139 of the constitution, which describes their dual purpose as both to provide regional representation to the national assembly and to "participate in the attainment of development objectives" at the provincial level. The 2005 Law on Provincial Councils is meant to further elaborate their role; however, it does not clearly define the authorities of the PCs or the nature of participation and grants PMs limited oversight authority of provincial administrations. Analysis from Adam Smith International, "Legal Framework Analysis for Afghanistan's Provincial Governors and Provincial Councils," September 2013, 51–56, in author's possession.

49. For example, see Pajhwok Report, "Council Candidates Hold Out Promises Beyond Powers," March 10, 2014.

50. Ernesto Londoño, "State Department Approves More Visas for Afghan Interpreters," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2014.

51. Former international official, interview, May 2014.

52. International official, interview, March 2014.

53. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Constitution of Afghanistan," Article 140.

54. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development reports 398, whereas IDLG reports 364 plus ten "temporary" ones.

55. International official, interview, March 2014.

56. Ibid.

57. The IEC has not to date publically stated that the district council elections will not occur in 2015 as formally specified, but from a logistical and resource perspective it appears highly unlikely.

58. With donor support, the MRRD and IDLG each maintained its own collection of district-level councils, district development assemblies (DDAs) and Afghan Social Outreach Program councils respectively; donors further supported a range of other district-level shuras in various locations. ASOP has concluded except for an associated follow-on program in Helmand; DDAs remain operational in many areas. For a discussion of the multiple council phenomenon, see Shahmahmood Miakhel and Noah Coburn, "Many *Shuras* Do Not a Government Make: International Community Engagement with Local Councils in Afghanistan," Peacebrief no. 50 (U.S. Institute of Peace, September 2010).

59. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation*, 58; Miakhel and Coburn, "Many Shuras."

60. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Policy for Improving Governance in the Districts and Villages," May 2013.

61. Center for Global Development, "Cash on Delivery Aid," www.cgdev.org/initiative/cash-delivery-aid.

62. Approaches of PRT-based programming varied significantly between donors and time periods. This section, like the rest of the report, focuses primarily on the United States as the largest actor in surge areas.

63. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 2.

64. Ibid.

65. The Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework, and its later descendent the District Stability Framework, were both tools intended to help military or civilian personnel identify local sources of instability and program small-scale interventions to ameliorate them. Incorporation of these tools varied between regions depending on civilian and military leadership, but during the height of the surge, mobile and stationary trainings on DSF were widely held. For more on the DSF, see Counterinsurgency Training Center-Afghanistan and USAID/Afghanistan, "District Stability Framework."

66. David Ucko notes that "clear-hold-build garners more attention, in terms of numbers of pages, than any other approach in US, UK and NATO counter-insurgency doctrine" (David Ucko, "The Five Fallacies of Clear-Hold-Build: Counter-Insurgency, Governance and Development at the Local Level," *RUSI Journal* 158, no. 3 (2013): 54–61).

67. Ibid.

68. Many of NSP's projects, such as simple infrastructure, were similar to those projects implemented by stabilization programs, so the findings of NSP's evaluation on the impact of these projects offer useful insights. Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *Randomized Impact Evaluation*, 69–75.

69. Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Rubin Enikolopov, "Winning Hearts and Minds Through Development: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan," World Bank Policy Research working paper 6129, July 2012.

70. Fishstein and Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 5.

71. Christoph Zürcher, Jan Koehler, and Jan Böhnke, "Assessing the Impact of Development Cooperation in Northeast Afghanistan 2005–2009: Final Report," Evaluation report no. 049 (Bonn: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammen arbeit und Entwicklung, 2010).

72. International official, personal communication, June 2014.

73. Some analysts suggest that resilience, as defined by U.S. government evaluation efforts, may sometimes contradict other donor initiatives to increase support for the Afghan government. See Aimee Rose, "Resilience and Stability in Afghanistan," Caerus, http://caerusassociates.com/ideas/resilience-and-stability-in-afghanistan/.

74. Program implementers, interviews, March 2014.

75. International official, interview, March 2014.

76. "Report on an International Symposium on Monitoring and Management in Insecure Environments: Applying Best Practices to Afghanistan," (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace and Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, June 2014), www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Applying-Best-Practices-to-Afghanistan-USIP-SIGAR_SymposiumReport.pdf.

77. Ibid. See also Arne Strand, "Afghanistan: Innovative Risk Management Approaches for Local Aid Delivery" (London: Chatham House, May 2014), www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/199289.

78. International officials, interviews, March and June 2014.

79. International M&E official, interview, June 2014. Kandahar-based Afghan counterpart, interview, March 2014.

80. Brown, "The U.S. Surge," 16.

Of Related Interest

- *Last Chance: The International Community and the 2014 Afghan Elections* by Scott S. Smith (Peace Brief, March 2014)
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