

Partner in development. On the development of the Afghan administration

Michiel de Weger¹

NL-ARMS, 2009, 333-356

The Afghan government is the subject of this contribution, which investigates how it has developed over time, what the efforts of recent years to build it up have resulted in, and – its actual objective– what it means for foreign militaries, such as the Dutch in Uruzgan at present, to have a weak state as their partner. This is an important issue in the present international security situation. There are many more weak (or failing) states in the world and in many countries there are areas where the influence of the state's administration is virtually non-existent.² Apart from the fact that in the coming years the Dutch armed forces will be involved in Afghanistan in one way or another, it is likely that in the future they will also be committed in other areas with a weak administration. Therefore, being able to operate in an area with a poorly developed government has become an important ability for the Dutch armed forces - Uruzgan offers enough material to draw important lessons from.

In the first section the history of the Afghan government up to the American-led intervention in 2001 will be described, while the second section goes into what has happened since. This is followed by a description of the situation in Uruzgan since the Dutch began to play an active large-scale role there. The fourth section discusses the state of affairs with regard to the role of the Afghan government in the period before, during and after the 'battle for Chora' in June 2007, when the Dutch fought a large-scale battle against the Taliban. This makes clear what it *in ultimo* means for a foreign military to have a weak state as a partner. The final section presents conclusions and formulates several lessons learned, followed by a reflection on the future of Afghanistan and its government.

This chapter does not make use of any theories, models or specific research methods. On the basis of various types of public sources an attempt is made to describe what happened. There is enough literature available on the general history of Afghanistan and its government. Statistical and other quantitative data on the development of the Afghan state, in particular, can be found in the reports and studies of Afghan, foreign and international organisations. These have to be met with suspicion, just like media coverage, as they tend to be politically biased. For the developments in Uruzgan the reports for the Dutch Parliament form an important source, while most information on the clashes

around Chora can be found in newspaper articles, websites and in the writings of the servicemen directly involved in them. The intention of this contribution is not to give any judgment on the quality of the Dutch or foreign (military) efforts to build up the Afghan government. That would require much more elaborate research. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn with regard to what matters in military operations in weak states.

The Afghan government up to the fall of the Taliban

Conditions in Afghanistan did not allow its leaders or people to develop an elaborate system of government. Vogelsang points at the fact that the country is extremely mountainous and rather arid, with few flat areas with enough precipitation to irrigate the fields. Artificial irrigation is a problem, too: there is much snow in winter, but there are hardly any rivers that have water the year round. The consequences are low food production and a low population density.³ On top of that come centuries of desertification, deforestation, overgrazing and degradation of habitat.⁴ Also the many conflicts, foreign influence, governmental neglect, opportunistic behaviour of leaders and a lack of willingness to compromise among the population have always been in the way of the development of the country and a strong government.⁵

Founding and early development

How did the Afghan administration develop up to the fall of the Taliban in 2001? The state of Afghanistan was founded at the end of the nineteenth century as a buffer between the two greatest colonial powers in the region: Great Britain and Russia. Until then the territory had been little more than a loose collection of different peoples, without a common language culture or proud past.⁶ The name Afghanistan was coined by the British. The country held many large ethnic minorities, which by now have their own states: Turkmenians, Uzbekians and Tajiks. At present, more Pashtun live in neighbouring Pakistan than in Afghanistan itself.⁷

In 1880 the British proclaimed Abdoer Rahman Khan the new emir of the country. With British guarantees for the external security, British financing and arms, and with the periodic use of violence he imposed his central authority on the various peoples of the territory. In a classic attempt of 'divide and rule' he deported many members of the Pashtun tribe in the south, where they were the dominant ethnic entity, to the east and north, where they became a minority. Invoking the Islam, he increased his hold on the traditional religious leaders, and claimed that a *jihad* was justified against anyone who did not support him and robbed the clergy of their estates and juridical privileges,

which from then on fell to state-trained and state-paid experts. His son, Habiboelah, continued the modernisation of the country from 1901 onwards, introducing hydro-electric plants, telephone lines, roads, the first school for secondary education in Kabul, a military school and a pedagogic training centre. The constitution, instigated by his successor, Amanoollah, provided all citizens with equal rights. The resistance of the traditional leaders made Amanoollah revise the text on a number of points. In spite of the rising opposition he was strong enough to crush a Pashtun rebellion along the border with Pakistan in 1925. After having travelled in Egypt, Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain, an experience which made an indelible impression on him, he decided to increase the pace of his reforms. He wanted a parliament to be elected by all adult males, general conscription and compulsory education for all boys and girls. Men in Kabul should wear western clothes, and women should lay down their veils. He had all citizens registered, established courts of justice, terminated the subsidies to the clan leaders, abolished slavery and forced labour, secularised education, reformed the tax system, founded a national bank and introduced a government budget and a national currency (the *afghan*). His proposals, however, went much too far for most Afghans, which resulted in riots and a forced abdication in 1929.⁸

Habidoollah Ghazi began to undo the reforms of his predecessor, but after a brief military campaign he was replaced in the same year by Nadir Sjah, who was a Pashtun, unlike the Tajik Ghazi. He restored order in the country and further reversed the reforms. All legislation was subjected to Islamic law. The importance of the national 'Great Gathering', the *Loya Jirga*, in which the representatives of the ethnic entities met, increased. Tribal leaders were given back their authority over the militias which they had had to yield to the Afghan army. Nadir Sjah did, however, establish freedom of the press and compulsory education. He had roads and communication networks constructed, expanded the banking system and the army. Nadir Sjah was murdered in 1933 by supporters of Amanoelah. From now on, it was not so much kings or emirs who ruled the country, but prime ministers and presidents. Until 1953 the government expanded its influence over the various segments of the Afghan society. A growing number of bureaucrats began to emerge in the cities, the army expanded, the schools and universities got more and more pupils and students and a national bank was re-instituted.⁹

Foreign influence and increasing tensions

The modernisation further increased under prime minister Mohammed Daoed (1953-1963) – this time, however, with substantial foreign aid from the Soviet Union, but also the United States. Daoed tried to carry out land reforms around Kandahar, the Pashtun-dominated region, suppressing the riots that were the result with his army. After a crisis

with Pakistan about incorporating the Pakistani Pashtun area into Afghanistan, Daoed voluntarily stepped down.¹⁰

The new prime minister Mohammed Yoesoef took up the path of modernisation once more. A new constitution was introduced, providing the right to education, freedom of property, religion, gathering and press, and an independent legal system. All adults were allowed to vote. In 1965 the first general elections were organised, but the meetings in the National Assembly quickly got out of control. In the streets of Kabul the communists staged large-scale demonstrations, forcing Mohammed Yoesoef to resign. What was more important, though, was that the country began to fall prey to increasing oppositions. A large group of educated young people in the cities, originally coming from the rural areas, but estranged from their traditional backgrounds, could not find any suitable work, and became frustrated with the lack of change. The dominant role of the more conservative provincial representatives in the General Assembly also frustrated the middle classes of Kabul. This hotbed of the disillusioned spawned marxist as well as Islamic-fundamentalist factions, based on ideas from Egypt and Pakistan. In 1973 the two were more or less balanced, but in that year the former prime minister Mohammed Daoed seized power with the support of the marxists and the army. After a bloody military coup the military regime embarked on a series of drastic marxist reforms. The unrest in the country just increased. In 1979 Herat was the centre of a rebellion which was crushed with bombardments, but in other places riots broke out and it was not long before the government had lost all control of large parts of the country.¹¹

Soviet invasion and the Taliban

What follows is much better known in the west. In 1979 the Soviet armies invaded Afghanistan in order to support the pro-Soviet government in Kabul. They were attacked with increasing success by the *mujahideen* groups, which received money and training from the USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other countries to thwart the Soviet Union. With the retreat of the Soviets in 1989, the Afghan forces began to fight amongst each other and for several years a large group of *warlords* controlled parts of the country. From 1994 onwards one of the warring factions, the Taliban, began to gain more and more territory, taking Kabul in 1996 and occupying almost all of the country by 2000 (although it is doubtful whether they effectively controlled the North, where they met more opposition) This fundamentalist group imposed heavy restrictions on the population.¹² Not much was left intact of the Afghan administration, but, however reprehensible the Taliban regime was, at least in comparison to the warlords period, it was successful in establishing and maintaining law and order.¹³

The Taliban were not only oppressors, but also had a degree of public support and did not control the whole country. It is often only pointed out that they are extremely religious. This is certainly the case, but the Taliban were also an ethnic entity: 26 of the 27 Taliban leaders were Pashtun. The movement originated from mainly puritan Pashtun students and later was most of all led by Pashtun, especially from the southern Helmand and Kandahar regions in the south of the country. Many of them were determined to subject the other ethnic groups in the country to the traditional conservative and rural Pashtun culture. They did not want a 'western' state and could rely, amongst others, on considerable support from the local leaders and part of the population.¹⁴ For many Afghans the taking over of power in their region by the Taliban was experienced as a true liberation from the widespread abuse of power and violence from the local *warlords*. Also because the Taliban announced their arrival and gave their opponents the chance to leave without a fight or merge back again into the population without any reprisals, they succeeded in taking power in the south of the country without resorting to violence. Only in Kabul and the north real violence was used and atrocities committed against the local leaders and population by the Taliban.¹⁵ Their hold on the country was never absolute; in some parts the Taliban cooperated with local leaders, while in some places and remoter areas they left the population to govern itself completely. The Taliban made compromises with the warring factions which had supported them in their bid in taking over the country and which now had interests of their own. Areas of government which, from their religious perspective, were of lesser interest were left alone.¹⁶

Reconstruction after the Taliban

The USA started its invasion in response to the '9-11' attacks on the country by *Al-Qaida*, an international movement, which had also fought against the communist government and the Soviets and whose main bases, protected by the Taliban were in Afghanistan. Many *Al-Qaida* camps were destroyed and its battle groups were nearly all chased out of the country. With strategic air raids and in combined battles the USA supported an alliance of former *mujihadeen* groups coming from the north of the country. Their success enticed more and more *warlords* to join forces with them and the Taliban were swiftly driven from the northern part of the country. The mainly Pashtun areas in the south were not attacked as intensively, however. Here the Americans and other local leaders fought the Taliban. This conflict developed very differently, among others¹⁷ due to the considerable support the Taliban enjoyed among the population. The fall of the major city of Kandahar did not so much come about by acts of war than by negotiations - albeit with the threat of American military intervention looming. Given the American stance, the fall of the Taliban seemed unavoidable, but all Afghan parties wanted to pre-

vent bloodshed, “as it was realised full well that in the long run that would again lead to more tensions and victims”.¹⁸

In hindsight, the way this conflict was fought makes clear what would become the most important obstacle for the new government and the international coalition: the conservative population, factions and local leaders in the south.

With the fall of the Taliban the Afghan administration, or what was left of it, collapsed. By the end of 2001 the new government had only real control over Kabul and a small area around it. Beyond, most of all in rural areas, the power lay in the hands of local leaders, including warlords, who received considerable support from the US, which strengthened their position against ‘Kabul’. The central Afghan government proved unable to provide the most basic services to its population, its security organisations were too weak to establish and maintain law and order in the entire country and there were too few international police or military forces to fill the gap.¹⁹ Between 2003 and 2006, the Taliban were gaining more and more power in the south and east of the country.²⁰ As it moved into additional areas, NATO met an ever-increasing resistance during its operations.²¹ By 2006 there was an all-out, large-scale ‘insurgency’, most of all in the south, with 139 suicide attacks, 1,667 remote-controlled explosive devices and 4,542 armed attacks (which increased by another 27 per cent in 2007).²² Although the 2001 invasion stemmed from the determination to fight Al-Qaida, what developed was a growing coalition of opponents of a strong central government, its modern institutions and western influence in general – not to mention the interests of other countries.²³ The fight was also not only directed against the Taliban, but a fluid entity encompassing Al-Qaida, Taliban, local warlords, conservative local leaders, opium racketeers and anyone else who wanted or were forced to work with them.²⁴

Foreign assistance and political change

Since 2001, the government in Kabul received large-scale support from the ‘international community’ not only to establish its authority over the entire country, but also to improve the economy, to modernise the administration and to expand the public facilities for the population. In December 2001 at a conference in Bonn it was decided to send an international peace force (*International Security Assistance Force*, ISAF). Between August 2003 and March 2008 the number of ISAF troops rose from 5,581 to 47,332.²⁵ In 2003 ISAF got Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to assist in the (re)construction. The *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan* (UNAMA) coordinated the humanitarian aid and reconstruction activities. In Bonn financial support to an amount of \$4.5 billion for five years was pledged, only to be followed by another \$8.2 billion in Berlin in 2004. In early 2006 London, with \$10 billion for five years²⁶ and in June 2008 Paris

with 13.5 billion euros followed suit.²⁷ Besides, the Netherlands (300 million euros) and other countries offered Afghanistan bilateral help.²⁸ Incidentally, the costs of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan from August 2006 until August 2008 amounted to 680 million euros, and the extension up to and including 2010 will also end up between 600 and 700 million euros.²⁹ For the period of 2009-2011 the Netherlands has pledged another 775 million euros for help.³⁰

In a political respect much seems to have improved. In Bonn the Afghan leaders and the representatives of the Afghan refugees agreed on the formation of a new, democratic state. Hamid Karzai was elected chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority. A Pashtun of the clan of the former kings of Afghanistan, the Durrani, he had been one of the most prominent leaders in the conflict in the south of the country. At the moment the Pashtun constitute a large part of the Afghan population,³¹ much more in the south, which might lead to the expectation that his administration would enjoy considerable support there. In 2002 local leaders from all over the country gathered in an emergency *Loya Jirga* and elected Karzai again, this time as interim president. A similar gathering laid down a new constitution in 2003. In free elections in October of the following year Karzai was elected president and in September 2005 a national parliament followed. Women received the right to vote and were elected as Members of Parliament.³²

It remains to be seen, however, how much impact these political changes have made. Allan (2003) calls it a fantasy of the European social-democratic governments to suppose that it is possible to build an Afghan unitary state with powerful central control.³³ Jalali (2007) concludes that the changes, positive as they may have been, have brought much less national unity, centralised authority and modernisation than was expected. Since Bonn the Afghan Interim authority had been dominated by the Northern Alliance, so it was not representative for the entire country. In spite of the political reform process regional leaders and warlords initially held on to their own armies, revenues, foreign contacts and administrative machinery. Also the *Loya Jirga* proved to be a disappointment. In former times this had been an assembly which brought the country closer together, but now, in the absence of strong leadership in Kabul, it seemed to have lost its relevance. No major issues were dealt with, the local leaders and the *warlords* mainly served their own interest by means of political pressure, intimidation and money and the assembly did not result in a representative government, after all.³⁴

Social-economic development

What is also an open question is whether the financial support has achieved much. The available socio-economic data described below, although rather superficial and possibly not (completely) reliable, present a partially positive picture. For the time being,

Afghanistan is flourishing economically. The gross domestic product in constant millions of 1990 American dollars was 2,618 in 2001. From then on it increased considerably every year to the highest level on record: 8,202 in 2007.³⁵ Other positive developments are an increased life expectancy of 1 or 2 per cent between 2001 and 2006, and a fourfold increase of the number of children attending primary education.³⁶ The regular decrease of child mortality since 1980 (19.2 per cent) continued until 2005 (16.3 per cent). The same happened with child mortality under age 5, which fell from 28.6 per cent to 24.2 per cent.³⁷ By 2008, 82 per cent of the population had access to first-line medical care (9 per cent in 2002).³⁸ In other terrains, too, there was progress. In July 2005 there were 50,000 Afghans military and police officers; in early 2008 the numbers were 50,000 and 75,000, respectively. 90 per cent of the Afghans stated they thought the army was honest and fair.³⁹ The *National Directorate for Security*, the Afghan intelligence service, seems to be functioning adequately at the moment⁴⁰ and from 2001 to 2006 the political right and civil freedoms of the population increased (from 7 to 5).⁴¹

There are, however, also less positive developments. In the *Global Corruption Perception Index* Afghanistan fell from a shared 34th to 42nd place in 2005 to 5th place in 2008.⁴² The number of hectares of land used for the opium production rose from less than 10,000 in the last year of Taliban rule (2001) to more than 160,000 in 2006.⁴³ On the *Failed States Index* Afghanistan has steadily lost ground over the past few years: from 11th lowest in the world in 2005 to 10th in 2006, 8th in 2007 and 7th in 2008.⁴⁴ On the five-point *Political Terror Scale* Afghanistan scores, just like in 2001, the maximum score, a 5, in 2006 (“terror has expanded to the whole population”).⁴⁵

Development of the administration

The World Bank makes calculations of various aspects of the quality of the administration,⁴⁶ where quality is expressed in a percentile score, i.e. the percentage of countries in the world to which Afghanistan belongs from the bottom up: thus, a score of 1 means that it belongs to the worst 1 per cent. The table below does not only show that the Afghan state has among the lowest scores in the world, but also that since 2001 there have not only been positive developments. In any case from the graph it can be concluded that the situation is now better than it was in 2001, but after a sharp progress up to 2003/4, most indicators are in decline. The only exception seems to be effectiveness, participation and accountability, where considerably improvements have been realised.

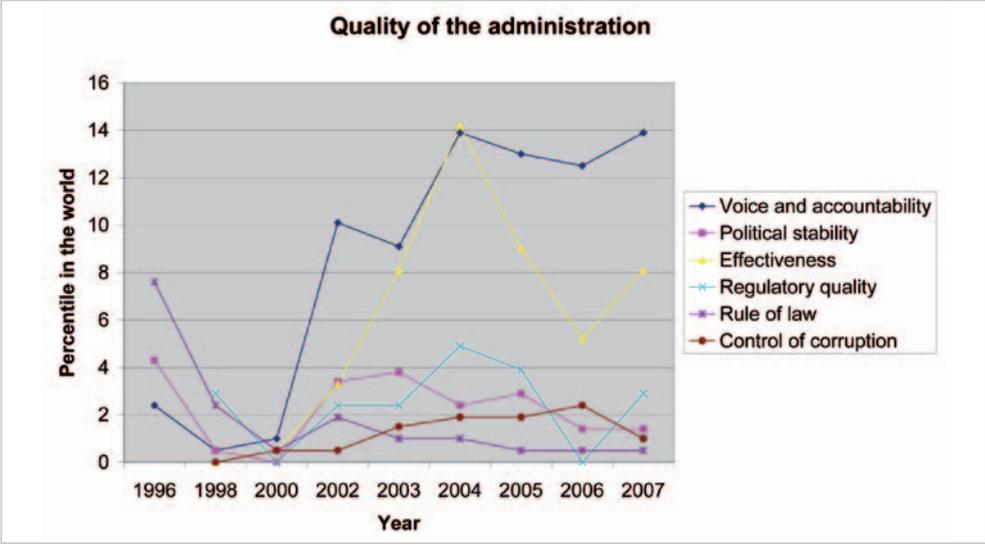


Table 1

There are more data available on the Afghan administration which illustrate that it is strongly underdeveloped. Thus, in 2006 only 11.6 per cent of all Afghan judges had completed a secular law study at a university. Of all judges 36 per cent indicated that they had no access to legislation and regulations, 54 per cent did not have legal literature and 82 per cent could not get access to rulings of the Afghan High Court. Almost all judges and 93 per cent of the Afghan police officers are Pashtun and Tajik – a composition which is far from representative in comparison with the population.⁴⁷ In 2005 and 2006 the country scored 102 of a maximum of 120 points in the *Conflict Assessment System Tool*, which is a measure of internal conflict and the functioning of society. On a scale of 1 to 10, for instance, Afghanistan score 8.9 for delegitimisation of the state and 8.2 for discord among the elite.⁴⁸

Although the Afghan administration is *de jure* one of the most centralised in the world, central management and control is *de facto* extremely weak, due to the strength of the regional and local *warlords*, who levy their own taxes and have military might. The weakness of the Afghan government is also illustrated by the fact that a mere 1 per cent of the population are civil servants, the absolute number increasing slightly from 327,000 to 348,000 between 2004 and 2007.⁴⁹ In 2005 the Afghan government’s revenue from taxation amounted to 4.5 per cent of the GDP; in Pakistan and Thailand this is 16-17 per cent.⁵⁰ In 2006 USAID scored the capacities of the Afghan administration on a five-point scale: leadership and military services scored 2, police, civil service and

judiciary i. According to the American organisation the Afghan civil service was rife with bribery, corruption and ethnic discrimination.⁵¹

There was large-scale absence of military personnel (which is not so strange in a large and difficult to travel country as Afghanistan, MdW): 20 per cent in 2002, falling to 13 per cent in 2006.⁵² The personnel turnover in the police force was 15-30 per cent a year, prisons are burdened with a chronic overload of inmates and in many cases 'uninhabitable', and a very high percentage of police officers were involved in the drugs trade.⁵³ Only in 2006 did the Afghan government introduce a national strategy to fight drugs.⁵⁴

In order to lend a broader perspective to these data, it is good to indicate how under-developed Afghanistan and its government still are. The country ranks 20th from the bottom as regards per capita income, 17th for unemployment, 10th for life expectancy, 9th for morality rate, 5th for (birth) fertility and 3rd for migration and child mortality.⁵⁵ In the 2007 *Human Development Index* Afghanistan ranks 5th from the bottom in the world, just a little worse than in 2004. 76.5 per cent of the adult population was illiterate, 68 per cent of the population did not have access to clean water and 50 per cent of the children below the age of 5 were underweight.⁵⁶ On the 2008 *Global Peace Index*, which indicates internal security, Afghanistan ranked 4th from the bottom.⁵⁷

The following macro data clearly illustrate the deplorable state of the Afghan central government even clearer. Revenues from opium amounted to 37 per cent, and foreign aid to 38.5 per cent of the GDP.⁵⁸ In 2007 there were still (far) too few Afghan and foreign military and police forces in the country to establish an effective authority of the central government. According to some, twice that number, 150,000 men/women, would be necessary.⁵⁹ In 2008 the *Afghan Conflict Manager* concluded that 11 per cent of the country, 31 per cent of the central government and 58 per cent of the local parties are under control of the Taliban.⁶⁰

It can be concluded that seven years of international help have undoubtedly brought progress for Afghanistan and its inhabitants, but the country and the central government are still unable to stand firmly on their own feet. No broad and modern state, controlled by the central government had been developed. Progress has been made, but it has been modest. In the south of the country central government has a weak position and Afghanistan is to a high degree financially dependent on opium-related income and foreign assistance. The Afghan state is not yet capable either of guaranteeing security; here, too, it is highly dependent on foreign support.

Government in Uruzgan

What has been the development of the Afghan government in the southern province of Uruzgan since the beginning of the more large-scale Dutch military presence in 2006? This development is not necessarily representative for the whole of Afghanistan, but can serve as an example for what it means for a foreign military force, in this case the Dutch, to have a weak state as a partner. In order to establish whether any progress has been made, it is necessary to first describe the starting point. This is done by the first commander of the Dutch battle group.

Except for Kabul, the influence of the national government is only in evidence in the provincial capitals, while the population outside the urban areas – and that is where most of the inhabitants of Uruzgan live – does not experience anything at all of whatever government. Where the provincial government has any influence at all, there is insufficient support due to the many instances of corruption on all levels and tribal favouritism.⁶¹

Another picture was given in August 2006 by the Netherlands Embassy in Kabul. It wrote that the government in Uruzgan functioned inadequately due to a lack of qualified personnel, physical infrastructure, financial and logistic resources, monitoring and control mechanisms. The population viewed the government as inefficient, incapable of providing basic facilities, strongly partisan and unrepresentative. Fewer and fewer inhabitants openly chose the side of the government. The judiciary was understaffed, unprofessional and unrepresentative in tribal and ethnic composition. At the level of the district as a rule less than 20 per cent of the functions were filled. District governors and chiefs of police were inadequately educated and novices in government and in many cases alienated the local population. In Uruzgan a century-old conflict was going on between two confederations of Pashtun: the Ghilzai and the Zirk branch of the Durrani. After the fall of the Taliban the Durrani – to which also the Poplzai tribe of president Karzai belong - acquired much more power in Uruzgan.⁶² The position of the Ghilzai, traditional supporters of the Taliban, had been weakened. Tribal identity had become much more important since 2002 and ties with the government and the international troops were frowned upon.

The province of Uruzgan came third from the bottom as for general development, second for primary school attendance and third for mortality of children under five. Over the past few years many schools had been closed and the Afghan government had no programme to set up (new) schools. There were also no investments in the judiciary and the disarmament of local factions. Health care was not provided by the government, but mainly by NGOs and private clinics. The province received funds for eighteen physi-

cians, but employed only two. The rest had either left or only existed on paper. 30 to 50 per cent of the population of Uruzgan depended on food aid to some extent. The Taliban greatly disrupted commerce in the province. Most of the fertile arable land was used for opium production, which increased not only the debt burden of the farmers, but also drug addiction and crime. There were six big drugs traffickers active, who received high-level political backing from Kabul, where persons favourably disposed towards drugs traders were appointed in key positions. Probably the majority of the police leadership were involved in the protection of the drugs trade. Incidentally, the drugs traders also paid protection money to the Taliban,⁶³ who were said to control 80 per cent of the province with 2,500 fighters, only 2 per cent of whom came from outside the province.⁶⁴

How underdeveloped and conservative the province was, is illustrated by other data as well. In 2006 around 1 per cent of the population in Uruzgan (2,846) worked for the government, 1 per cent of whom were women. In 2005 8-9 per cent of the population had clean water and 8 per cent first had to travel for more than one hour to get to it. 21 per cent relieved themselves in an open hole, 47 per cent did not even do that. 8 per cent of the population had electricity, but only 1 per cent through a public facility. 61 per cent of all the roads could be used in all seasons: 5 per cent of the population could read, 0 per cent of the women. In 2006 there were 125 primary and secondary schools, attended by a total of 31,723 pupils, 93 per cent of whom were boys. There were 860 teachers, with the exception of 7, all males. In 2005 Uruzgan had 3 health centres and 3 hospitals, with a total of 98 beds, 12 doctors and 29 nurses. Since 2003 the number of doctors had doubled and that of nurses trebled. In 2005 there were 55 pharmacies in the province, all privately owned. Almost three-quarters of the population had to travel more than ten kilometres to find medical help.⁶⁵ In 2005 the number of judges was clearly lower than the country's average (1 per 59,400 vs. 1 per 21,317), and the situation in 2006 was not much better.⁶⁶

Problems with administrators

What has changed in this sad situation since the arrival of the Dutch? The Netherlands has clearly made attempts to replace the 'wrong' administrators, which proved to be very difficult due to the sometimes obscure power struggles among the leaders and the fact (or suspicion) that all could be found fault with to a certain extent. In the century-old struggle between the Ghilzai and the Durrani also crime plays an important role. Thus, according to some media sources not only president Karzai's own brother is a drugs baron, but also the brother-in-law of the former governor, Jan Mohammed Khan.⁶⁷ In some districts in Uruzgan the local leaders supported by Karzai allegedly extorted the population so badly that the latter begged the Taliban to attack.⁶⁸ The divide-and-conquer

game with the local leaders and groups in the end made many enemies, a situation that the Taliban skilfully exploited.⁶⁹

There was much ado about the governorship in Uruzgan. Thus, in March 2006 Karzai appointed Maulavi Abdul Hakim Munib governor of the province as successor to Jan Mohammed Khan. This replacement was a condition of the Dutch government to begin its military operation in Uruzgan. Jan Mohammed Khan was a warlord, but also a personal friend and ally of Karzai, coming from the Pashtun tribe of the Populzai. Jan Mohammed Khan always had the disposal of large sums of development money to (also) make politics and he was feared by his opponents in the region as well as the Taliban. After stepping down, Jan Mohammed Khan was appointed 'vice-minister for tribal affairs' and this allowed him to travel freely to Uruzgan to look after his interests. Munib's position was eroded as Jan Mohammed Khan's supporters, carefully minding what their powerful leader had to say, had access to all functionaries around Munib. The latter had held several ministerial positions in the nineties during the Taliban regime. He was also a Pashtun, but a native of the province of Paktia, so he had no network and power base in Uruzgan. As a result of the replacement of Jan Mohammed Khan the Dutch now simultaneously had to fight the Taliban, try to create more support for Munib and attempt to minimise the influence of Jan Mohammed Khan in the area.⁷⁰

Munib was also fighting Colonel Matiullah, one of Jan Mohammed Khan's 'managers', but also the commander of the only effective police force in the province.⁷¹ Many people asserted that Munib himself was also a criminal, had ties with the Taliban and mainly resided in Kabul.⁷² On 12 September 2006 Karzai appointed Assadullah Hamdam governor. The latter is a Pashtun from the Zabul province, an engineer and former mujahideen, who had emigrated to Great Britain, where his family still lives, incidentally. He, too, is suspected by some of corruption,⁷³ although it cannot be excluded that this is part of a deliberate blackening by political adversaries.

Limited expansion of the state

As for the volume of public facilities, the Afghan government seems to have made some progress. The medical facilities in Uruzgan have been expanded. In early 2008 there were one district hospital, five community health centres, one basic health centre and 120 health stations (manned by 31 female and 140 male health workers). For most of the population there was emergency obstetric help, paediatric help, medicines, pre-natal and post-natal care, vaccination and TB treatment. For the first time in decades (two) surgeons were working in the hospital at Tarin Kowt.⁷⁴ In the spring of 2008 five new schools had been opened in Uruzgan.⁷⁵ By the end of 2008 43,000 children attended primary school, around 250 of them girls. Seven thousand enjoyed secondary school and

higher education, including 250 girls. 145 irrigation systems had been constructed, 270 water wells, 110 village roads and a suspension bridge. 3,000 families had been given sowing seeds and fertilizer, and 100,000 fruit trees had been divided and three greeneries set up.⁷⁶

As for security organisations, over the past two years the central government has clearly strengthened its presence in Uruzgan. In March 2007 there were only 100 police officers in Uruzgan (Afghan National Police, ANP) and three hundred military (Afghan National Army, ANA). Abuse of power and corruption were rife. Illiteracy, too, estimated at 60-70 per cent, poor equipment and a lack of facilities contributed to a 'limited' confidence in the police force.⁷⁷ Three months later there were 120 ANP, and an additional 850 auxiliary police officers (Afghan National Auxiliary Police, ANAP), locally recruited and less well trained.⁷⁸ In September 2007 a total of 965 ANAP had been trained. The turnover among them, however, was said to be as high as 40 per cent, due to the meagre pay and low status of the work. It was reported that officers asked 'toll money' or sold their equipment to supplement their pay.⁷⁹ In the summer of 2008 somewhere between 700 and 800 ANAP were actually present.⁸⁰ By the end of 2008 there were 1,700 ANA present in Uruzgan, 1,400 of whom were active 'in the field'. ANAP was disbanded, but 650 of them were trained into 'real' policemen.⁸¹ So, there are not many more Afghan armed forces and police in the province than the number of Dutch service personnel.

Nevertheless, for Uruzgan, too, it must be said that progress has been limited, indeed. Lieutenant-Colonel Rietdijk, the commander of the Dutch PRT in the spring of 2008, described the situation on his return as follows. (This is of course a subjective sketch, but the picture that emerges is all too familiar.) According to him, on all levels the government performed poorly. "This makes it easy for the Taliban to bribe government officials, to corrupt them or simply take over their posts." There was a "flat, less than well functioning tribal clan structure, which caused an absence of sufficient binding forces to fend off external threats, among which those coming from the Taliban". There was "poverty, few basic facilities and no perspectives. This economic situation encourages people to resort to criminal activities...the growth of the Taliban is strongest in the poorer areas in the south of Afghanistan. In part because of the bad security situation the Taliban and other criminal organisations find it very easy to grow, protect, harvest and process the poppy. The hundreds of millions of euros that are made in this way give subversive elements almost unlimited possibilities." The police organisation was still "functioning badly". This causes people to distrust the government even more.⁸² In more general terms the Dutch government indicated in 2008 that in Uruzgan crucial functions on the district level remained unfilled for lengthy periods of time. Those functionaries who had been appointed often lacked competence, integrity and tribal neutral-

ity. The strengthening and expansion of the provincial governmental organisation was losing momentum.⁸³

The status of police and army

ANA, but also the police force functioned below par in a number of areas. Jobs in the police or the army guarding posts were very popular in all the clans. There were many accusations that the armed men also escorted drugs transports and carried out robberies and the Afghan army and police were suspected of incriminating themselves. ‘They can commit murder with impunity and will do so. They even kill when no gain is to be expected, just to scare people and to show they will get away with it, thus ensuring that no one has the courage to protest.’⁸⁴ Although the army was seen as less corrupt than the police, it had its problems, too. In 2008 the ANA commander for Uruzgan, Mohammed Sabir Dawer, was replaced on his own request. His successor, Hafizuldin, “tightened the reins considerably with regard to discipline”, which reduced the number of ANA personnel going AWOL. A number of subordinate commanders were replaced due to poor performance.⁸⁵

In the middle of 2008 ISAF, too, stated that in Uruzgan on a local level the police stations represented the only government presence. On a provincial level the government organisations were still “seriously underfunded, understaffed and underequipped”. It proved to be difficult to get qualified people in the central government to move to Uruzgan, while there was also the risk of many of the qualified personnel who were there going to work for international organisations and NGOs. In contrast to the administration controlled by Kabul, the informal, traditional control system of village chief and village elders functioned reasonably well.⁸⁶ Some doubted the quality of the reconstruction projects executed or funded by the (Dutch) military.⁸⁷ Only 113 hectares of poppy fields were destroyed in only 21 villages, amounting to 5 per cent of the total production.⁸⁸ The anti-drugs units were fired upon, and four policemen were killed and two helicopters damaged.⁸⁹ In 2007-2008 the poppy production in Uruzgan was still growing. No progress worth-mentioning was made in the judiciary sector. The number of engagements with the Taliban decreased and ISAF and the Afghan government had increased the area under their control, but the situation was “fragile” and the influence that the Taliban exerted on the local population had “not been structurally decreased”.⁹⁰ In large sections of the north of the province the Taliban still ruled supreme.⁹¹ According to a Dutch newspaper a secret survey of ISAF was to show that 58 per cent of the Uruzgani were negative about ISAF and 60 per cent felt that the security situation was bad in the province, by far the highest percentage in the country.⁹²

The Afghan government in the battle for Chora

What it means for foreign troops, in this case the Dutch, to have a central government which is weak locally as an ally, may perhaps best be illustrated by means of extreme situations, such as the battle that was fought in the Uruzgan district of Chora in June 2007.

For months prior to the battle in June 2007 Taliban messages were intercepted from which it could be concluded that they were preparing a major attack on Chora. This information was also passed on to the Afghan Ministry of the Interior and the *Wolesi Jirga*, the Afghan Second Chamber.⁹³ At the end April 2007 ISAF sent reinforcements to this area crucial for the Taliban for the transport of drugs, weapons and money. ISAF pressured the provincial and local authorities into taking security in and around Chora into their own hands.⁹⁴ From 26 May onwards, when the Taliban stormed a police post on the edge of Chora, there were almost daily exchanges of fire and artillery bombardments.⁹⁵ On 7 May the Afghan police in the village of Ali Shirzai in the Chora valley arrested a man, who probably was a senior Taliban leader.⁹⁶

In the end, the Afghan authorities were unable to direct many extra police and army to the area. According to the Dutch commander, he asked the governor of Uruzgan and the commander of police to send more ANA to Chora before the battle began. The requested reinforcement did not materialise, the police commander denying he had ever received such a request. The Ministry of the Interior did decide to send some Afghan Standby Police, who flatly refused to go to Chora. In the end, the only reinforcement consisted of 40 ANA. Civilians in Chora asked the Dutch for arms to defend themselves, but they did not get them. The Afghan police in Chora appeared to have too little ammunition and, according to their provincial commander, they were also poorly equipped. The district governor did have enough ammunition but stated he wanted that for himself.⁹⁷ ISAF then bought ammunition on the local market for the local Afghan police force, so that 'they could not come up with any eyewash' when it came to fighting.⁹⁸ While in the end some 500 Dutch soldiers were engaged in the fighting in Chora,⁹⁹ there were 100 Afghan police officers.¹⁰⁰ When the fighting had started 50 extra ANA were flown in,¹⁰¹ bringing their numbers up to 90.

Local informal leaders, their militias and groups of civilians wanting to protect their area, did play a major role in the defence of Chora (it is unknown how many local people were active on the Taliban side), but their contribution to the defence, incidentally, appears to have been rather tenuous prior to the battle. Thus, a group of some 150-200 local militiamen, failed to show up at first, after an earlier promise to help. Only when

the battle began did they take part after all.¹⁰² This was probably a group led by warlord Rosi Khan. The group received weapons from the district heads, but only after ISAF had uttered some “threatening language” towards them.¹⁰³ It is also known that the inhabitants of the village of Qala-e-Ragh, led by their tribal leaders Mallim Abdul Sadiq Khan, resisted the attacking Taliban. Also a third group, the 48-strong ANAP, commanded by Tora Abdullah, was supported by local fighters (12) and several tribal leaders. In the end their combined effort enabled them to push the Taliban back. Somewhat earlier Tora Abdullah had been visited by Rosi Khan, who advised him to flee, as he himself could not help him.¹⁰⁴

The Afghan government itself could only play a modest role with regard to medical and other provisions to alleviate the consequences of the battle for the civilian population. There were supposed to have been between 30 and 88 civilian dead and 80 to 100 wounded. Clinics in Chora, Tarin Kowt and Kandahar (and those of the ISAF PRT) received the wounded.¹⁰⁵

Afghan administrators played a limited role during and after the battle. The Dutch leadership was in contact with the district governor and ISAF informed him by satellite telephone that the air raids were about to begin. A large part of the local population, however, had already fled the area by that time. The governor of Uruzgan as well as president Karzai telephoned ISAF urging them to also offer support to Tora Abdullah. The latter had called Karzai and governor after Rosi Khan’s visit to him, asking them how he was supposed to fight the Taliban without their support, upon which Karzai was supposed to have requested ISAF for help for Tora Abdullah. In the meantime a controversy has emerged with regard to the return of the civilians to their village of Qala-e-Ragh on 19 June. When it was announced via the loudspeakers of the local mosque that the village was safe again the inhabitants began to return. At the same time, however, the Taliban were firing at ISAF troops in the area. The latter requested and got air support from ISAF, during which three civilians were killed and five wounded. According to Sadiq Khan, the district governor, by order of ISAF, supposedly told the mosque to make the announcement. ISAF, however, denied having given the order and the district governor stated that had not been involved at all in the matter. What is clear is that the district governor had warned the population on 16 June about the impending ISAF air strikes.¹⁰⁶

Incidentally, the battle did not drive the Taliban from the area and several months later the situation was still tense around Chora. The Dutch presence had been built down and taken over by Afghan units. “The Taliban, however, remain particularly active in this region and in the past period there have been many combat contacts. ... Moreover, the Taliban offensive has intensified tribal differences.”¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from the above and what lessons can be formulated for the future? It, first of all, shows that over the past few centuries Afghanistan has been a poor country with a weak state, the central government never having had much influence over the rest of the country. Local authorities and traditional, conservative powers resisted a modernisation of the country and an expansion of the state machinery. The conflicts that have been going on since the nineteen-seventies have caused the ruin of the governmental system - albeit that the Taliban in their own horrid way managed to create law and peace in the country. These ultra-conservative, anti-western and Pashtun dominated group initially enjoyed considerable support in the south of the country.

Secondly, the Afghan economy and government have developed somewhat since the US-led invasion in 2002, but in spite of comprehensive international support, the country is still very poor and underdeveloped, with a (very) weak administration. Facilities for the population, such as medical care and education, have been expanded somewhat, but in these areas Afghanistan still ranks among the least developed countries in the world. Despite a strong increase in the size of the Afghan army and police forces in the south, they are incapable, even in cooperation with the international police and armed forces, of marginalising the coalition of opponents - Taliban, *Al Qaida*, criminals and conservative powers. Afghanistan heavily depends on international financial backing, profits from the drugs trade and – too little - international military and police support.

Thirdly, since the Netherlands committed a large force there in 2006 the situation with regard to medical and educational facilities has improved somewhat. The greater numbers of Afghan military and police have also given the central government a stronger hold over the area. On the local level, however, the police force is often its sole representative. The Afghan government, including the authorities and the police, is still often very corrupt and enjoys little support among the local population. Opium crime is a major economic and political factor in the area. The authorities and the civil service are badly developed in numbers as well as quality, and are not representative in view of the composition of the population. In fact, traditional, informal parties, such as warlords, tribal chiefs and religious leaders, including the Taliban, hold a strong position in the area.

The final conclusion that can be drawn is that the 'battle of Chora' illustrates what it means to have a weak state as an ally in a conflict. The government was able to provide medical and other support to the population only on a modest scale, while during the battle itself the authorities played a minor role. Dutch soldiers were directed to the area

on a large scale, while the Afghan government was only present with its armed forces on a limited scale, being able to send only few reinforcements there. During and after the battle local leaders, militias and civilians who were ready to protect themselves played a major role. The other, largely local, party, the Taliban, against which they fought, was also very much present and did not disappear from the area when the battle was over.

What are the lessons to be drawn from the involvement in Afghanistan of the past eight years, in particular with regard to Dutch and foreign military deployment? First of all, it goes without saying that from a policy and political perspective, it must be assumed that the development of such a country and its government is a difficult and lengthy process. Progress will be modest, leaving little room for high hopes and too much optimism.

Secondly, it would be wise, before embarking on military operations, to study carefully the history, functioning, interests, actors, society, traditions and position of a country. Rushing headlong into an involvement will all too often lead to unrealistic or undesirable deployments.

Thirdly, military and other international involvement should bear the local environment and *de facto* leaders in mind in as many aspects as possible. (Drugs) crime, sense of honour, and even personal relations among leaders may be of crucial importance

The fourth lesson to be drawn is that the role of the local militias and groups of civilians who are willing to defend themselves should get more attention. Policy making and doctrine development on handling militias and volunteers should be considered. Finally, the establishment of a representative, non-corrupt and non-abusive government is crucial. This aspect needs more attention in procedures, doctrines, guidance and training in order that all military, leadership and cadre in particular, are able to recognise undesirable situations and developments and react adequately to them.

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9. Runion (2007), p. 93 and Vogelsang (2002), pp. 148-150.
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